Restorying Relationships and Performing Resurgence:

How Indigenous Storytelling Shapes Residential School Testimony

by

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that an understanding of Indigenous storytelling can change how audiences engage with residential school survivors' testimonies. From 2009 to 2015, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recorded residential school survivors' stories. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation published these recordings online to meet survivors' desire for their stories to be a learning opportunity. Any audience's learning process is, however, contingent on their understanding of testimony. The most prominent Western understandings of testimony come from the contexts of courtroom testimony and trauma theory. Their theoretical underpinnings, however, emerge from epistemologies that are often incommensurable with Indigenous epistemologies, which can lead to a misreading of residential school testimonies. Looking at residential school testimonies through the lens of Indigenous oral storytelling, an inherently relational practice that creates and takes care of relationships, is an ethical alternative that allows audiences to recognize how these testimonies are a future-oriented process and restore relationships and responsibilities.

My main argument is that Indigenous literatures can teach us how to apply the principles of Indigenous storytelling to residential school testimony. Indigenous epistemologies understand theory as a way of explaining processes by enacting those processes. Based on this, I argue that residential school novels reflect on the process of telling residential school stories by way of telling them. Thereby, the novels create theories of residential school testimony that explain how this form of testimony employs Indigenous storytelling principles in order to restore relationships that support Indigenous resurgence. I analyze residential school novels by Tomson Highway (Cree), Robert Arthur Alexie (Teetl'it Gwich'in), Richard Wagamese (Anishinaabe), and James Bartleman (Anishinaabe) in order to demonstrate how they re-imagine testimony by drawing from

Indigenous storytelling principles that emphasize relationality, collectivity, and reciprocal responsibility.

By applying the novels’ theories to the recordings of TRC testimonies, this dissertation renders visible how survivors used their testimony to create relationships, address contemporary political issues, and work towards Indigenous resurgence. Thereby, this dissertation contributes to a new understanding of testimony that enables audiences to engage with survivors’ stories in a decolonial manner.

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To Daniel.
No more oceans
and a cat.

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Introduction:

Listening to Residential School Survivors

One night, a 13-year-old Cree boy was awakened by his mother and asked to sit at the kitchen table and listen to her stories of residential school. She told him how she was taken away from her own mother, and how she was forced to learn English. Cree author Darrel McLeod chose to open his memoir *Mamaskatch* with the description of this particular moment, recreating the image of an intimate storytelling situation that is nested in the relationship between 13-year-old Darrel, the listener, and his mother, the teller. When relating how his mother shared stories of residential school during a nightly kitchen table storytelling session, McLeod pays special attention to his mother's narrative strategies, and rather than simply sharing *what* she told him that night, he first foregrounds *how* she tells her stories:

> The pattern of my mother's stories is different from the ones I hear at school. The timelines are never linear. Instead, they are like spirals. She starts with one element of a story, moves to another and skips to yet a different part. She revisits each theme several times over, providing a bit more information with each pass. At first I find it hard to follow, but I've learned that if I just sit back and listen without interrupting, she will cover everything and make each story complete. (4)

McLeod's mother was not formally trained in the Cree tradition to be a storyteller, and yet, McLeod's description of her stories' structures reminds me of the ways in which Cree storytellers weave and braid stories. McLeod's memory of this particular moment speaks to the way in which his younger self needed to learn how to listen to this way of storytelling in order to understand the meaning behind the intricate structures of his mother's stories. I chose to begin with this passage

from McLeod's memoir because in numerous ways, the passage encapsulates the subject of this dissertation: it is about listening to residential school stories; it is about the process of *learning how to* listen to residential school stories; it is about how survivors' stories refuse to conform to certain expectations of structure and content; and it is about how Indigenous storytelling shapes residential school survivors' stories. Perhaps most importantly, this dissertation is about the relationships that make any act of storytelling possible in the first place, and the relationships that may be created or re-created during the act of storytelling.

McLeod's description of his mother's way of sharing residential school experiences strongly resonates with the ways in which many survivors testified at community events of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—even though the circumstances of a kitchen table storytelling session are very different from those of a TRC community hearing. From 2009 to 2015, the TRC travelled through Canada and organized events where residential school survivors were invited to tell their stories. Like McLeod's mother, many survivors at TRC hearings created residential school testimonies that are like spirals: testimonies that dwell on, skip, and revisit certain incidents and themes. This dissertation engages with the techniques of sharing residential school narratives, in particular with the relationship between Indigenous storytelling principles and the techniques survivors employed when giving testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. When tracing the connections between techniques of Indigenous storytelling and Indigenous testimony, I am interested in the impact that a particular way of telling these stories has on individuals, on communities, and most importantly on the relationships that hold them together. One of the central questions I am asking is: how can we understand residential school survivors' stories through the lens of Indigenous storytelling principles, and how may this change the way in which we listen to these stories—and therefore change the impact that these stories

have? Just as Darrel McLeod needed to learn how to listen to his mother's stories, most of us need to learn how to listen to survivors' stories. My main argument in this dissertation is that Indigenous literatures can teach us how to listen. Residential school novels in particular can help us understand the connections between Indigenous storytelling and residential school testimony because residential school novels reflect on the process of telling residential school stories through the very practice of telling these stories. Thereby, the novels imagine theories of residential school testimony that explain how this form of testimony employs Indigenous storytelling principles in order to restore relationships and support Indigenous resurgence.

Indigenous resurgence, in this context, refers to the restoration of relationships that Canada's residential school system, which was in place from the 1880s to the late 20th century, was designed to disrupt: relationships with one's life story, relationships with one's kin and community, and relationships with the other-than-human and the land. Indigenous scholars such as Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice, Anishinaabe writer Leanne Simpson, and Dene scholar Glen Coulthard argue that Indigeneity emerges from a web of interdependent relationships: relationships to one's family and community, to other-than-human beings, and to the land. In this web, cultural practices are a way to express and uphold these relationships (Justice, "Go Away Water," Simpson, *Dancing*, Coulthard, *Red Skin*). Colonialism in general, and residential schools in particular, constitute "relentless assaults on [Indigenous] communities and kinship practices" (Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures* 54). Therefore, "re-establishing these healthy relationships is the major aim of many Indigenous resistance and resurgence movements" (Coburn 25). And as Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice points out, "literary works offer us insight and sometimes helpful pathways for maintaining, rebuilding, or even simply establishing these meaningful relationships" (*Why Indigenous Literatures* xix). In residential school, Indigenous children were

separated from their families and communities as the Canadian government purposefully attempted to sever kinship relationships in order to facilitate assimilation (Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision* 456, n39). In many cases, the schools were located far away from the place the children called home. This "spatial diaspora" (McLeod, "Coming Home" 19), together with the Western education that was imposed on the students, prevented them from learning how to live off and live with the land in their home territories. Moreover, Indigenous languages, stories, and songs were strictly forbidden at the schools, and the system attempted to replace them with settler Canadian Christian ideologies. As I will emphasize throughout this dissertation, Indigenous languages, stories, and songs arise from the many relationships that constitute Indigeneity. Because of the way in which they also strengthen the relationships of Indigeneity when they are spoken, told, and sung, these integral parts of Indigenous cultures were specifically targeted by the schools. Furthermore, children in residential school were not only confronted with forced assimilation, they were also constantly affected by physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual assaults that had a traumatizing impact on many. This impact strongly contributed to the way in which the students later thought about the world: it changed how they understood their own position in this world, and it changed their relationship to their own Indigeneity and their life stories. Despite the residential school system's relentless attempts to eradicate Indigenous students' relationships with their life stories, their kin, their community, the other-than-human, and the land, countless students managed to preserve these relationships, often through memory and story. As residential school survivors, former students have been working on rebuilding these relationships in the process of Indigenous resurgence, and one of the numerous ways in which they do so is by sharing their life stories. I argue that if we listen to the recordings of survivors' TRC testimonies with Indigenous storytelling principles in mind (as residential school novels teach us to do), we are able to see how

survivors' testimonies actively work towards rebuilding relationships and fuelling Indigenous resurgence.

As a non-Indigenous scholar, I have given a lot of thought to the question of how to ethically listen to and engage with Indigenous stories—whether they are told or written. I grew up in Germany, surrounded by what I now know to be the simulacrum of "the Indian," and it was not until my first year at a German university that I was introduced to Indigenous literatures and therefore "heard" Indigenous voices. Reading Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories*, I first learned about the Canadian residential school system, and King's words led me to Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*. I have been re-reading these two novels for the past seven years, and the way I listened to those novels kept changing until it became this dissertation. When I first came to Canada as an exchange student in 2013, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was still ongoing, and since I was writing a bachelor's thesis on Highway and Alexie, I was following some of the TRC events online. At that time, the way in which I listened to the stories that were told at those events was deeply influenced by understandings of testimony that came from the context of Holocaust studies as well as from common Western understandings of courtroom testimonies. Because of these lenses, I was convinced that the ways in which Highway's and Alexie's residential school novels told stories were very different from survivors' TRC testimonies. However, the more I learned about Indigenous storytelling, the more I came to listen differently to survivors' TRC testimonies. I realized that the relationship between the residential school novels and the TRC testimonies is not one that is characterized by differences, but one that is characterized by connections and relationships—and Indigenous storytelling principles are the element that establishes these relationships. Because of my own learning process, my work traces the relationships between

Indigenous storytelling, residential school novels, and TRC testimonies, and it is particularly attentive to how we listen to different genres and the reasons for which we listen the way we do.

I purposefully use the term "listening" when speaking about engaging with Indigenous literatures—even though this term, and the auditory process it implies, seems to be at odds with the process of reading literature, which we traditionally associate with seeing letters on a page. My use of the term "listening" instead of "reading" refers to a process of experiencing story that goes beyond deciphering printed letters. As will be discussed in Chapter 1, Chickasaw scholar James Youngblood Henderson suggests that when it comes to performances, Indigenous nations hold the "belief that all forms of expression and sensory experience are somehow united," and, therefore, "any conscious preference for communicating through a single sense, as opposed to a combination of senses simultaneously, is not supported" (174). I argue that Henderson's point can also be applied to the ways in which readers experience written stories through their imaginations because during this process they often seem to see, hear, smell, and feel what they are reading about. When Anishinaabe artist and residential school survivor Rene Meshake launched his memoir *Injichaag: My Soul in Story* at the University of Manitoba on January 28, 2020, he accompanied Métis scholar Kim Anderson's reading of his stories with improvisations on his flute. He pointed out: "You cannot hear this when you read the book. But then… you might." Meshake's comment astutely captures how reading is a process that involves more than seeing letters.

If engaging with written texts involves all our senses through imagination, the question remains why I give preference to the term "listening." I use this term because of the way it evokes Indigenous storytelling situations where listeners are invited to engage in an active process of collaborative meaning-making. Thinking about Indigenous literatures in terms of storytelling has a long tradition, and many Indigenous authors evoke oral storytelling in their written work to invite

readers to "listen" to their stories (a strategy that has been widely discussed in the field of Indigenous literatures).[1] What I am most interested in are the ethical implications of these invitations to listen to Indigenous texts. Thomas King ends every story in *The Truth about Stories* by cautioning: "don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (29). King's warning gestures toward the responsibilities that come with listening to Indigenous storytelling. As will be discussed in Chapter 1, these responsibilities are what makes listening a crucial process for engaging with Indigenous literatures and residential school testimony. Listening is more than hearing—just as listening to residential school literatures is more than reading them. As Tlingit curator and scholar Candice Hopkins points out: "Listening implies a relationship or relation of exchange" ("Toward a Practice of Decolonial Listening" 44:53-44:58). Mohawk writer Beth Brant similarly emphasizes: "Oral tradition requires a telling and a listening that is intense, and intentional. Giving, receiving, giving —it makes a complete circle of Indigenous truth" (*Writing* 24). For me, the act of listening to Indigenous literatures implies entering into a relationship with a text rather than studying it as a passive object. In doing so, one adopts the responsibilities that come with this relationship.

One of the most important aspects of research in Indigenous contexts is for a researcher to be aware of their own motivations and to be able to articulate the purpose of their research (Kovach 50). While one purpose of my work is to contribute to our understanding of stories and their impacts, another purpose is to inspire engagement with Indigenous literatures and residential school testimonies. In 2015, the TRC presented its final report, which included excerpts of survivors' testimonies, a history of the residential school system, a description of its impacts and

[1] Mareike Neuhaus's 2011 book *That's Raven Talk* theorizes textualized orality in Indigenous literatures. Another example is Renate Eigenbrod's discussion of how Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Harry Robinson and Wendy Wickwire's *Write it on Your Heart* use markers of orality that invite the reader to "hear" the story ("The Oral in the Written"). Kimberly Blaeser addresses the question of written orality in her article "Writing Voices Speaking."

legacy, and 94 recommendations of how Canada ought to address this legacy. Furthermore, the TRC had recorded thousands of residential school testimonies which were archived at a newly established National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). After the TRC presented its final report, many voiced their concern that the report would share the fate of past reports which have "gathered dust on the shelf," as Ry Moran (Métis), the Director of the NCTR, puts it (Moran, "Action and Accountability"). I similarly worry that the TRC testimonies might "gather dust" in the archives when people believe themselves to now be educated about the history of the residential school system. Métis scholar Warren Cariou emphasizes the importance of animating stories that have been stored in archives, stating that "[i]t is not and should not be a one-way process, from testimony to document to archive" ("Who Is the Text" 475). I hope that this dissertation helps to contribute to people's further engagement with TRC testimonies and Indigenous literatures, because as I will demonstrate, survivors' stories are not only directed toward the past by testifying to the traumatic impacts of residential schools but also aimed toward the future by performing and imagining the restoration of relationships. My work builds on and is indebted to countless Indigenous storytellers, writers, and scholars who have shared their thoughts on storytelling, relationships, and decolonial listening.[2] In the field of residential school literature, foundational and inspiring work has been done by settler scholars Sam McKegney and Renate Eigenbrod, who looked at residential school literature's workings and effects in terms of what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor calls "survivance." McKegney and Eigenbrod demonstrate that by creating residential school literature, authors do not only testify to their own survival but engage in acts of

[2] Tlingit scholar Candice Hopkins used the term "decolonial listening" in a lecture given at Simon Fraser University in December 2019. In her definition, decolonial listening involves "freeing some of the voices wedged beneath dominant history," an act that has the potential "to redress some of the violence that has reduced Indigenous people, Indigenous lives, to numbers, cyphers, and fragments of discourse" ("Towards a Practice of Decolonial Listening" 19:50-20:07).

resistance that strengthen Indigenous cultures in the present. Most recently, Algonquin scholar Michelle Coupal has been conducting much-needed research on decolonizing understandings of trauma and testimony in the context of residential school literature. My own work contributes to the existing body of research with a unique approach to residential school literature as testimonial theory in three ways: (1) by tracing the connections between Indigenous storytelling, residential school literature, and residential school testimony; (2) by outlining how residential school novels reflect on the ways in which testimony supports Indigenous resurgence through the restoration of relationships; and (3) by demonstrating how our understanding of the TRC testimonies changes when we listen to them with the knowledge of Indigenous storytelling gained from residential school literature.

So far, the words "story," "testimony," and "literature" have repeatedly been used in this Introduction, and this gestures toward the fact that the question of genre is an important one.[3] From a certain perspective, these three different designations for residential school narratives are interchangeable since all residential school experiences that are related in narrative form are stories, and all those narratives are testimony in that they testify to residential school experiences. Finally, many of them can be understood as literature, depending on one's conceptualization of literature. However, for the sake of providing an overview of different kinds of residential school narratives, I have decided to distinguish between the genres of residential school stories, residential

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[3] When I apply the concept of "genre," I follow John Frow who establishes a concept of genre that is connected to performance. Frow does not define genres "in terms of the intrinsic structure of their discourse but by the actions they are used to accomplish" (14). This idea builds on Carolyn Miller's genre theory according to which genres are "'typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations'" (Miller qtd. in Frow 14). Miller argues that these "situations are social constructs," depending on interpretation by society and [that they] demand a form of social knowledge (Miller 156). Building on Miller's idea, Frow argues that "patterns of genre […] are at once shaped by a type of situation and in turn shape the rhetorical actions that are performed in response to it" (14). Based on these ideas, I argue that different situations beget different genres of residential school narratives. In turn, the narratives themselves perform different actions in these situations. My understanding of "genre" is inspired by Rubelise da Cunha who applies Frow's concept of genre to Tomson Highway's theatrical plays (da Cunha, "Unending Appetite").

school testimony, and residential school literature in this Introduction. In order to listen to residential school narratives in a respectful and decolonial manner, it is important to be aware of the different kinds of narratives that exist in present-day Canada. It is crucial for any listener to be aware of the specific historic contexts and circumstances under which these different kinds of narratives were and are told, and listeners need to be aware that each genre involves different audiences and different purposes.

It is important to emphasize that Indigenous people have always talked about their experiences in residential school. They shared their stories within their families and communities—probably often under circumstances that were similar to the storytelling situation that Darrel McLeod describes in his memoir. The collection of the 7,000 testimonies gathered by the TRC is the result of a very long process of speaking out, and in a way, they are the latest addition to a body of residential school narratives that has existed as long as residential schools have existed. What I refer to here as residential school stories are memories of the residential school system that Indigenous people shared, mostly with families and in communities. With family and community members as audiences, the purposes of these stories are manifold and range from survivors sharing their stories in order to deal with past trauma to survivors sharing their stories in order to educate their relations about their lives.

The second kind of residential school narratives are what I refer to as residential school testimonies. In order to understand this genre and the actions that its narratives perform, one needs to understand the particular historical context out of which they emerge. As pointed out above, Indigenous people have always spoken about and told stories of the residential school system. However, as of the late 1980s, more and more of them spoke out publicly, specifically addressing a non-Indigenous Canadian audience. In 1990, Phil Fontaine (then Grand Chief of the Assembly

of Manitoba Chiefs) revealed in a TV interview his experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse at Fort Alexander Indian Residential School. This disclosure opened a door and hundreds of residential school survivors “stepped forward with accounts of abuse in the last 16 schools” (Milloy 297). Also, in 1991, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was established to “help restore justice to the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada and to propose practical solutions to stubborn problems” (RCAP, *People to People* 2). The RCAP held 178 days of public hearings in 96 communities, investigated past reports, and consulted numerous experts (*People to People* 2). The residential school system was one of the commission’s many fields of inquiry, and in its final report from 1996, the commission recommends a public inquiry into the system as well as access to appropriate methods of healing for residential school survivors (*Bridging the Cultural Divide*). In January 1998, Jane Stewart, then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, presented Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan “Gathering Strength,” which was developed in response to the RCAP’s final report. This plan “announced a federal government commitment of $350 million to support community-based healing of the legacy of physical and sexual abuse at residential schools” (Brant Castellano 1). Ninety days after the action plan was published, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was founded to distribute the grant to projects that focused on Indigenous individual and community healing (Brant Castellano 1).

As all of this was happening, non-Indigenous Canadians started talking about the residential school system, and the level of awareness in the non-Indigenous population rose thanks to the relentless work of survivors. Numerous survivors also started fighting for redress and went to court. Their efforts led to what was then the biggest class action lawsuit in Canadian history, which resulted in a settlement agreement in 2006. The Indian Residential School Settlement

Agreement (IRSSA), which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4, entailed a 2-billion-dollar compensation package for 86,000 survivors and set in motion various processes that were supposed to redress the harms survivors had suffered in the schools. At the same time, these processes were supposed to raise Canadians' awareness of the history of the residential school system. Some of these processes facilitated payments to survivors as a form of monetary compensation for residential school experiences, and all of these processes created different kinds of residential school testimonies. Among the most prominent of these processes are the Common Experience Payment (CEP), the Independent Assessment Process (IAP), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The Common Experience Payment (CEP) allocated a certain sum of money (depending on the years of residential school attendance) to all former students who could prove that they went to a school listed in the IRSSA. This process created a body of data based on 105,530 applications (INAC "Statistics on the Implementation"), and the data reveals where and when individuals attended residential schools. While this kind of data does not constitute residential school testimonies in narrative form, the data could be crucial information for eventually creating collective narratives and histories that testify to the impact of residential schools on communities.

The other process that facilitated payments to survivors, the Independent Assessment Process, was an alternative dispute resolution process that enabled redress payments for sexual and physical abuse suffered in residential schools. The IAP required survivors to give very specific testimony about the abuses they suffered. In the process, survivors' stories were translated into a rather dehumanizing bonus system. An excerpt of the IAP's compensation table is printed in Miller's *Residential Schools and Reconciliation*, and the table demonstrates how the IAP allocated "compensation points" to different forms of abuse. For example, "one or more incidents of

fondling or kissing" translated into 5 to 10 compensation points. "Repeated, persistent incidents of anal or vaginal intercourse" translated into 45 to 60 compensations points (145).[4] There were 38,098 applications and therefore 38,098 testimonies. The IAP process promised privacy, and in 2017, the Canadian Supreme Court ruled that these testimonies need to be destroyed within the next 15 years. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation had been hoping to preserve the IAP records, and its director Ry Moran argues that with the Supreme Court's decision, "we've lost the entire integrity of the record of the worst atrocities inflicted on Indigenous peoples in this country's history" (Harris "Indigenous residential school records can be destroyed").

The survivor statements that were created by CEP and IAP emerge from Canadian legal contexts which gave survivors very little agency over their stories. The audience for these testimonies mostly consisted of lawyers, and the main function that these testimonies performed was to serve as legal evidence for the purpose of having past trauma acknowledged and redressed through a form of monetary justice. These testimonies were limited and shaped by questions and necessary questionnaires, and the demand for specificity when talking about abuse potentially led to survivors' re-traumatization and re-victimization. Therefore, while these testimonies could effect financial redress for survivors, they did not contribute to individual or community wellbeing and resurgence.

Throughout the process of demanding redress for the residential school system, survivors often emphasized that they wanted all of Canada to know the truth about the residential school system, its history, and its legacy. These demands manifested themselves in the form of yet another

[4] Justice was anything but guaranteed with the IAP process. There are many accounts of survivors whose experiences of abuse were not acknowledged because of legal technicalities. For example, in some cases it was argued that certain incidents did not happen on school grounds but on the way to school—therefore, survivors did not receive any compensation. Numerous survivors addressed these and other kinds of problems with the IAP process in their TRC testimonies.

element of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement: a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC had a five-year mandate (and a one-year extension) during which it gathered more than 7,000 statements from survivors all over Canada. For this purpose, the TRC organized different kinds of events: seven big national events in cities in different Canadian provinces and territories, and almost 70 hearings directly in Indigenous communities. During all of these events, the TRC aspired to involve Indigenous practices and protocols such as sharing circles and acts of witnessing.[5] While legal redress processes such as the Common Experience Payment (CEP) and the Independent Assessment Process (IAP) focused on the individual, the TRC attempted to situate the individual within community by asking Indigenous communities to organize the community hearings themselves and by asking the community to witness the survivor's testimony. Survivors were given the option of either testifying in public or in private, and they were granted a much greater degree of agency over how they would tell their stories and what they would tell. By the time the TRC held its hearings, many survivors had already encountered CEP and IAP, and numerous survivors spoke about their negative experiences with these processes when testifying at the TRC events. In a way, CEP and IAP influenced the TRC testimonies because survivors tended to perceive the TRC as being related to these payment processes, and the commissioners, when offering introductory remarks at events, therefore often included longer explanations about how CEP and IAP were separate processes and that unlike those, the TRC did not offer money but an opportunity to share their story. The audiences of the TRC testimonies consisted of family members, community members, non-Indigenous Canadians, and—because of the TRC's live web streaming—a wider international audience. As will be

[5] When using the term "witnessing" in this dissertation, I refer to the TRC's idea of witnessing which asked everyone who was present during a testimony "to store and care for the history they witness[ed] and most importantly, to share it with their own people when they return[ed] home" (TRC "Honorary Witness").

discussed in chapter 4, the TRC testimonies performed (and potentially still perform) numerous actions such as establishing and re-establishing relationships and educating the audience about colonial violence and its impacts. While the Independent Assessment Process forced survivors to focus on physical and sexual abuse in detail in order to receive financial redress, the TRC offered survivors an opportunity to craft their stories in a more encompassing way, and it encouraged them to also include memories of life before school and memories of life experiences after their time at residential school. All TRC testimonies are housed at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba which aspires to make all of the survivors' public testimonies available online. This dissertation engages with recordings of community hearings that are currently available on the Centre's website.[6]

In addition to residential school stories and residential school testimonies, the third kind of residential school narratives are those that fall under the category of residential school literature.[7] For this overview, I define literature in a rather traditional sense: published books that are meant to be read by a wide audience.[8] Residential school literature has existed before events such as the Oka Crisis in the 1990s created broader public awareness and discourses around residential school and reconciliation. The ever-growing body of residential school literature ranges from autobiography (Jane Willis' *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*, 1973) to dystopian fiction (Cherie

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[6] Further residential school testimony has been collected by Indigenous organizations such as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Legacy of Hope Foundation, which conducted interviews with survivors for the purposes of healing and of educating Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences about the impacts of the residential school system.

[7] Self-evidently, there are numerous other art forms through which survivors shared their experiences, such as film, performance art, theatre, song, and many more. The overview in this Introduction specifically focuses on those genres that are most important for the work of this dissertation.

[8] In this dissertation, I focus exclusively on literature written by Indigenous authors. Certain works have been created by non-Indigenous authors that are concerned with telling residential school stories, for example Gord Downie and Jeff Lemire's *The Secret Path* project, which involves a music album and a graphic novel. However, I argue that at this particular point in the reconciliation process that we are in, residential school stories belong to Indigenous people, which is why the body of residential school literature as it is discussed in this dissertation, consists of works by Indigenous authors.

Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, 2017) and from children's picture books (David Alexander Robertson's *When We Were Alone*, 2016) to stark realist adult novels that explore issues like sexual abuse and dysfunctional relationships (Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*, 2003).[9] Settler scholar Renate Eigenbrod offers a conceptualization of residential school literature as well as a classification of the many books published in this genre. Eigenbrod defines residential school literature as a sub-genre of Indigenous literature ("For the Child" 278), and she argues that by reclaiming the power of imagination, literature about childhood in residential schools evokes "survival, resistance, and continuance of cultures against colonial policies aimed at the annihilation of Indigenous presence most aggressively in residential schools" (280). The core of residential school literature consists of books that specifically engage with residential school experiences and describe children's time in the schools and/or the direct impacts that the residential school experience has on the lives of survivors and their children. At the same time, Eigenbrod also includes books in which residential schools come up as a strong theme in the background—which is the case for many works by contemporary Indigenous authors (293). One example that comes to mind is Tlicho author Richard van Camp's novel *The Lesser Blessed*, where the residential school experiences and trauma of the main character's parents indirectly trigger incidents that are crucial for the novel's plot. Other authors similarly focus on the residential school system's intergenerational effects and explore cycles of violence and sexual abuse, for example Haisla/Heiltsuk author Eden Robinson. By establishing a causal relationship between the events in her short story "Queen of the North" and the events in her novel *Monkey Beach*, Robinson shows how violence and sexual abuse spill from one story into the next, just as the residential school

[9] My conceptualization of residential school literature in this overview excludes scholarly works on residential schools. It is, however, important to emphasize that the boundaries between these different genres are fluid, and at times, authors combine literary and scholarly work. One example is Nisga'a author Jordan Abel's 2020 work *NISHGA*.

system caused them to spill from one generation into the next in too many Indigenous communities. Eigenbrod predicts that the end of the residential school system and the public's beginning acknowledgement of its legacies "is not the end of the history of residential school literature" ("For the Child" 293). Eight years after the publication of her article, the topic of residential schools is more prominent than ever in Indigenous literature.

Residential school literature offers an enormous spectrum of narratives expressed in the form of autobiographies, novels, poetry, and graphic novels, to name just a few. Residential school novels, which are the focus of this dissertation, differ from other forms of residential school narratives in a crucial way: they are what is generally referred to as "fiction." This quality raises certain questions when looking at the relationships between residential school testimony (categorized as fact) and residential school novels (categorized as fiction). With the defining qualities of the two genres being largely mutually exclusive, testimony and novel seem to exist in binary opposition, and as will be discussed in the next chapter, certain theories of testimony specifically prevent any connections between the two genres by excluding works of fiction from their definition of testimony. These theories argue that fictional literature cannot have the same impact on the audience as testimony—in particular impact that moves the audience to political action in terms of redress and justice. In the context of residential school literature, however, Algonquin scholar Michelle Coupal makes a strong case for the existence of "fictional testimony" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 490). The body of residential school literature includes narratives that are memories brought to the page based on authors' life experiences, but it also includes narratives crafted by authors' imaginations, involving fictional characters and often fictional places. These fictional stories engage with residential school history and the experiences of survivors, but the authors rework others' life experiences in order to convey deeper truths and

offer reflection. Publishers and scholars tend to distinguish between three different kinds of residential school narratives in relation to the question of fiction: narratives based on the author's memories (also known as memoirs), fictionalized narratives, and fictional narratives.

Autobiographies and memoirs are based on an author's memories, and although their content and structure can resemble the content and structure of TRC testimonies, the context out of which they emerge is different. The vast majority of autobiographies, with the exception of collaborative "as-told-to autobiographies" (see McCall, *First Person Plural*), do not emerge from a storytelling situation where a survivor tells their story to an audience. Instead, these kinds of narratives are written over long periods of time in often solitary contexts with anticipated future audiences in mind. Prominent examples of residential school autobiographies include Anishinaabe writer Basil Johnston's *Indian School Days* and Anishinaabe writer Theodore Fontaine's *Broken Circle*. Fictionalized residential school stories emerge when authors draw on their own life experiences to create fictional characters and events. Examples include fictional residential school diaries by Shirley Sterling and Ruby Slipperjack and novels such as Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*. The process of fictionalization offers survivors imaginary freedom and therefore agency, and as Coupal argues, the process of fictionalization also grants the survivor a certain degree of privacy ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 478). Fictional residential school literature describes narratives that emerge from the author's imagination while drawing from history and the experiences of others. Often, these stories are created by authors who did not go to residential school themselves and imagine characters who did, as Richard Wagamese does with *Indian Horse* and as James Bartleman does with *As Long as the Rivers Flow*. Novels that imagine survivors' life stories fall under Coupal's idea of fictional testimonies, and they usually display a high level of reflection on residential school

impacts, the importance of storytelling, and ways for the restoration of relationships and resurgence. In this dissertation, I argue that the Western literary concept of "fiction" is not always helpful when tracing the relationships between residential school literature and testimony, their workings, and their effects. Instead, it is much more helpful to look at residential school literature through the lens of Indigenous storytelling concepts. As this dissertation will demonstrate in chapters 2 and 3, these nation-specific storytelling concepts collectively offer an alternative to the concept of fiction and potentially decolonize the Western fact/fiction binary.

Another Western genre convention that this dissertation aims at decolonizing is the binary distinction between literature and literary theory. When working toward a degree in English Literature in a Western institution, students are usually taught that literary theories (such as psychoanalysis, deconstruction, or even postcolonial theories, to name a few prominent examples) may be or *should* be applied to literature. Students are taught that these literary theories function as lenses that render visible certain content in literary works. While this understanding of the relationship between literature and theory is certainly a productive approach for engaging with literature, it is not the only approach. This dissertation argues that Indigenous understandings of theory change our understanding of the relationship between literature and literary theory, and they thereby enrich any scholars' engagement with Indigenous literatures. Any theory (literary or not) is first and foremost an attempt to understand the world around us. As Leanne Simpson puts it: "A theory in its most basic form is simply an explanation for why we do the things we do" (*Dancing* 39). As will be discussed in Chapter 1, according to Indigenous understandings of theory, one does not only create theory by putting one's mind to work. Instead, Indigenous approaches to theory dissolve the binary between theory and practice that is perceived to be almost natural in Western thinking. In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson shares her experiences of learning from

Anishinaabe Elders. She describes how she "would ask them about treaties, and they would take [her] fishing" (18). Simpson points out that at first, she could not see how this would answer her questions—that she could only see practice and no explanation or theory. Simpson then points out that she had to learn to engage in practice in order to be able to see the theory enacted in it (19). According to this understanding, theory is an embodied practice and this dissertation argues that Indigenous authors produce theory on story by telling stories. As pointed out before, residential school literature functions as residential school testimony—therefore, I propose that residential school literature also functions as theories of residential school testimony. In this dissertation, I demonstrate how residential school novels constitute theories of residential school testimony that can help us understand the connections between Indigenous storytelling and residential school testimony, and that reflect on the ways in which testimonies restore relationships. Literature as theory, however, does not communicate its knowledge as straightforwardly as theories in Western contexts purport to do. The process of accessing residential school novels' theories is, to a certain extent, contingent on interpretation. And in order to access the novels' theories in an appropriate manner, a scholar's process of interpretation needs to be undergirded by the appropriate knowledge. As a non-Indigenous scholar, I therefore rely on Indigenous storytellers, scholars, and authors who have generously shared their knowledge.

Out of the enormous body of residential school literature, I have selected four novels that contain theories on residential school stories I am particularly interested in: Cree author Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998), Teetl'it Gwich'in author Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* (2002), Anishinaabe author James Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow* (2011), and Anishinaabe author Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* (2012). My selection criterion was that the texts needed to thematize and reflect on residential school testimony as well

as delineate its impacts on survivors' lives. I therefore chose novels which describe their protagonists' experiences at residential school *and* how their later lives are influenced by the process of giving testimony. It happens that the authors of the novels that I consider to be most interesting in regard to the questions that I examine are all men.[10] Though it focuses on these four novels by male authors, this dissertation still engages with plenty of female survivors' and intergenerational survivors' works and words, for example when analyzing Dovie Thomason's residential school story "The Spirit Survives," when listening to women's TRC testimonies, and when drawing connections throughout to works of residential school literature written by female Indigenous authors such as Ruby Slipperjack and Louise Halfe.

At the Native American Literature Symposium on March 24, 2018, Nisga'a scholar and poet Jordan Abel reflected on the relationship between residential school literature and testimony and asked the question of what it means to engage with residential school literature as testimony; to engage not only as a reader but also as a witness. Abel's question is an important one, and it is a question that this dissertation reflects on when tracing the relationships between Indigenous storytelling, residential school literature, and residential school testimony. While all three genres share certain similarities, the genre of the residential school novel differs from the other two genres in crucial ways. First of all, the format of the novel is a fundamentally Western format—even though Indigenous authors Indigenize this format through their use of narrative strategies to a great extent. Nevertheless, the materiality of the book as a medium makes the narratives of novels different from narratives that are shared through storytelling and different from testimony as it was shared at the TRC events. As narratives that are contained in books, residential school novels are

[10] In the past, I have been asked whether I think that there is a gender-related tendency in genres of residential school literature (as one person put it: do men write novels and women write poetry?). I do not think that such a tendency exists, and I caution against overgeneralizations because they create boundaries and binaries that are limiting and, in a way, replicate gender-related thinking that was imposed on children in residential schools.

works that any reader may choose to engage with or disengage from at any time in any place. Furthermore, readers might choose to go back in the story and re-read certain pages or skip ahead a few pages. Obviously, this is not possible when listening to an actual person who is telling their story.[11] Yet another aspect is that Indigenous storytelling and testimony establish a particular kind of relationship between the teller and the listener. This relationship is what creates the responsibilities of witnessing, and when Abel asks how to witness residential school literature, his question is about the nature of the relationship that exists between reader and teller and about the kind of responsibilities that this relationship entails. The question of the relationship between listener and teller is an important one for my own engagement with the four residential school novels that I work with in this dissertation. When reading these residential school novels, readers do not listen to the author in the same way in which they listen to a storyteller tell their story—or a survivor giving testimony—because the novels feature what narratologist Gérard Genette calls autodiegetic narrators (the main character tells the story, as in *Indian Horse*) and heterodiegetic narrators (a narrative voice that does not belong to any of the characters, as in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, *As Long as the Rivers Flow*, and arguably *Porcupines and China Dolls*).

The question is whether the relationship between the reader and these fictional narrators that are neither physically present nor real-life persons still creates the same kinds of responsibilities for witnessing that are created by testimony. Certainly, the relationship that is created by the residential school novels is more unidirectional than the reciprocal relationships of Indigenous storytelling where the storyteller reacts to the audience and lets the audience influence the story (to a certain extent, this kind of reciprocity is also present in testimony because survivors

[11] Because of the fact that, today, the TRC testimonies are only available as recordings, these testimonies might be located at an interesting position between oral storytelling and written books. When engaging with these recordings, one can potentially navigate (forwarding, pausing, replaying) them in ways that have more in common with the way one reads books than with the way in which one listens to oral storytelling.

who shared their stories at TRC events reacted to and engaged with their audience as will be discussed in chapter 4). While a reader is needed for a novel's story to come into existence, and while this reader is invited to make meaning of what they "hear," the autodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators of residential school novels cannot react to their audience's reaction. Leanne Simpson goes as far as to argue that because of this, a story that is that shared via print, film, or video "loses some of its transformative power" (*Dancing* 34). The transformative power that Simpson mentions might refer to the power that affects and transforms the audience, but it might also refer to the transformative power that affects the storyteller. In *Indian Horse*, for example, Saul Indian Horse sits down to write his life story but suddenly realizes that this does not have the effect he was hoping for—telling his story through the medium of the written word does not wield the transformative power Saul is looking for.

I do not want to give the impression that I assume a hierarchical relationship between the written and the oral when it comes the ability to engage an audience (a topic that has been addressed by scholars in the field of Indigenous literatures time and again). Instead, I am convinced that, when it comes to the responsibilities of witnessing, both formats are able to establish relationships—but the nature of these relationships differs. When listening to storytelling or testimony, the audience establishes a relationship with the storyteller. When reading novels, they establish a relationship with the story and its characters rather than with the author.[12] When reflecting on the role of the narrator in Indigenous literatures, Renate Eigenbrod argues that autodiegetic narrators create empathy and help the reader understand what a character is feeling (97). I suggest that empathy might be a way in which novels are able to create relationships that

[12] However, it would be wrong to assume that this is never the case with Indigenous storytelling. In fact, Indigenous storytellers quite often "disappear" behind the characters, using different voices, aspiring to foreground the story to create images in the listeners mind. As Renate Eigenbrod observes: "The teller herself becomes the transformer taking on the limitations of another being, a character in the story" ("Oral in the Written" 96).

bestow responsibilities on the reader that turn the reader into a witness—even without an actual storyteller (or a testifying survivor) being physically present. This being said, it is conspicuous that three out of the four novels discussed in detail in this dissertation are written in third-person narration rather than in first-person narration. This narrative situation speaks to the ways in which the novels constitute a reflection on testimony in addition to relating residential school experiences. And it is because of this element of reflection that the novels can teach their readers how to engage with residential school narratives in a decolonial manner.

The question of how different genres of residential school narratives engage their audiences and potentially create witnesses will be reflected on in more detail as this dissertation proceeds to demonstrate how residential school testimony can support the creation and re-creation of relationships for Indigenous resurgence through the performance of Indigenous storytelling principles—and how residential school novels can teach us to understand this process and to listen to residential school testimonies in a respectful manner. Generally, this dissertation develops its arguments in three steps: first, it introduces main principles of Indigenous storytelling and reflects on the relationship between storytelling and testimony in terms of the actions that they perform and the impacts that they have on their audiences. Then, it performs a reading of the four residential school novels in order to carve out how the novels develop theories of residential school testimony by reflecting on how the act of telling one's story establishes relationships. Finally, it applies the theories that are developed in the novels to the TRC testimonies and performs a reading of these testimonies through the lens of Indigenous storytelling in order to demonstrate how the novels change our understanding of these testimonies and how these testimonies work toward resurgence.

Chapter 1 delineates the dissertation's theoretical foundations and points out through which theoretical lenses Indigenous testimony can be approached. The chapter opens with the question

of what constitutes theory and discusses how Indigenous scholars have worked on decolonizing the predominant Western notion of "theory." Indigenous understandings of theory as embodied practice are the basis for this dissertation's argument that Indigenous theories of 'story' are enacted in the holistic process of storytelling itself. Moving on to testimony, Chapter 1 problematizes the use of testimonial theories that emerge from non-Indigenous context and argues that they distort the meaning that we make from Indigenous testimony and more specifically residential school testimony. This chapter argues that Indigenous storytelling principles offer an alternative for understanding how testimony works in Indigenous contexts. The interrelations between Indigenous storytelling and testimony, as well as the interrelations between theory and practice, are demonstrated toward the end of this chapter where I analyze how Dovie Thomason's story "The Spirit Survives" enacts and intertwines storytelling theory and testimonial theory.

Chapter 2 performs a reading of two residential school novels and examines what they teach about the relationship between testimony and storytelling, and how they reflect on how telling one's story might restore relationships. This chapter focuses on two novels that were written before the TRC started its work: Cree author Tomson Highway's 1998 novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Tetlit Gwich'in author Robert Arthur Alexie's 2003 novel *Porcupines and China Dolls*. The chapter will demonstrate how *Kiss of the Fur Queen* establishes a theory of residential school testimony as a creative and collective endeavour by describing how the two main characters, Jeremiah and Gabriel, perform their residential school testimonies as theatrical plays on stage. *Porcupines and China Dolls* has a different approach to residential school testimony, and the novel theorizes the interplay between testifying survivors and a witnessing community with a strong focus on community relationships. When analyzing how these two novels draw connections between storytelling and testimony, this chapter is attentive to nation-specific storytelling

principles and applies Cree storytelling concepts to Highway's novel and Gwich'in storytelling concepts to Alexie's novel. Finally, this chapter will demonstrate how an understanding of nation-specific storytelling principles can prompt a re-evaluation of the concept of "fiction" in the context of residential school novels.

In Chapter 3, I engage with two residential school novels written while the TRC was holding hearings all over Canada and written by authors who were not survivors themselves: Anishinaabe author James Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow* (2011) and Anishinaabe author Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* (2012). One of the main arguments of this chapter is that these two novels approach testimony through the theme of witnessing and this chapter demonstrates how both Wagamese and Bartleman act as such witnesses when they draw on the residential school stories they heard for the creation of their novels. In terms of theorizing testimony, Wagamese's *Indian Horse* conceptualizes the process of giving testimony as a process of embodied narrativization that emerges from Anishinaabe storytelling principles and that requires survivors to physically return to places from their past to restore disrupted relationships. The discussion of Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow* shows that the novel is predominantly concerned with the negative impacts residential schools had on lives of individuals and on the relationships these individuals have with their own children later in life. As a theory of testimony, Bartleman's novel demonstrates how the process of testimony can help to restore intergenerational relationships.

Chapter 4 utilizes the knowledge gained from all three previous chapters and applies it to residential school testimonies that were given at TRC community hearings. Thereby, the chapter aims at demonstrating how survivors apply Indigenous storytelling principles when giving testimony—a process that is rendered visible through the theories developed by the residential school novels. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrates how Indigenous storytelling principles in

survivors' testimonies work actively toward the restoration of relationships and therefore toward resurgence. The chapter opens with a brief discussion of how the TRC's statement-gathering process was set up. Then, the chapter engages with the testimonies themselves, and the discussion is organized around the different kinds of relationships that are affected (and, at times, effected) by those testimonies: the relationship to one's story, the relationship to one's kin, the relationship to one's community, and the relationship to the land and its other-than-human-entities. The discussion will furthermore be attentive to how the testimonies affect (and effect) relationships to non-Indigenous audience members and the commissioners themselves.

The Conclusion broadens the perspective of this dissertation by pointing towards the potential of further research into how stories establish relationships in other Indigenous cultures and through other media. The Conclusion furthermore reflects on the ways in which the ideas developed in this dissertation might help audiences to "become ready to listen"—a process through which audiences might prepare themselves to engage with to survivors' voices in a respectful and decolonial manner.

At the end of this dissertation, I hope to have demonstrated that residential school survivors' testimonies have intricate structures that perform specific actions that are only rendered visible if the audience knows how to listen—which leads me back to Darrel McLeod's description of how his mother told residential school stories. The storytelling situation that Darrel McLeod and his mother shared was an intimate moment in their relationship, and, in a way, survivors' testimonies are invitations to relationships as well—and once again, the audience is only able to accept and reciprocate this invitation if they know how to listen. It is through residential school novels and their theories of the connections between storytelling and testimony that one can learn how to listen to testimony in a manner that acknowledges and honours the relationships that are

being offered. When listening in this manner, one comes to see that survivors' testimonies are not only important evidence of the impacts of colonialism in the past and present, but that they are processes that actively work toward relationships for an Indigenous resurgence in the future—and that the testimonies therefore need to be visited and engaged with again and again.

Chapter 1: Stories of Theory

In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice distinguishes between stories that are good medicine and stories that are bad medicine, emphasizing that story and its effects are anything but neutral (2-4). The same is true for theory because theories, just like stories, arise from particular times and places and are embedded in specific worldviews—and while theory can nourish understanding, at times the knowledge that it generates can also have harmful effects. In this chapter, I perform a decolonial critique of testimonial theory in order to problematize the unreflecting adaptation of non-Indigenous understandings of testimony to Indigenous contexts in general and to the context of residential school testimony in particular. I purposefully scrutinize (1) the eyewitness testimony in the court of law which continues to heavily influence mainstream understandings of testimony and (2) testimonial theory which emerged in the context of Holocaust Studies and Trauma Studies in the 1990s and which created a notion of testimony that is now prevalent in the humanities and particularly in literary studies. The practice of courtroom testimony and the ideas of testimonial theory are pivotal for non-Indigenous understandings of testimony and I question them in terms of their underlying epistemologies and ideologies as well as the power relations that they establish.

It is not my intention to question the validity of these theories and the important work that they do in their original contexts. Rather, I intend to demonstrate that both courtroom testimony and testimonial theory are based on principles that are in many regards incommensurable with Indigenous worldviews, which renders problematic the unmodified application of these theories to the context of residential school testimony. I will discuss how these theories have been altered and adapted by Indigenous organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, but I emphasize that these adaptations are still cautioned against by

Indigenous scholars. Rather than establishing yet another adaptation of these theories myself, I propose that the practice and theory of Indigenous storytelling offers an alternative for understanding how testimony works in Indigenous contexts, which helps to prevent the re-inscribing of colonial power relations. At first, however, it is necessary to rethink the notion of theory itself as it emerges from Western academic traditions which have been complicit in the colonial project in the past and present.

As pointed out in the Introduction, a theory is an attempt to understand the world around us, "an explanation for why we do the things we do" (Simpson, *Dancing* 39). The central premise of this thesis is the argument that residential school novels by Indigenous authors incorporate theories of testimony. Rather than treating the novels as objects that need to be explained by applying theory to them, I see the novels as processes that offer explanations for a better understanding of lived experiences such as the TRC testimonies. In coming to this understanding, I am indebted to Indigenous scholars who have relentlessly worked on decolonizing the notion of theory which academia used to claim "as thoroughly Western" (L. Smith 29). The Oxford English Dictionary defines theory as "[a]bstract knowledge or principles, as opposed to practical experience or activity" ("theory," *OED*). As an abstract construct that is separated from lived experience, theory becomes an externalized tool. As Anishinaabe poet and novelist Gordon D. Henry Jr. observes, "only in this manner can the perceiving subject arrogate for himself the impartiality of science, or the perceived impartiality of a methodology" (19). As such, Western theory has an in-built tendency to objectify whatever it is applied to—including in many cases Indigenous peoples (L. Smith 29). These particular definitions of theory have contributed to the marginalization of non-Western ways of knowing, and as Sto:Lo scholar Lee Maracle points out, the abstract language of Western theory additionally turns knowledge into a privilege for those

who are trained in Western academia—and it re-inscribes colonial power structures as "[p]ower resides with the theorists so long as they use language no one understands" ("Oratory: Coming to Theory" 64). Furthermore, theory itself has been actively utilized to justify and perpetuate colonialism, as it has been "used to discount the experiences of Native scholars, writers, and people" (Henry 16).

Indigenous scholars have resisted these definitions of theory by not only broadening the understanding of what constitutes theory but also by offering alternative understandings of theory based on nation-specific worldviews. Seneca scholar Penelope Myrtle Kelsey's argument that any notion of theory needs to encompass tribal specific knowledges and traditions (Kelsey 10) resists narrow Western understandings of theory. Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson goes even further by fundamentally challenging the basic tenets of Western notions of theory which she says reinforce "an artificial division between thought and embodiment" (*Dancing* 44, n39). Rather than trying to conciliate Western and Indigenous notions of theory, Simpson posits Indigenous theory as a different, alternative process that is "lived, not just discussed and actualized in the intellectual realm" (*Dancing* 44, n39)[13] and that is not just enacted in thought and recorded in writing, but also "communicated through story, action, and embodied presence" (*As We Have Always* 56). Simpson's Anishinaabe understanding of theory not only dissolves the boundary between abstract thought and lived experience; it also dismantles the boundary between academic knowledge and community-held knowledge because Indigenous theory "is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community, and generation of people" (*As We*

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[13] Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million similarly foregrounds the importance of emotions in her article on "felt theory" in which she claims and that "feelings are theory, important projections about what is happening in our lives" (*Therapeutic Nations* 61).

Have Always 151). This alternative approach to theory is holistic in that it is "woven within kinetics, spiritual presence, and emotion" (*As We Have Always* 151).

This holistic understanding of theory resonates with Indigenous people and communities' holistic approaches to story and testimony as they are discussed throughout this chapter. Chickasaw scholar James Youngblood Henderson points out that as performance cultures, Indigenous nations hold the "belief that all forms of expression and sensory experience are somehow united," which is due to the fact that in verb-centred languages the distinction between the senses or "any conscious preference for communicating through a single sense, as opposed to a combination of senses simultaneously, is not supported" (Henderson 174).

Understanding theory as an enacted, lived process has led me to the position that Indigenous theories of 'story' are enacted in the holistic process of storytelling itself. I share Henry Jr's observation that "Native literature is replete with discourse on the nature and power of stories" and the way in which nearly every story comments on "what a story is or what stories are" (Henry 18) testifies to the idea that storytelling theory is enacted through storytelling.[14] In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Indigenous storytelling principles are constitutive for Indigenous testimonies and how, therefore, Indigenous testimony can be understood through theory that is expressed and enacted in storytelling itself. Hence, it is possible to read residential school novels as theories of testimony. I will demonstrate the interrelations between Indigenous storytelling and

[14] The argument that theories of storytelling are enacted in storytelling resonates with Anishinaabe scholar Kimberly Blaeser's call for "a critical center," a methodology of reading and interpreting Indigenous literatures that comes from within the texts themselves ("Native Literature" 232).

testimony towards the end of this chapter when I analyze how Dovie Thomason's story "The Spirit Survives" enacts storytelling theory and testimonial theory.[15]

Story might not only communicate theory of story but might also express explanations of other phenomena. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Simpson argues that Anishinaabe creation stories set the "theoretical framework" for the interpretation of "other stories, teachings and experiences" (32) and she impressively uses this framework to interpret Anishinaabe Aandisokaanan (sacred stories) and Dibaajimowinan (everyday stories) as theories of resurgence. Lee Maracle similarly criticizes Western notions of theory that separate theory from story ("Oratory: Coming to Theory" 62). Theory, says Maracle, "means nothing outside of human interaction" (63) and story is a way of not only merging theory and human interaction but also of embedding theory in emotions and physicality (64). Henderson echoes the understanding of stories as "explanations" and he conceives of stories as "guides to the unseen as well as the seen" (161) and Kiowa novelist N. Scott Momaday similarly argues that "[m]an tells stories in order to understand his experience, whatever it may be" ("The Man Made of Words" 14). Speaking about Cree storytelling, Neal McLeod explains that "Cree narrative imagination is one way of conceiving Indigenous theory. It is a visionary process of imagining another state of affairs" (*Cree Narrative* 98).

As Margery Fee points out in her essay in the *Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, Indigenous scholars work relentlessly to bring these alternative understandings of theory and the understanding of story as communicating theory into academia. Fee observes how "[s]everal Indigenous scholars have also modeled what might be called 'story theory,'" a way of

[15] While theorizing story is one function of storytelling, it is, of course, neither its only nor its most important function. As will be discussed in the second half of this chapter, the purpose and effects of storytelling differ and are mostly context-dependent.

writing theory that is based on storytelling principles and that emerges from “the oral tradition’s mode of conveying deep thought” (572). While it is neither my place nor my intention to attempt to create story theory as a non-Indigenous scholar, I still think that Indigenous conceptualizations of theory broaden our understanding of Indigenous literatures in ways that make it possible to conceive of them as theories that contribute to our understanding of other storytelling processes such as the testimony given to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In my decolonial critique of testimonial theories, I stress throughout that theory, testimony, and story share crucial principles despite the fact that they are marked by differences. An understanding of these principles enhances our understanding of all three of these processes.

While theory, story, and testimony share the basic function of communicating knowledge and sparking the generation of new knowledge, it is in story and testimony where the relationship between a teller and a listener is most pronounced. Both story and testimony are processes of transmitting knowledge from a speaker to a listener (in Indigenous storytelling contexts, this process is one of co-creation rather than transmission as will be discussed later). [16] In testimony, the knowledge is usually the knowledge of an event or an experience that is remembered and at a later point narrativized as story and told to a listener. Transmitting knowledge from a speaker to a listener creates understanding in the listener which may have certain effects on the listener’s future actions. In the critique of testimonial theories that follows, I will analyze how the nature of the relationship between speaker and listener is constituted in those theories, how they conceive of ‘event,’ ‘memory,’ and ‘story,’ and, most importantly, what they suggest about effects and possible future actions. Each theory will be considered within its respective time, place, and context.

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[16] Although the ideas of ‘story’ and ‘testimony’ are human constructs, this does not mean that the teller (or the listener) needs to be human. Certainly, objects can testify to occurrences and as pointed out by Indigenous scholars and storytellers, the land can tell stories (see Johnston *The Gift*, Armstrong “Land Speaking,” and Cariou “Terristory”).

Mainstream understandings of testimony are heavily influenced by the process of giving testimony in the court of law (Gelfert 13). My analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of this process focuses on the anglo-Canadian court of law in particular, which traces its origins to the common law of England and the civil law of France and to principles and concepts which originated in "Roman and Greek legal thought" (RCAP, *Bridging the Cultural Divide* 17). In courtroom testimony, the speaker is usually the eye-witness.[17] While some witnesses share their story voluntarily, there are cases in which witnesses are subpoenaed, ordered by the court to tell their story. If served with a subpoena, a person "must testify or face a penalty" (Department of Justice). The element of subpoena reveals an asymmetrical power relation in which the speaker's agency is limited. The act of testimony itself is conceptualized as "merely a way of *transmitting* information" (Gelfert 15) and this information is evaluated and challenged in Canadian law's adversarial model by jury members and the prosecution and defense who constitute the listeners of the testimony.

The witness testimony serves as evidence for a certain event and is utilized by the court for the purpose of establishing the 'truth' about the event. The court's epistemology centers the existence of an objective, positivist Truth which can be accessed through evidence. Courtroom conceptualizations of testimony betray the preference of certain ways of knowing which are revealed in the expression 'eye-witness' and the court's instruction for witnesses to "[m]ake sure [their] answers are based on what [they] actually saw and heard, and not on what [they] think probably happened" (Government NWT). Seeing and hearing are preferred over other senses and other ways of knowing in this empiric framework which establishes a hierarchy among the senses

[17] The other predominant case is the expert witness whose testimony is, however, based on different epistemologies. The expert witness is not as influential for testimonial theory as it is looked at in this thesis. For a discussion of expert witnesses see Gelfert, Wall, and Candilis et al.

that is diametrical to Indigenous ways of knowing as outlined in Henderson's description of how all senses are united.

When testifying, witnesses are asked to confirm that the evidence that they give "shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" (Canada Evidence Act) and the actual story of the testimony is furthermore strictly regulated by mechanisms that prevent the witness from digressing "too far from the subject matter" or violating "the impartiality assumption" (Gelfert 14). It is interesting to consider the court's assumptions around memory which seem to subscribe to the idea of "memory as a container," as Tasha Hubbard puts it (148). Assuming the existence of a positivist truth, the court assumes that the witness' memory records this truth and stores it until it can be accessed and transmitted in the form of testimony. This understanding of memory bears a striking resemblance to the functionalities of the Western archive. And even though Western thought has now acknowledged that memory is not simply a recording device but works in ways that are selective and subjective (Gelfert 14), the idea of memory as a record of a positivist truth is still dominant in Western courtrooms.

Indigenous legal scholars have challenged the notions of 'truth' and 'memory' that play out in Western courtrooms. In a report for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, judge Murray Sinclair, who later became the chair of the TRC, argues that the court's notion of truth is incommensurable with Indigenous worldviews according to which "truth is relative and always incomplete" (*Bridging the Cultural Divide* 75) and that therefore the Canadian oath for witnesses as spelled out in the Evidence Act is "illogical and meaningless" (*Bridging the Cultural Divide* 75). As Sinclair points out: "The Aboriginal viewpoint would require the individual to speak the

truth 'as you know it' and not to dispute the validity of another viewpoint of the same event or issue" (*Bridging the Cultural Divide* 75).[18]

Despite being a strictly regulated process of transmitting information that occurs in a setting that is set apart from everyday life, courtroom testimony has tremendous and tangible effects on the world outside the courtroom as it influences legal decisions that influence the lives of individuals and, in some cases, whole communities.

The prevalent understandings of testimony in the humanities and in literary studies can be traced back to a specific point in history: the publication of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's seminal work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* in 1992. Felman, a literary scholar, and Laub, a psychologist, worked with Holocaust testimonies and their book combines literary-philosophical methods with clinical approaches to establish a theory of testimony. Their work is furthermore informed by poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. Felman's literary approach is somewhat similar to my own approach, as she reads literature in order to develop a theory of testimony. Laub comes to theory by listening to Holocaust survivors' testimonies—both live and recorded. While pertaining to Holocaust testimony in particular, Felman and Laub's work contributed to a discourse "about the nature of trauma, testimony, witness, and community" that has influenced how scholars think about how these elements function and how they are represented in other contexts of "extreme human suffering" (Miller and Tougaw 4).

[18] Further critique by Indigenous legal scholars regarding Western law's conceptualizations of memory and recording has come up in the context of Indigenous land claims where the admissibility of oral traditions in court are debated. As Indigenous scholars and communities criticize, the court favours written over oral records as media of documentation (Mildon 83). Even in cases in which oral records are considered, the court's empiricist restrictions on testimony that preclude any kind of interpretation is incommensurable with Indigenous oral traditions which cannot by subdivided "neatly […] into 'types' of narrative" (Mildon 90) and whose understandings of boundaries between "story, legend, law and ritual" differ from Western understandings (Mildon 90).

In the testimonial processes examined by Felman and Laub, the speaker is the Holocaust survivor who is alternatively referred to as "witness," which evokes legal discourses. The event that this survivor testifies to is a personal Holocaust-related experience of the past, and Felman and Laub conceptualize this past experience by resorting to a model of trauma.[19] This model of trauma makes assumptions around the workings of memory that are key for understanding Felman and Laub's testimonial theory. Similar to courtroom assumptions about memory, this model of trauma assumes that memory works as a recording device. In the case of trauma, however, memory "has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance" (Felman, "Education and Crisis" 5). This resonates with Caruth's definition of trauma as an "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11).[20] This model of traumatic memory assumes that in the case of trauma, memory as a recording device is not able to record the traumatic experience in its usual way but records it differently, which results in flashbacks that surface to haunt the survivor.

In his analysis of testimonies from the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, Lawrence Langer proposes a different conceptualization of memory by distinguishing between two different kinds of memory that are at play during testimony: deep

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[19] In the humanities, trauma studies emerged around the same time as Felman and Laub's theories on testimony with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* in 1996. While clinical trauma studies have officially originated with the inclusion of the concept of trauma in the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-III*) in 1980 (for a detailed history on clinical notions of trauma see Ringel *Trauma* and Leys *Trauma*), notions of trauma in the humanities have been mostly influenced by Caruth's work. Critics point out that this influence went so far that "[s]econd-hand employment of Caruth's ideas […] has, through repetition, only served to strengthen the sense that this particular way of conceiving the representation of trauma is the only way" (Gibbs 9). Felman and Laub's assumptions around trauma and memory are closely connected to Caruth's.

[20] Caruth's theories of traumatic memory have had tremendous implications for literature as they contributed to what Gibbs calls a "trauma genre aesthetic" (Gibbs 26). This aesthetic represents trauma through fragmentation of narrative, repetition, and a way of circling around an event without its direct representation (Vickroy 3).

memory which “tries to recall the Auschwitz self as it was then” and common memory which “offers detached portraits, from the vantage point of today, of what it must have been like then” (6). Langer’s model moves away from the idea of memory as a recording device and acknowledges that memory is mediated by later experiences and the present. However, while being enormously illuminating for the understanding of the workings of memory in testimony, Langer’s model has been less influential than those of Caruth, Felman, and Laub.

When it comes to the story that is (re)constructed through testimony, Laub’s theorization of testimony acknowledges that this story does not represent an empirical positivist truth. Laub suggests that truth works differently in testimony when he discusses his often-quoted “chimney example” of a survivor who testified to the uprising in Auschwitz that was carried out by groups of the Jewish Sonderkommando in 1944. In this testimony, the survivor described how the uprising resulted in four of the Auschwitz crematorium’s chimneys being blown up. Historians, however, pointed out that in the survivor’s testimony “[t]he number of chimneys was misrepresented. Historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four” (Laub 60). Laub disagrees about the misrepresentation, arguing that the survivor was testifying “not to the number of the chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence” (Laub 60). The most important contribution of Laub’s chimney example to testimonial theory is that it frees testimony from the courtroom’s strict regulations of story as giving unmediated access to “the historical truth” and opens testimony up for the use of metaphor and other rhetorical devices. Later Holocaust scholars acknowledge that in the act of giving testimony survivors actively create life-story through a process of narrativization which “depends on using plots and meanings that are essentially alien to the destruction itself” and which must be retrieved

from elsewhere, "from all the rest of who survivors are, what they have lived, and what they remember" (Greenspan 4).

In Laub's testimonial theory, the relationship between speaker and listener is much more pronounced than it is in the process of courtroom testimony. Laub emphasizes the collaboration between speaker and listener who have a "joint responsibility" which makes the "reemerging" of truth possible (Laub 85).[21] For Laub, testimony is inherently relational because "there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*—in the position of one who hears" (Laub 70-1). In Laub's description of testimony, the listener bears striking resemblance to the psychoanalyst who helps the survivor to "place the traumatic experience into a narrative to be told to another because the memory of the traumatic event is understood as a literal and fixed record of experience stored in an area of the brain that can be unlocked by talking" (Balaev 8-9). Because of its adoption of a specific psychoanalytic model of trauma, testimonial theory as proposed by Felman and Laub assumes that the effects of testimony are therapeutic for the person telling the story. Another purpose of testimony is to have, as Felman points out, not a *statement of*, but rather […] a mode of *access to*, that truth", i.e. the experience of the past event ("Education and Crisis" 16). It has only been in later Holocaust studies that scholars have also emphasized the importance of testimony for the preservation of knowledge for future generations (Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*).[22]

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[21] Interestingly, Felman analyzes the writings of Holocaust survivor Eli Wiesel and poet Paul Celan and comes to the conclusion that the act of witnessing and giving testimony "is a radically unique, noninterchangeable and solitary burden" (Felman 3). This notion of the witness as isolated individual differs from Laub's model and it is certainly different from Indigenous instances of testimony and storytelling which are embedded in community contexts.

[22] The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University whose testimonies formed the basis for Felman and Laub's work, "in an attempt to protect what was perceived as the survivors' ownership of their testimony" strictly limited the circulation of the videotaped testimonies (Givoni 140). This procedure speaks to the therapeutic framework adopted by Felman and Laub. It stands, however, in stark contrast to the work of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation that houses residential school survivors testimonies given to the TRC and which encourages public engagement with these testimonies as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Over the past years, this testimonial theory has attracted a lot of criticism. As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, it is not my intention to discredit the important work of theorists such as Felman, Laub, and Caruth. Rather, I will discuss some major points of criticism because they speak to issues with testimonial theory that make it problematic to apply it to the context of residential school testimonies. One strand of scholars' critique is preoccupied with testimonial theory's connections to psychoanalysis and its assumptions around trauma and memory. A second strand questions testimonial theory's rootedness in poststructuralism, arguing that it depoliticizes testimony.

Scholars in Holocaust studies, postcolonial studies, and Indigenous studies criticize the relationship between speaker and listener as it is posited in Laub's work. Their critique focuses on the asymmetrical power relationship that emerges from psychoanalytic theory and as Michal Givoni points out in her thorough critique of *Testimony*, "the prime responsibility for operating the intersubjective scene of testimony shifted from the community over to the interviewer" (*Care of the Witness* 152). Givoni comments that "[t]he interviewer was the agent in charge" (*Care of the Witness* 153). Even though Laub proposes a joint responsibility, his model of testimony suggests a dependence of the witness on the interviewer's recognition. Julia Emberley goes as far as identifying a colonial mentality in Laub's theory, according to which the psychoanalyst acts as the "Christopher Columbus of psychic discovery" ("Epistemic Heterogeneity" 154) who serves as "*a guide and an explorer, a companion in a journey to an uncharted land, a journey the survivor cannot traverse or return from alone*' (Laub qtd. in Emberley "Epistemic Heterogeneity" 154). In addition to the colonial imagery, Emberley argues that in Laub's writing the witness is gendered as either male or female, whereas the interviewer, the agent, is always male, which "puts into play the paternalistic side of colonial imperialism" ("Epistemic Heterogeneity" 154).

Scholars who question the model of trauma that is adopted by testimonial theory disagree with the "one-time aspect" of the Caruthian model of trauma which assumes that trauma is a one-time occurrence in the past (Gibbs 16). Feminist trauma scholars challenge the idea that trauma is a one-time event and offer an alternative, chronic model of trauma based on their work with women whose trauma is that of repeatedly being physically and sexually abused over the course of years (Brown 120). Caruth's model of trauma as a one-time experience in the past is furthermore not only incommensurable with, but also erases Indigenous experiences of ongoing systemic oppression and violence. As Anne Rothe argues, "the trauma paradigm desocializes and thus depoliticizes suffering" (Rothe qtd. in Gibbs 21).

Testimonial and trauma theory's assumptions around memory as a warehouse which can be accessed through testimony in order to achieve therapeutic relief have also attracted criticism (Balaev 26). As Hodgkin and Radstone point out, the "characteristic features of 'traumatic memory'—its elisions, interruptions and reinventions" which dominate in cultural and especially literary representations of trauma "need bear no specific relation to an event, but rather can be seen to characterise the workings of memory in general" (Hodgkin and Radstone 97). Scholars furthermore challenge the argument that trauma cannot be represented except through the psychoanalytic process of testimony. As Balaev points out, silence around trauma "is not necessarily due to the intrinsic quality of trauma to defy all representation, but due to variable factors, including individual, social, and cultural factors that influence the remembrance and narration of the experience" (Balaev 10). This argument is crucial in the context of residential school testimony in which silences are in part generated by the shame surrounding sexual abuse as well as by asymmetrical power relations that were at play in this context.

Being aware of how testimonial theory might reinforce colonial power-relations because of its underlying epistemologies and ideologies is crucial for any scholar who engages with residential school testimony. Reading and interpreting these testimonies and residential school novels through the lens of testimonial theory and Caruthian trauma forecloses alternative interpretations that are rooted in Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews.

The second strand of criticism of testimonial theory condemns its lack of attention to political contexts and testimony's potential political effects. Michal Givoni argues that although testimonial theory freed testimony from some of the limiting assumptions and restrictions around story as they are at play in courtroom testimony, this liberation came "at the cost of losing the specificity of witnessing as an ethical and political practice" (*The Care of the Witness* 15). Givoni herself emphasizes testimony's potential for creating relationships between speaker and listener(s) and its capacity to ignite "unexpected political dynamics"—elements she is missing in testimonial theory which, according to her, ignores the ways in which testimony establishes relationships that could lead to political action (*The Care of the Witness* 54). Because of its psychoanalytical focus on the survivor's inner life,[23] testimonial theory "seems to downplay the fact that testimonies are immersed in complex webs of interpretation and instrumentalization that inflect their reception in other directions than the passive identification with trauma" (*The Care of the Witness* 87). Shane Graham similarly argues that the testimonial paradigm developed by poststructural and psychoanalytic scholars such as Felman and Laub has "a tendency toward a depoliticized individualist psychology" (Graham 128). Graham scrutinizes how Felman and Laub's testimonial theories were adopted by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and he argues that

[23] This focus emerges from the fac that "[p]sychology is rooted in modern liberal individualism and places the individual at the center of the moral and political universe" (Kitzinger and Perkins 117). Modern liberal individualism is in many ways incommensurable with Indigenous people's emphasis on community.

it was this depoliticizing tendency which rendered the Commission inadequate to account for the complex political realities of South Africa's revolutionary transition (Graham 128). Graham's critique of the South African TRC's adoption of an understanding of testimony as "talking cure" resonates with voices who criticize the Canadian TRC (see for example Alfred "Restitution"). As I will discuss in Chapter 4, critiques of the Canadian TRC often emerge from an understanding of testimony as depoliticized. However, as I will demonstrate, this is not entirely the understanding of testimony that the TRC adopted—and it is certainly not the understanding of many of the survivors who testified. This demonstrates how the lens of testimonial theory becomes problematic in the context of residential school testimonies whose function is not only deeply political but also usually directed towards communities.

Keeping Givoni's critique in mind, it is illuminating to briefly introduce an alternative theory of testimony which emerges from a sociopolitical rather than a psychoanalytic approach and therefore emphasizes testimony's political rather than therapeutic potential. John Beverley theorizes *testimonio* which is a Latin American genre or mode of writing that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (31). Beverley's theory foregrounds testimonio's political purpose and political effects as its most important functions. As Beverley points out, "[t]estimonio […] always signifies the need for a general social change" and one of its aspirations is to bring the "stability of the reader's world […] into question" (41). When defining testimonio, Beverley emphasizes its status as a written document, a story told in first-person "by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts" (31). The voice of testimonio is usually that of someone who is part of a marginalized group, "the voice of the subaltern" (27) speaking with an urgency to issues of social injustice such as "a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, [or] struggle for survival" (32). Beverley's theorization of testimonio is highly attentive to the

relationships that a speaker of testimonio establishes with their listeners (in this case exclusively readers) and the responsibilities that are bestowed on the reader when testimonio implicitly or explicitly asks them to act for social change (1). Beverley's argument that the narrator needs to speak from personal experience in order to inspire social change in the reader resembles courtroom testimony's insistence on the eyewitness whose testimony does have tangible societal effects. Beverley's emphasis on testimonio as a written document, however, differs from the oral courtroom testimony and from testimonial theory which focuses on mostly orally delivered testimonies. Notably, Beverley strongly rejects conceptualizing fictional literature as testimonio, arguing that this would "deprive [testimonio] of its power to engage the reader" (40). This rejection of the testimonial potential of fiction is at odds with ideas of testimony as they have come up in Indigenous literary criticism where scholars such as Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew draw strong parallels between life writing as testimony and fictional autobiographies as testimony, pointing out that they have similar effects on their readers (*Taking Back* 110).

The concept of testimony has increasingly surfaced in discourses of Indigenous individual and community well-being, politics, and literature, with the act of giving testimony to the TRC constituting the most prominent example. Models and theories of testimony have been established by Indigenous organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF), which both work with predominantly therapeutic frameworks. Furthermore, as discussed further below, Indigenous writers and scholars champion the idea of literature as testimony with sociopolitical goals—a framework that is not dissimilar from testimonio. The AHF and the AFN utilize notions of testimony when emphasizing the importance of telling one's story for dealing with the impacts of colonialism, specifically in terms of 'healing' individuals and communities from the traumas inflicted by colonialism. As pointed out above, the

indiscriminate adoption of non-Indigenous trauma-related theories of testimony to Indigenous contexts is problematic because of differing understandings of concepts such as “truth” and the danger of re-inscribing colonial power structures. In addition to this, it is important to be aware of Western psychiatry and psychology’s complicity in pathologizing Indigenous people (Linklater 20). In their work, the AHF and the AFN display an awareness of these problematics when they adapt Western theories of trauma but reconceptualize them according to Indigenous worldviews and adapt them to the context of colonialism. For example, an important alteration they make is to move away from an understanding of trauma as a one-time experience and towards the long-term, ongoing nature of colonial trauma which has impacted Indigenous individuals and communities over centuries. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux’s concept of ‘historic trauma,’ put forward in a report for the AHF (*Historic Trauma*), is such a reconceptualization of trauma that highlights the intergenerational effects of colonialism’s traumatic impacts while also emphasizing their chronicity. The AHF furthermore adapts Western models of healing trauma to the context of colonialism by combining Western therapeutic models with “the sociopolitical process of decolonization” (Brant Castellano 117) in order to be attentive to “the connections between history, the social, economic, and political environments and individual experience” (Brant Castellano 117). Here, testimony is understood as the act of “speaking about and grieving personal losses and experiences of abuses, as well as those within the family (intergenerational impacts) and community/people” (Brant Castellano 118). Testimony is here conceptualized as a process that transcends the individual and that has an impact on the community in which the individual is understood to be embedded.

Another example that specifically pertains to the context of residential schools is the AFN’s seminal study *Breaking the Silence* from 1994, which theorizes healing processes for the impacts

of residential schools—processes of which testimony is an integral part. Using the term 'remembering' instead of testimony, it is defined as "mak[ing] known to oneself and to others what happened in residential school and recall[ing] the experience in such a way that the experience emerges as a complete story which makes sense" (AFN 126). Particularly noteworthy is the study's conceptualization of truth *not* as knowledge that can be accessed through testimony but as knowledge that "is built and rebuilt over time through the stories we tell, individually and together in community" (AFN 5). Story itself is understood as being complex and interrelational, "made up of many threads, […] each thread affecting the way the story, and consequently the experience, hangs together as a whole" (AFN 21). This understanding of story differs from courtroom testimony's restrictions of 'relevance' and accounts for multiple levels of experience. It is also very similar to the way in which Thomason's story "The Spirit Survives" (discussed below) works.

Even though these approaches to trauma and testimony are rooted in Indigenous worldviews, they have attracted criticism. Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million warns that a focus on trauma depoliticizes Indigenous experience by erasing colonialism and "can foreclose on other kinds of storytelling, other tropes, other kinds of knowledge that the community can and wishes to produce" (*Therapeutic Nations* 76)—an argument that especially literary scholars need to keep in mind. Roland Chrisjohn, Sherri Young, and Michael Maraun's *The Circle Game* specifically rejects the concept of residential school trauma, arguing that it pathologizes Indigenous people who are then expected to "accept their pathology, and to parade it before the Powers That Be, before those Powers will condescend to undertake the merest of amends" (98). According to them, a focus on therapy in relation to the impacts of residential schools deflects attention from processes of redress and justice (34). The tendency of Western trauma theories to

focus on the individual supports what they refer to as "methodological individualism," which situates the impact of residential schools within the individual and thereby distracts from the systemic nature of the crimes that were committed (116). Million, Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraun do not condemn healing but caution against substituting social justice for healing. Unquestioningly adopting the frameworks of trauma and healing in relation to testimony when reading residential school literature potentially leads to interpretations that pathologize individuals and communities and that deflect from claims for justice and redress, which is one of the reasons I do not adopt trauma and healing as interpretative lenses in this dissertation.

Métis literary scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew develops what might be called an Indigenous theory of testimony which, in terms of the effects attributed to testimony, attempts to balance healing and political action. Building on the work of psychologist and scholar Dan P. McAdams, she develops the notion of the "personal myth," which is "*an act of imagination that is a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future*" that can be individual and/or collective and which trauma causes to be incomplete or incoherent (*Taking Back* 69). It is the process of giving testimony, of "reconstructing a complete and coherent personal myth and then sharing that myth with others," which can heal trauma (Episkenew, *Taking Back* 15). Testimony also "seeks to repair the damage that colonialism has inflicted on Indigenous communities" by inspiring the audience "to seek social justice through social change" (Episkenew, *Taking Back* 75). Episkenew argues that the recognition of Indigenous life stories is not only therapeutic for Indigenous people but also helps settlers to be cured from the "pathology of colonialism" (155). According to Episkenew, both Indigenous fiction and life-writing can help the reader "to see order and relation" and she points out that "many readers have difficulty differentiating between the two" (Episkenew *Taking Back* 110). Daniel Heath Justice cautions

against Episkenew's assumption that the effects of Indigenous literature are inherently healing, which relates to his idea of stories as potentially bad medicine ("Literature, Healing" n.p.). Labrador Inuk scholar Kristina Fagan warns that the idea that 'telling one's story' is integral for healing disregards the important role silence can play in Indigenous cultures ("What Stories Do" n.p.).

Indigenous writers and scholars have reflected on the testimonial aspects and effects of Indigenous literatures time and again and their ideas resonate with those of testimonio in terms of giving voice to the marginalized and pushing towards social change and justice. One prominent example is Métis writer Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* where she states: "I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a halfbreed woman in our country" (2).[24] The title of Beth Brant's collection of essays *Writing as Witness* furthermore evokes testimonial discourses. Scholars such as Episkenew and Algonquian scholar Michelle Coupal have also started to think about ways in which fictional literature can operate as testimony. Their ideas stand in opposition to Beverley's argument that in order to have socio-political impacts, testimonio cannot be fictional. In this dissertation, I intend to build on and to contribute to the idea of fictional testimonies by arguing that residential school novels operate as testimonies.

As stated in the beginning, the goal of this dissertation is not to adapt non-Indigenous theories of testimony to residential school stories but to engage with Indigenous storytelling principles in order to better understand the workings of residential school testimony in fictional literature and the work of the TRC.[25] Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod describe Indigenous

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[24] Recent discoveries about the editing history of this text are a reminder of the fact that processes of oppression and silencing might impact a story even when it appears to be complete. For a discussion of how passages of sexual abuse were censored by the editor of Campbell's book, see Reder/Shield "I write this."

[25] It is important to critically reflect on the term 'oral storytelling' or 'oral tradition' at this point. Christopher B. Teuton argues that the ideas of 'orality' and 'oral literature' "further a colonialist conception of Indigenous discursive

storytelling as an interpersonal and intergenerational process that generates knowledge and relationships (7)—a description that is indicative of the deep resonance between Indigenous storytelling and testimony. However, despite many parallels between storytelling and testimony, not all Indigenous storytelling is testimonial in purpose. Furthermore, there is not *one* Indigenous storytelling tradition, as principles and protocols vary from nation to nation and from community to community. Since it is impossible to give an overview of all these traditions within the confined space of this chapter, I will discuss certain aspects of Indigenous storytelling that are constitutive for Anishinaabeg, Cree, and various Plains cultures. Many of these principles are shared by nations all over Turtle Island. In order to subscribe to an Indigenous notion of theory and to avoid abstract generalizations, I ground my discussion of storytelling theories within the discussion of one particular instance of storytelling: Lakota/Kiowa Apache storyteller Dovie Thomason's performance of her story "The Spirit Survives" that was recorded at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg in March 2015.[26]

In the beginning of this chapter, I presented Leanne Simpson's concept of theory as lived experience and enacted holistic process. Thomason's performance of "The Spirit Survives" is exactly such an act of theorization. By performing this story, Thomason reflects on the workings of storytelling. Even more so, she reflects on the parallels between Indigenous storytelling and testimony: Throughout "The Spirit Survives" Thomason blurs the boundaries between these two processes of transmitting and creating knowledge. Thomason reflects on storytelling through the

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practices" because of their establishment in relation to the written (C. Teuton, "Indigenous Orality" 170). My own hesitation towards these terms stems from my perception that they seem to contravene the idea of holism as outlined by Henderson. The terms' emphasis on speaking and listening as modes of expression and reception potentially obfuscates the fact that Indigenous storytelling constitutes holistic, embodied processes on part of both the speaker and the listener. I will therefore refer to Indigenous non-written expressions of storytelling that involve a teller and an audience that are both present in the same place and time simply as "Indigenous storytelling."

[26] The NCTR holds a recording of this story but has yet to make it publicly available on its website. Not having been personally present at the performance, my own discussion emerges from my engagement with the recording.

performance of storytelling and she reflects on testimony by testifying to the residential school experiences of her relatives and the impacts that the residential school system has had on her own life as an intergenerational survivor. As I will demonstrate in my discussion below, this theorization of storytelling and testimony is a lived, holistic process that involves thought, emotions, and the body. Furthermore, as an act of storytelling and testimony, Thomason's story not only theorizes how knowledge is co-created by teller and audience but how it emerges itself from the interactions between teller and audience.

The title of Thomason's story not only refers to the resilience of Indigenous people and cultures but also gestures toward an understanding of story as spirit, a being with agency, that is championed by many Indigenous storytellers and scholars including Thomason herself who points out before her performance that "the story will take care of itself" (12:35-12:37). The understanding of stories as animate beings stands in stark opposition to the ways in which many non-Indigenous cultures understand story (and testimony). The objectification of Indigenous stories happened not only in the 19th century when "European folklorists saw oral traditions very much as 'things' to be collected – rather like objects of material culture" (Cruikshank, "Claiming Legitimacy" 3) but is in many ways ongoing in contemporary cases of cultural appropriation where stories are objectified for capitalist purposes. A notion of story—or testimony—as object is also apparent in Western archives. Indigenous conceptions of stories as living beings not only change any understanding of story and testimony but also change the way in which speakers and listeners (including literary scholars) engage with story.[27]

[27]Understanding story as animate explains some of the challenges that Thomason's story poses when it is studied within the Western academic format of literary analysis. Imagine having to analyze a living being in a linear fashion, where would you even begin? While the format of the text necessitates a teleological modus operandi, this is not how Thomason's story operates as it is constituted by numerous simultaneous processes that are interrelated and interdependent.

Thomason's story of Canadian residential schools and U.S. boarding schools challenges generic classification as it braids four stories: "personal story, family story, history and biography" (00:31-00:35). It also thoroughly embodies the overlaps between theory, story, and testimony that have been suggested in this chapter. "The Spirit Survives" centres around Thomason's visit to the cemetery of the former Carlisle Indian Industrial School which served as a model for U.S. boarding schools for Native Americans and for the Canadian residential school system. As Thomason visits the cemetery with her daughter in order to participate in a commemorative event that she helped organize for the descendants of boarding school students, she reflects on her own life story and education in relation to the place she is visiting. Thomason recounts how she first encountered the writings of Zitkala-Sa (Red Bird), a Lakota woman who taught at Carlisle, and she decides to pass on Zitkala-Sa's story together with her own story and to tell them to her daughter in order to teach her about boarding schools. As she does, Thomason reflects on the schools' impact on her own family and ponders the question of how to tell these stories, and the responsibilities that come with the telling. "The Spirit Survives" therefore not only transmits knowledge of history and personal story but also enacts a theorization of story and testimony.

The recording of Thomason's performance is prefaced with a separate short video clip of her that aspires to establish a relationship between Thomason and the viewer. As Métis scholar Warren Cariou points out, a recording "does not create an intimate relationship between the storyteller and the listeners in the way that a performed oral story does" ("Life-Telling" 316). In a way, the preface to Thomason's story attempts to 'make up' for this lack of an intimate relationship between Thomason and those viewers of the recording who were not present at the actual event. In the clip, Thomason sets out to establish a relationship by greeting and directly addressing the viewer and by introducing and positioning herself. She also 'reaches out' by directly looking into

the camera lens, and therefore the viewer's eyes, and by directly addressing them: "I ask that you watch it. I thank you for watching it. It's my gift to you" (03:05-03:13). Even though, as gifts, Indigenous stories "elude the logic of capitalist value" (Cariou, "Life-Telling" 315) in the sense that there is usually no money expected in return, they do come with certain expectations and responsibilities (discussed below) that they bestow on the listener and that reinforce relationship. Thomason emphasizes these responsibilities throughout her story and demonstrates how testimony, when understood through the principles of Indigenous storytelling, is an inherently relational process that sparks further action. Based on this understanding, Indigenous testimony cannot merely focus inward as Felman and Laub suggest in their psychoanalytic understanding of testimony.

In the preface, Thomason also apologizes to the viewer by saying that some of those who are watching "may know more than I know" (00:59-01:03). Her apology is not only an expression of humility but also displays an awareness of her audience who, on the platform of the NCTR's online archives, are often survivors or descendants of survivors. Thomason's apology resonates with Cree narrative traditions which often "begin with 'namoya mistahi e-kikeyihtaman' ('I do not know very much')" (McLeod, *Cree Narrative* 16). This phrase, as McLeod points out, indicates the speaker's belief that they are a conduit of a narrative rather than owning it and having power over it which relates back to the idea of story as animate (*Cree Narrative* 16). Via her apology, Thomason also shows that she does not claim to know the whole truth, which resonates with Sinclair's remarks on Indigenous conceptualizations of truth discussed earlier. Thinking about this moment and Thomason's story in terms of testimony, it is notable that it also does not claim the status of an eye-witness account. Even though some elements of her story are based on personal experience, others are not—and the fact that the story does not make a difference between their

epistemological value distinguishes it from Western courtroom and testimonial theory. Thomason expands the idea of testimony by stating that the viewer of the recording should not only listen to the story but also "add your voice to it" (03:55-03:57). This process—in which testimony passes through several speakers, is reflected upon, and shared further—resonates with what Lee Maracle describes as the task of the "mythmakers" ("Oratory on Oratory" 57), and this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

In an act of Indigenous storytelling such as Thomason's performance of the "The Spirit Survives," the listener is considered to be as important as the speaker. As Simon Ortiz points out, "[a] story is not only told but it is also listened to; it becomes whole in its expression and perception" (Ortiz 57). And as Leanne Simpson points out, the event of storytelling "places dynamic relationships at its core" which not only "reinforces the web of relationships that stitch our communities together" but also influences the story itself as "[t]he storyteller then has to work with emergence and flux, developing a unique relationship with the audience based entirely on context and relationships" (*Dancing* 34). Thomas King similarly emphasizes the relational and interactive nature of Indigenous storytelling (12), and as Julie Cruikshank points out, Indigenous storytelling is not merely about receiving knowledge but requires active listening and participation on the side of the listener who is expected to engage with the telling which "does not spell out everything a listener needs to know, but rather makes the listener think about ordinary experiences in new ways" ("Claiming Legitimacy" 7).

Thomason's story requires the listener's active engagement from the beginning when it opens with parts of a song by Buffy Sainte Marie: "Over and over I hear it again, from you dear lady, from you dear man, some great-great-grandfather from Indian blood sprang and you feel in your heart for these ones" (16:23-16:48). By singing these words without offering comments and

reflections afterward, Thomason makes it the audience's responsibility to figure out their meaning in relation to the story. The last line that Thomason sings, "[s]o what will you do for these ones?" (17:20-17:25), evokes the theme of taking responsibility and action, and if the listener were to get active and to look up the whole song later, they would learn that it is about the ongoing nature of colonial violence and that it expresses a call for allyship: "Oh, it's all in the past you can say / But it's still going on till today […] It's here and it's now you must help us, dear man" (Sainte Marie 174). By evoking this song in the context of residential schools and boarding schools, Thomason's story counteracts what Keavy Martin calls the amnesia of reconciliation "that is promised in the discourse of 'moving on,' or of 'putting the past behind us'" ("Truth, Reconciliation" 57). Sainte Marie's song emphasizes the ongoing presence of colonial violence and calls its listeners to action—something the listeners of Thomason's story will only learn if they take action themselves and engage further. As Julie Cruikshank was taught by Elders, "[o]ral tradition does not simply tell us about the past, […] it continues to provide guidelines for the present and it lays a foundation for thinking about the future" ("Claiming Legitimacy" 2). Cruikshank's words not only apply to the oral tradition but also to residential school testimony. As a reflection on testimony, Thomason's story rejects the idea of testimony as a mere record of past events but emphasizes testimony's attempts to point toward ongoing colonial violence in the present and its call for change and action in the present and future. Thomason thereby presents Indigenous testimony as inherently political. Furthermore, Thomason theorizes testimony as an engaging process where the audience is supposed to do more than the courtroom audience which passively absorbs and judges information. By evoking relationships as the defining element of Indigenous storytelling, Thomason suggests a relational understanding of testimony that is far from testimonial theory's implicitly asymmetric

power relationship between listener and teller in that it suggests genuine cooperation between equals.

Thomason's story is rooted in place (the cemetery at Carlisle) and her visit to this place constitutes the one strand of narrative that inspires the other strands in the story. This structure is indicative of the way in which Indigenous storytelling traditions, as McLeod points out in a Cree context, are anchored in a "sense of place" (*Cree Narrative* 6). Thomason's story "emerges" from place since the cemetery at Carlisle is where "The Spirit Survives" was born: Thomason recounts how, at the commemoration event, her father decides to speak about his school experience. Thomason re-enacts a short dialogue between her and her father: "Just get up there Dad and you tell them your story. And he said, I ain't tellin' no story. You'll tell this story. I just need to talk'" (59:47-1:00:00). This dialogue captures the moment in which "The Spirit Survives" is born as Thomason adopts the responsibility bestowed upon her by her father and tells "this story" after years of working on it, reflecting on it, and adding to it. Thomason's awareness of place stretches furthermore to her present act of telling the story at the NCTR on Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene, and Métis territory. As she stresses in the beginning: "I'm a guest here" (12:01-12:03). The importance of place and a speaker's relationship to place for the telling of testimony is something that neither courtroom testimony nor testimonial theory is attentive to. Indigenous storytelling, however, is grounded in place and Thomason's theorizations suggest the same for testimony. This dissertation will particularly discuss the constitutive importance of place for the telling of testimony in its discussion of *Indian Horse* in Chapter 3.

At the heart of this story is not only a place but also a relationship and another act of storytelling when Thomason tells her daughter about residential schools. From this particular place and storytelling situation, "The Spirit Survives" branches out into the past and the future, while

continually circling back to this one afternoon at the cemetery. The circular layering of Thomason's story and the way in which it establishes connections between different narrative strands helps the audience to get a deeper understanding of all the stories that are told. This process of coming to an understanding is one that is radically different from courtroom testimony's narrow conceptualizations of relevance. The circular nature of "The Spirit Survives" also draws attention to the way in which Indigenous storytelling "disrupts or stymies Western notions of time, unfolding in a present of the storyteller's literal *presence*, but also gesturing toward pasts and futures from the living location of the teller's body and the shared 'now' of the audience's experience" (Cariou, "Life-Telling" 325). Thomason keeps reminding the audience of the ways in which words (and story, and testimony) call the past into the present when she talks about how her grandfather still "does get upset when he talks about the schools" (39:16-39:20). [28] Finally, the way in which Thomason's story blurs the boundaries between past and present displays an understanding of time that also "enables us to view human life in terms that are more in tune with Indigenous understandings, such as the cyclical nature of existence, the continued presence of ancestors, and the fundamentally communal and plural nature of identity" (Cariou, "Life-Telling" 325). Thomason theorizes and enacts testimony as non-linear—and as I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, many residential school survivors testifying at TRC events did the same. Testimonial theory attributes circularity to the workings of traumatic memory. Thomason's theorization of circularity as inherent in Indigenous story and testimony demonstrates how the lens of trauma would produce a misreading of the TRC testimonies.

[28] Okanagan poet and scholar Jeannette Armstrong beautifully reflects on the same powerful function of words in her poem "Words," where she discerns that "[w]ords are memory/a window in the present/a coming to terms with meaning/history made into now/a surge in reclaiming/the enormity of the past" (*Breath Tracks* 17). I included this passage because as an act of theorizing it demonstrates yet another way of conceiving of theory that differs from Western assumptions: theory might not only be enacted and communicated by story but also by poetry.

As pointed out earlier, relationships form the core of Indigenous storytelling. Kimberly Blaeser argues that by speaking, listening to, and retelling story, Indigenous people reaffirm their relationships with their family and community networks (Blaeser qtd. in Hulan & Eigenbrod 12). This relationship-establishing nature of story is visible in Thomason's story when she points out how the written stories of Zitkala-Sa and her own retellings of these stories have created a relationship between her and Zitkala-Sa and that "[h]er narrative has become part of my own" (55:29-55:32). The fact that she refers to Zitkala-Sa as her "Lakota grandmother" (55:44-55:45) frames this relationship in kinship terms and thereby indicates how close Thomason feels to this person whom she only knows through story. As pointed out in the beginning, relationships are also forged between the speaker and the listener as they engage in the performance of the story together. Thomason's sharing stories with her daughter and Thomason's sharing stories with the audience at the NCTR are processes in which speaker and listener share responsibilities for the story and for making meaning. These shared responsibilities "inform and nourish an interrelated 'community of being,' which the Cree language characterizes as 'connecting through speaking' (anisko-atohtamohk)" (Henderson 160).

Throughout her story, Thomason reflects on the responsibilities of testimony and the responsibility that the telling of residential school stories entails. Returning to the moment of telling stories to her daughter at the cemetery, Thomason remembers: "Honestly, I didn't wanna tell her this story. There are some stories you don't wanna tell. Not to your children" (22:13-22:19). Thomason's reluctance to tell the story speaks to a silence that neither originates from psychoanalytic repression nor political oppression but rather constitutes an act of care.[29] As

[29] Another powerful example for silence as an act of care is given in Katherena Vermette's novel *The Break* which circles around the trauma of a young girl who has been abused and does not talk about the incident. While it is assumed that she does not speak because of reasons related to fear and trauma, the novel in the end reveals a different motivation: "She hasn't forgotten. She knows everything. She will always know each part, every detail, even though

Kristina Fagan points out, "[t]here are many Indigenous teachings about the importance of sometimes not telling a story" ("What Stories Do" n.p.) and Thomason's hesitation to tell the story creates room for silence which, in Indigenous storytelling, can be a space of respect that "can create good thinking" (Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork* 89). Thomason's own reflections on her hesitation are shared at the end of her story and are discussed at the end of the chapter. Despite the benefits of silence, Thomason decides to share the story with her daughter because of the responsibilities that she feels come with these stories which "cry out for a voice" (22:20-22:24).

Indigenous storytellers are well aware of strategies that ease the burden of telling a story that creates strong emotional responses and might upset both the listener and the speaker. An important one of these strategies is humour. When she speaks about Indigenous resistance and resilience towards the end of her story, Thomason makes the audience laugh by dryly remarking: "We even survived Kevin Costner" (1:09:01-1:09:04). Thomason reflects on this reference to *Dances With Wolves* later when she comments: "I almost cut the Kevin Costner part but he saves me at the end. If I didn't have like a quick second of that boy hoppin' around a fire, you know… If I didn't have that image, I'd never make it to the end" (1:11:11-1:11:27). Humour helps Thomason to lighten her own mood as well as the mood of the audience when engaging in a story full of grim experiences. Through humour, she not only makes it easier for herself to make it through the telling of the story, she also lifts the audience's burden of listening—at least for a few short but nourishing moments.[30] As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, humour is also a strategy that was adopted by many residentials school survivors in their TRC testimonies.

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she doesn't want to say any of them out loud" (307). Emily remains silent "[s]o they don't have to know, not completely. Not all the way. That's the only thing Emily can do to make any of this better" (307). The passage shows that Emily's silence emerges from the urge to protect her family and to spare them the burden of knowing.

[30] For a detailed discussion of the function of humour in traumatic stories, see Fagan "Weesageechak Meets the Weetigo."

By reflecting on intergenerational storytelling and intergenerational care, Thomason theorizes testimony as a process of intergenerational witnessing. Being an intergenerational survivor herself, Thomason theorizes the feeling of being divided between the need to tell a story and the need to protect her loved ones from the burden she carries. She concludes that testimony is necessary, but she shares the story in a way that still allows her to take care of her audience. Survivors at the TRC events stressed time and again that they were sharing their stories for their children and family and like Thomason they emphasized that Indigenous testimony is a process that involves intergenerational witnessing—a concept this dissertation reflects on in Chapter 3.

In Western understandings, testimony is predominantly a process of transmitting knowledge of a truth—as indicated by courtroom testimony's principles of accuracy and relevance and testimonial theory's idea of getting to the bottom of the hitherto unnarrativized truth of trauma. In Indigenous storytelling, however, "knowledge is not the final identification of an unmediated truth, but an ongoing process in which storytellers and listeners may offer multiple perspectives" (S. Teuton 23). Simpson echoes this understanding by pointing out that in Indigenous storytelling, "[m]eaning is derived from the presence of both the storyteller and the listeners" and as an emergent practice, "meaning for each individual listener will necessarily be different" (*Dancing* 104). The meaning that is generated through storytelling differs not only from listener to listener but also changes over time and with context, challenging "the very notion of stasis" (S. Teuton 22). Adapting this understanding of how knowledge is produced through Indigenous storytelling to the context of testimonies suggests that testimonies do not constitute containers of knowledge that can be stored. Because of their contingency in relation to time, contexts, and participants, the meanings of Indigenous storytelling "must be studied in practice. Oral traditions are texts to be heard. They can't be objectified and stored with the idea that their meanings can be determined

retrospectively" ("Claiming Legitimacy" 14). Therefore, when engaging with Indigenous storytelling, "[w]e have to listen to what people are actually saying with clear questions in mind, not simply record oral tradition as an end in itself" ("Claiming Legitimacy"14). These theories of how meaning is generated through Indigenous storytelling are important to keep in mind when thinking about testimony and about how to engage with residential school testimonies, as will be discussed in chapter 4.

Cruikshank's claim that Indigenous oral stories need to be studied in practice creates a dilemma for any scholar (such as myself) who has only access to the NCTR testimonies as recordings.[31] While I agree with all the scholars quoted here who emphasize the values and powers of Indigenous storytelling, listening to and engaging with Thomason's story has made me somewhat rethink the importance of recordings in the particular context of testimony. I am eminently struck when Thomason points out in her performance that "The Spirit Survives" "is not a story I like to tell. I long for the day I will tell it no more. This taping will help make that possible. Let it carry it for a while because they are hard to carry" (1:09:48-1:09:59). In the context of residential school testimonies, scholars have yet to discuss the ways in which recordings might work as externalization of embodied stories that are, to borrow again from Justice, "bad medicine;" and how this externalization through recordings might work as a relief for the speaker while still ensuring that the spirit survives. My engagement with the TRC recordings of residential school testimony in Chapter 4 will be an opportunity to do so and to delve deeper into the ways in which

[31] The differences but also relationships between the performed and the written (or recorded) is a topic that has been thoroughly discussed by scholars engaging with Indigenous literatures (see Blaeser "Writing Voices," Fee "Decolonizing," Eigenbrod "The Oral in the Written," McCall *First Person Plural*, Christopher B. Teuton "Theorizing," and Gingell/Roy *Listening Up*). The often conceived binary existence of the oral and the written still influences processes in Canadian courtrooms where "there is continued resistance to the inclusion of orally transmitted narratives" (Hulan & Eigenbrod 8) and in Western academia where scholars still need to insist on the inclusion of the study of oral narratives in Indigenous literatures (Cariou "Life-Telling" and "Who Is the Text").

recorded stories might build relationships even if speaker and listener do not share time and space. After all, Thomason only has access to Zitkala-Sa's stories through writing and she points out how those stories still influenced her as much as the stories she was told: "I could not tell you with a hundred percent certainty whether anybody told them to me or whether Gertrud Bonnin Zitkala-Sa gave me those stories when I was but a teen" (55:59-56:10). Thomason's felt kinship relation to Zitkala-Sa is also established through the written word.

As pointed out above, Thomason time and again stresses the responsibilities for speaker and listener that come with both testimony and story. Her theorization of these responsibilities draws from Indigenous storytelling traditions and is in many ways related to the idea that stories are autonomous and powerful beings that need to be treated with respect. Indigenous storytellers and scholars emphasize the flexibility of stories, how they change with audiences and context (King), and how they are co-performed with the audience (Simpson, *Dancing*). This is not supposed to give the impression that a story must not be engaged with carefully and respectfully. In fact, there are numerous protocols in different storytelling traditions that ensure this careful engagement because story is accredited with a tremendous impact on those who are listening. As Thomas King points out, "once a story is told, it cannot be called back" (9) and Leslie Marmon Silko similarly reflects on how the effects of a story once released cannot be undone (138). Telling a story wrong "could cause a life and death situation depending on how it is told and who's…listening" (William qtd. in Mildon 91). Cree-Métis storyteller Duncan Mercredi learned to tell stories from his grandmother and when it came to family stories, she put a strict emphasis on the accuracy of memory. Mercredi describes that when retelling family stories, "[i]t was very, very important that they did not digress whatsoever from the way they were told because a slight transgression could affect the whole family and would continue to affect them for years" (18).

Jeannette Armstrong also gestures toward the responsibilities that come with speaking story when she emphasizes that "you not only have to assume responsibility for speaking those words, but you are responsible for the effect of those words" (Armstrong qtd. in Hubbard 149). It is therefore important to keep in mind (especially in the context of testimony) that Indigenous storytelling, despite its collaborate, creative, and flexible nature, is not a process that is free from protocols and responsibilities. When Thomason theorizes the parallels between story and testimony, she therefore implies that there are also community-specific protocols in place for Indigenous testimonies.

Storytelling has its most immediate effects on the listeners by "calling those within its hearing to knowing and thereby transforming them" (Armstrong, "Literature of the Land" 347). And just as the storyteller adopts responsibilities, so does the audience. As Thomas King's puts it in one of his most-quoted passages about stories: "It's yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (29). Some of the audience's responsibilities are related to carrying and passing on the stories as "listeners can come to understand that their own bodies and spirits are the living link between the stories and future generations" (Cariou, "Life-Telling" 315). Other responsibilities are related to taking action—especially in the case of testimonial stories.

Thomason's story straightforwardly communicates her theory on the responsibilities that testimony creates for its listeners. Towards the end of "The Spirit Survives," Thomason straightforwardly asks: "What do we do?" (1:04:02-1:04-04). She then answers her own question (and the one posed by Buffy Sainte Marie's song in the very beginning) by establishing a brilliant and unexpected analogy between testimonial story and dung:

> Now this story is a lot like that shit. [...] If you pick it up too soon, if it becomes all you are, if it is the victim, if it is the rage, if it is the brokenness, if it is the damage. [...] If you pick it up too soon and it's nothing but your apology or your awkwardness or your denial or your shame or your guilt, it's not helpful. We have to move beyond that and that's the gift we have. Us today. The gift of time. Time changes dung into fuel. Buffalo dung, it burns a hot, clean fire. [...] It brings light. You can cook a meal on it. You can extend daylight. You can see each other through the darkness. You can take the scab off of a wound and clean it so it can heal properly. You can put light into darkness. You can see each other truly. You can read a book. You can write a book. You can spread it on the ground and make the earth richer than before it met you and grow good old food that you share around the fire with stories like this one. (01:05:57-1:08:03)

Thomason's analogy offers deeply insightful reflections on the effects that story—and testimony—can have and how tellers and listeners can actively participate in the process of storytelling but also engage further with the story afterwards. The suggestion to "read a book" is related to self-education which is a starting point for learning about and eventually working against ongoing colonial violence. The suggestion to "write a book" gestures towards scholarship and deeper engagement. The analogy furthermore reflects on how, through time and spaces of temporary silence, stories of traumatic experiences can be turned into stories of resilience and continuity. The images of "food" and "fire" speak to the way in which story and testimony can be turned into nourishing and sustaining experiences. Thomason also thereby suggests that the engagement with these stories is not only an intellectual but an embodied, holistic endeavour. The images of sharing food, fire, and stories with others emphasize how story and testimony establish relationships, and how they ought to be passed on.

Tellingly, "The Spirit Survives" does not have a pronounced ending. Instead, the various narrative braids flow into each other and slowly go over into Thomason's reflections on how "The Spirit Survives" came to be and how it works. The way in which the story spills into the present and goes over into an analysis of its own creation-process again emphasizes that there are no strict boundaries between genres or between the story and lived experience—just as there is no boundary between Indigenous theory and lived experience as pointed out in the beginning of this chapter.

Dovie Thomason's performance of "The Spirit Survives" constitutes an embodied act of theorizing as it is outlined in the beginning of this chapter via the arguments made by Simpson, Maracle, and Million. Thomason's story offers a theory of testimony that highlights the parallels between Indigenous storytelling and testimony and therefore teaches its audience how to think about Indigenous testimony in terms of Indigenous storytelling. Adopting this lens leads to an approach toward testimony that is characterized by respect since, as Thomason's title suggests, stories and testimonies are living beings. This conceptualization furthermore grants testimony an agency that is independent of speaker and audience—an agency that is not acknowledged in testimonial theory or in the process of courtroom testimony. Thomason establishes a theory of story and testimony that foregrounds the ways in which theses processes engage their audience and inspire further action, and it establishes these processes as inherently relational and political. Thomason's theory claims that testimony does not need to be based on personal experience but that speakers can testify to others' experiences and add their own voices to them. This process which is similar to the one Lee Maracle describes as enacted by "mythmakers" ("Oratory on Oratory" 57) is also similar to my own understanding of how fictional testimonies such as residential school novels (which are not fictional in the Western sense of the word) work. This process will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Thomason's emphasis on the importance of place

in Indigenous storytelling suggests a similar importance of place in Indigenous testimony: a place is not only a setting in the story, a location where an event happened in the past, but also needs to be understood in terms of the location of the telling of the story or testimony in the present. Thomason's story theory also reflects on the importance of intergenerational witnessing in Indigenous testimony by pointing out the need to hear testimony in order to understand one's own family history—an aspect that neither testimonial theory nor the process of courtroom testimony is attentive to. By theorizing the parallels between Indigenous storytelling and testimony, Thomason establishes a theory of Indigenous testimony as a dynamic process that not only emerges from relationships but that in turn (re)creates, fosters, and maintains relationships. Understanding Indigenous testimony through the lens of relationships is at the core of this dissertation and the literary analyses conducted in the following chapters.

In this chapter, I aspired to answer Julia Emberley's call that "testimony must be viewed in an intertextual relation to Indigenous epistemologies" (*Testimonial Uncanny* 154).[32] After demonstrating how Indigenous scholars challenge Western conceptualizations of theory and how their alternatives lay the groundwork for this dissertation's reading of residential school novels as theories of testimony, this chapter has engaged in a decolonial critique of testimonial theory. Looking at courtroom testimony and testimonial theory, I have pointed out how the theoretical underpinnings of these processes emerge from epistemologies that are in many ways incommensurable with Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews. As I hope to have

[32] Emberley's work offers valuable reflections on Indigenous testimony but despite her call to consider Indigenous epistemologies, *The Testimonial Uncanny* is still grounded in psychoanalytic and poststructural theories. Emberley points out that one goal of her work is to decolonize European-based epistemological frameworks by demonstrating that "European discourses have incorporated, over the last few centuries, Indigenous knowledges in support of their own critical analyses" (31). My own work purposefully centers Indigenous epistemologies throughout in order to establish Indigenous theories of testimony as alternatives to non-Indigenous testimonial theories.

demonstrated, an unreflective application of testimonial theory and courtroom testimony as a lens through which to engage with Indigenous testimony and residential school literature might perpetuate colonial violence, entail processes of erasure, and result in the pathologizing of Indigenous people. As I furthermore hope to have demonstrated, even though not all Indigenous storytelling is testimonial in purpose, Indigenous storytelling principles relate in meaningful ways to the process of testimony and therefore constitute an alternative lens through which to engage with Indigenous testimony. It is now time to look at the ways in which Indigenous authors rely on these storytelling principles to create novels that not only incorporate theories of residential school testimony but also constitute fictional residential school testimonies themselves.

Chapter 2: Disclosing the Experience: Residential School Novels Before the TRC

This chapter analyzes two early residential school novels written by survivors: Cree author Tomson Highway's 1998 novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Tetlit Gwich'in author Robert Arthur Alexie's 2003 novel *Porcupines and China Dolls*. Both novels were written at a time when survivors were starting to speak up publicly to testify to the sexual and physical abuse they had suffered in the schools. This discussion was amplified when survivor Phil Fontaine, head of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, disclosed his abuse in a television interview in 1990. At the time, residential school testimony was strongly connected to the idea of disclosure and I argue that this is reflected in the two novels under analysis, which put a strong emphasis on disclosure in their conceptualizations of testimony. Keeping temporal and cultural contexts in mind, it is the aim of this chapter to analyze how testimony is re-imagined in the novels and how the two novels interact with their readership as fictional testimonies. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* establishes a theory of residential school testimony as a creative and collective endeavour by describing how the two main characters, Jeremiah and Gabriel, perform their residential school testimonies as theatrical plays on stage. I will demonstrate how the processes of writing, rehearsing, and performing these plays restore the characters' relationships to kin, community, and Cree culture. *Porcupines and China Dolls* theorizes the interplay between testifying survivors and a witnessing community. While Highway's novel mainly focuses on kinship relations, Alexie focuses on the interrelations within a whole community, and his novel explores how testimony may help restoring interpersonal relationships and strengthening community through the shared experience of collaboration between survivor and witness on which further relationships can be built if those involved claim agency and commit. As I will demonstrate, the novel emphasizes the importance of Indigenous

storytelling traditions for telling one's life story as theorized by Julie Cruikshank in collaboration with Athapaskan and Tlingit Elders Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned (*Life Lived*). *Kiss of the Fur Queen* similarly involves storytelling principles from a Cree tradition and in its analysis of the novels' re-imagination of the process of giving testimony, this chapter will reflect on the impact that these traditional storytelling contexts have on the audience's interaction with testimony.

Both novels emphasize the importance of stories and storytelling for relationships, but the two novels differ in one crucial aspect: while Highway's protagonists still have a connection to their community's storytelling traditions and to their language, Alexie's characters are depicted to be completely disconnected from these traditions because of generations of residential schooling. While both novels emphasize the importance of Indigenous storytelling, Highway does so in the presence of traditional Cree stories and Alexie does so in the absence of traditional Gwich'in stories. Despite their different approaches, both novels offer similar insights into the role of story for restoring relationships and they specifically apply these insights to the process of giving testimony of the residential school experience in an environment where residential school stories were hitherto silenced. While doing so, both novels reflect on the practice of interconnecting one's own life story with other stories in order to create additional layers of meaning that speak to the truth of one's story. In this chapter, I analyze how each novel theorizes testimony in its own manner. Over the course of this discussion I will, however, constantly be drawing connections between the novels in order to point out differences and similarities. Subsequently, I will discuss how both novels not only theorize but act as testimonies and how they might prompt a re-evaluation of the concept of "fiction" in the context of residential school novels.

2.1 Testimony as Creative and Collaborative Process: Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

I want to open my discussion of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by addressing a recent controversy surrounding its author Tomson Highway. In 2015, the Huffington Post quoted Highway as commenting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with the following words: "You may have heard 7,000 witnesses in the process that were negative. But what you haven't heard are the 7,000 reports that were positive stories." And further: "Nine of the happiest years of my life I spent it at that school" (Ostroff n.p.). Highway's comments were appreciatively picked up by those who deny the traumatic effects of residential schools. In her address to the senate on March 7, 2017 the controversial senator Lynn Beyak laments that Canada ignores "the abundance of good" that came out of residential schools (Beyak 2514). In her appalling speech, Beyak refers to Highway, saying: "Tomson Highway is an accomplished playwright, novelist and classical pianist. Of residential schools, Highway says this […]" (Beyak 2514). Beyak then quotes Highway's statement on the "7,000 positive stories" without contextualizing it or offering any of the numerous quotes in which Highway speaks about the negative impacts of residential schools and without mentioning that the one novel that he has written in fact focuses on the traumatic impacts that residential school had on Indigenous people. While Tomson Highway himself never commented further on his more than problematic statement from 2015, his brother Daniel Highway told CBC in 2018: "People kind of cherry-pick what [Tomson] says. I think a lot of people are tired of hearing about [residential schools] so they're trying to find ways to keep the noise down. […] If Tomson were ever to tell the whole story, things would change pretty quick" (Meloney n.p.). In my opinion, Tomson Highway did tell "the whole story" by giving testimony through his novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. And as I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, this story makes the insidiousness of the residential school system and its harmful effects abundantly clear. The novel, however, also showcases the

resilience of residential school survivors who work tirelessly to counter these effects in the schools' aftermath. In a *Globe & Mail* interview from 2013, Highway says: "I don't dwell in the past." He goes on to say: "There are many, many positive things, and that's what I like to think about" (Lederman n.p.). As a non-Indigenous scholar who was in no way affected by the residential school system, I am not in the position to judge the ways in which Highway is coping with his personal trauma by narrativizing his personal past. I do however think that his recent comments and the way in which they were picked up by the media offer an opportunity for all of us to think about the responsibilities that come with testimony and witnessing—the responsibilities of survivors to other survivors, but especially the responsibilities of those witnessing and sharing survivors' stories. Those who cherry-picked Highway's comments for the purpose of denying the atrocious nature of the residential school system were quick to turn Highway's short comments into an encompassing experience and a single man into a spokesperson for 150,000 survivors. For me, this is an important reminder for my work as a witness and literary scholar: the stories that we hear are personal perspectives that arise from specific times and contexts, and one testimony never speaks for everyone in a community—whether this community is one of residential school survivors or a specific Indigenous nation.

As pointed out in the Introduction, this thesis centres relationships as a constitutive element of Indigeneity and examines the potential of storytelling, and of testimony in particular, for restoring relationships that have been impacted by residential schools. In Cree culture, kinship relations are expressed by the idea of "wâhkôtowin," which the *Online Cree Dictionary* defines as "kinship beyond the immediate family" or "the state of being related to others" ("wâhkôtowin,"

OCD). Métis writer Maria Campbell's description of wâhkôtowin[33] extends this state of kinship beyond the human and includes kinship relations with the land and the other-than-human. Campbell's description also emphasizes the role of stories and other cultural practices for upholding and honouring this kinship network. My reading of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* through the lens of wâhkôhtowin resonates with Métis scholar June Scudeler's thought-provoking article on the importance of wâhkôtowin for decolonization in the 1992 movie treatment of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (Scudeler, "This Show"). While Scudeler focuses on how honouring wâhkôhtowin may foster a community's inclusion of 2LGBTQ+ people, my own approach looks at wâhkôtowin in the broader sense defined by Maria Campbell as kinship relations to all of creation. In doing so, I aspire to demonstrate how *Kiss of the Fur Queen* re-imagines testimony as a process that is grounded in Cree storytelling traditions and that aims at restoring wâhkôtowin in the aftermath of residential school.

Kiss of the Fur Queen tells the life stories of two Cree brothers from northern Manitoba, Champion and Ooneemeetoo Okimasis, following them from their childhood on and around the reserve Eemanapiteepitat to residential school, where they are forced to carry their Catholic names Jeremiah and Gabriel, and on to urban Canadian centres such as Winnipeg and Toronto where Jeremiah becomes a classical pianist and Gabriel a ballet dancer. Since the novel is loosely based on Tomson Highway's and his brother René Highway's own life stories, literary scholars and critics have called the novel a fictionalized testimony. Scholars have made similar claims in regard

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[33] Maria Campbell reflects on wâhkôtowin in an article for *Eagle Feather News*: "Today it is translated to mean kinship, relationship, and family as in human family. But at one time, from our place it meant the whole of creation. And our teachings taught us that all of creation is related and inter-connected to all things within it. Wâhkôtowin meant honoring and respecting those relationships. They are our stories, songs, ceremonies, and dances that taught us from birth to death our responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to each other. Human to human, human to plants, human to animals, to the water and especially to the earth. And in turn all of creation had responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to us" ("We need to return" 5).

to Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* and I will discuss this categorization in greater detail at the end of this chapter. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is grounded in Cree storytelling traditions but also reflects on how to adapt these traditions to new contexts after colonial assaults on wâhkôtowin. From the beginning, the novel showcases close connections between Cree storytelling and kinship relations and theorizes these connections through the process of Indigenous theory discussed in Chapter 1.

One example of the connections between storytelling and wâhkôtowin that the novel puts forward is what might be referred to as the brothers' "pre-birth stories," which emphasize the relations between humans, the land, and the other-than-human as well as the principle of reciprocity on which these relations are built. The two stories are inserted right before Champion and Ooneemeetoo are born and they speak of a baby falling down from the stars.[34] While I agree with Sam McKegney's assertion that the inclusion of these "pre-birth stories" contributes to the novel's goal of challenging Western notions of factuality and history in the context of autobiography and testimony (*Magic* 157), I want to emphasize that these stories are primarily examples of Cree storytelling that encapsulate teachings of wâhkôtowin. Champion's pre-birth story evokes a storytelling performance from the beginning, starting with an onomatopoetic "[p]oof" as the child lands "on his bum, smack into the most exquisite mound of snow in the entire forest" (19). The land is not only described as animate but in very human terms when "a small spruce tree that happened to be sleeping there opened one drowsy eye" (20). The story teaches

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[34] This resonates with a statement by Wilfred Buck, a Cree Elder from Opaskwayak Cree Nation, that the Cree "are star people" ("Cree mythology" 1:36 – 2:20). Buck explains the Cree understanding of the Wesakaychak star constellation as pointing to the Pleiades, the Seven Sisters constellation which, for the Cree people, is the hole in the sky from where humans are lowered down to earth. Highway evokes this belief in the novel where the Fur Queen, the novel's trickster, resides in the sky, and a human foetus bursts "from the seven stars on her tiara" and "tumble[s], head over heels over head, down, down to Earth" (12).

about the land as a relative to humans—a notion that is also addressed in Maria Campbell's statement on wâhkôtowin. Reciprocal relationships to the other-than-human are encapsulated in the story's telling of the baby's encounter with a rabbit which, upon seeing the freezing child, "slipped off his coat and wrapped it around the child's shivering, plump midsection" (20). The baby reciprocates, as he "made his gratitude clear to the rabbit" (20-1). This story teaches about wâhkôtowin and the reciprocal nature of relationship to the land and the other-than-human. The novel includes further stories that Abraham Okimasis tells his two youngest sons about his own interactions with the land and his stories again emphasize that humans' relationships to the land are not dissimilar from those to other humans when he speaks "of arguments he had had with the fierce north wind, of how a young pine tree had corrected his direction on his homeward journey and thus saved all their lives, of how the northern lights had whispered truth into his dreams" (104). His story depicts the land and its elements as animate beings with whom human and other-than-human beings interact constantly. It also teaches the brothers how, even when they think they are alone, they are embedded in a network of relationships.

Interestingly, the novel not only conceives of stories as processes that encode teachings about kinship relations but also conceives of them as processes that themselves reinforce wâhkôtowin. The beginning of the novel (which opens with Abraham Okimasis' victory at the 1951 World Championship Dog Derby) is characterized by sentences that turn the story's present into a future act of storytelling: "The next thing Abraham knew, *or so he would relate to his two youngest sons years later*, the goddess floated up to a sky fast fading from pink-and-purple dusk to the great blackness of night […]" (12, emphasis mine). What is unfolding in the reader's mind

is not what happened at the derby in 1951 but what Abraham Okimasis later tells his sons.[35] Particularly noteworthy is Highway's word choice for this act of storytelling as a process of "relating" which suggests that the father is not only telling a story to his sons but is simultaneously connecting with them in an empathic process that strengthens kinship bonds. Highway puts an emphasis on this process by including a second instance in which Abraham Okimasis "relates" a story to his sons (13).

Neal McLeod's work on Cree narrative illustrates how wâhkôtowin "grounds the transmission of Cree narrative memory: people tell stories to other people who are part of the stories and who assume the moral responsibility to remember" (*Cree Narrative* 15). The expression "moral responsibility" implies that the telling of a life stories among kin establishes relationships that come with responsibilities that are not unlike those of testimony and storytelling as discussed in Chapter 1: the responsibility to remember and pass on a story, the responsibility to engage with a story in a respectful manner, and potentially the responsibility for further action. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* depicts how storied memory is transmitted through wâhkôtowin when Gabriel claims to remember his own baptism while "[i]n truth, it was Kookoos Cook, […] who would never tire of telling his nephews the yarn, which, as the years progressed, became ever more outrageous, exaggerated, as is the Cree way of telling stories, of making myth" (38). Kookoos Cook, whose description as alternatively Abraham's cousin or Gabriel and Jeremiah's uncle (16, 111) gestures toward wâhkôtowin, stories Gabriel's life and it is only through these stories that Gabriel gains knowledge of this event in his life. The novel describes Kookoos Cook's accounts of actual events as evolving processes which gestures to the ways in which, as discussed in the

[35] The way in which Abraham Okimasis tells the story retrospectively is similar to the way in which the narrator in Alexie's novel is, as I argue below, situated in the future. Both novels put an emphasis on the act of retrospectively telling a story and aspire to make their readers aware of this process.

previous chapter, "truth is built and rebuild over time" through the stories that are told in a community (AFN 5). Sam McKegney raises the question of factuality in the context of Kookoos Cook because the novel mentions this telling in a sentence whose opening ("in truth") stands in contrast to its ending, ("making myth") (*Magic* 157). McKegney argues that the example of Kookoos Cook (and the novel's inclusion of stories from Cree storytelling traditions) speaks to the ways in which the novel "unsettle[s] the audience's confidence in the story's narrative reliability" which, however, "does not negate the continued relevance of individual understandings of past events" (*Magic* 157). I think for a thorough understanding of how the novel thinks about and conveys truth it is crucial to have an understanding of Cree understandings of different kinds of stories.[36]

Robert Brightman, who published Cree stories in collaboration with Elders from various places in northern Manitoba (such as Brochet, the reserve where Highway is from), describes how the Rock Cree make a general distinction between âtayohkewina and âcimowina. Âtayohkewina, as Brightman points out, "are understood as temporally antecedent in those to âcimowina" (6). They include sacred stories such as creation stories and stories that emphasize "that animals and other non-human agencies spoke and behaved like humans" (6). A defining characteristic of these stories is that "the characters are not persons of whom the narrators possess any direct knowledge or experience outside of […] dreams and shaking lodge performances" (6). Âtayohkewina are

[36] Highway himself explains his notion of "myth" in his often-quoted lecture *Comparing Mythologies* where he distinguishes between three different kinds of Cree stories: âcimôwin, kîyaskiwin, and âtayohkewin. Âcimôwin, according to Highway, "means 'to tell a story' or 'to tell the truth'" (*Comparing* 21). Kîyaskiwin "means 'to tell a lie,' meaning 'to weave a web of fiction'" and âtayohkewin "lies at a point exactly halfway between these first two" and "means 'to mythologize'" (*Comparing* 21). Highway's lecture offers insight into Highway's personal understanding of Cree stories which is in many ways influenced by postmodernism. Other Cree storytellers and scholars working with Cree storytellers offer alternative ways of understanding the different genres of Cree stories. One example would be Louis Bird's description of different kinds of stories in Omushkego storytelling as described in his book *Telling Our Stories*. I decided to work with Robert Brightman's categorization because it allows for a very nuanced understanding of how Cree stories convey truth—an understanding that is most illuminating for understanding how Cree storytelling operates in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*.

"generally said to be true accounts of events that transpired in an earlier condition of the world" that were "handed down successively through the generations" or that were "dreamed" (6). Âcimowina describes a category of stories where "the narrator knows the characters or has direct or indirect knowledge of them through human intermediaries" (7). Âcimowina is therefore the category that life stories (âcimisowina),[37] or testimonies would fall under—but it also includes fictional humourous stories (7). A sub-category of âcimôwina are "kayâs-âcimôwina," kayâs being the Cree term for "a long time ago." Kayas-âcimôwina are oral histories of events "which are temporally remote from the situation of narration" (7). The story that Kookos Cook tells of Gabriel's baptism could be categorized as âcimôwin that through Cook's process of adding layers and layers of embellishment to the âcimisowin in order to emphasize its most humorous elements, more and more turns into a form of humorous âcimôwin. I will return to these categorizations when discussing the testimonies that Jeremiah and Gabriel create of their residential school experiences.

When Champion turns seven years old, he is forced to leave his family and go to residential school as "it is the law" (*Kiss* 40). The school not only physically separates Champion from his kinship relations but also robs him of all the cultural practices that are used to uphold these relationships. Speaking Cree and telling Cree stories is forbidden by the school that forces a Euro-Christian worldview on the children. It is notable how the novel's storytelling discourse changes when depicting Champion's arrival at school. In an interview with Suzanne Methot, Highway reflects on the difficulties of thinking in Cree and writing in English and he points out that the Cree concept of circular time "doesn't translate" (Methot n.p.). I argue that the novel's opening actually

[37] Cree-Métis scholar Deanna Reder uses the term âcimisowin in her doctoral thesis ""Âcimisowin as Theoretical Practice: Autobiography as Indigenous Intellectual Tradition in Canada."

does evoke storytelling situations in terms of circular time because of the way in which the novel brings past, present, and future together when stating that the account of past events that the reader is reading now is actually a story that Abraham Okimasis tells "his two youngest sons later" (*Kiss* 13). By setting a shared moment of storytelling in the future, the novel gestures toward the stability of ongoing kinship relations. Tellingly, in residential school, such projections into the future are completely absent. Jeremiah merely makes plans to tell Gabriel about his experiences in the future and this creates a sense of insecurity as to the kinship ties in the future. Upon encountering stairs for the first time, Jeremiah imagines how he would tell Gabriel how "[y]ou could slide up and down their pale green iron banisters all day long" (55) The phrase "wait till he told Gabriel about them" (55), which introduces Jeremiah's thoughts on how banisters could be used, seems to tell the reader to wait and see how things unfold since the future seems uncertain at this point. In residential school, Cree circular time is suppressed by a Western linear notion of time just as Cree stories are suppressed by colonial Catholic stories. Furthermore, the school deeply harms Jeremiah's kinship relations. The novel offers a succinct image of how the school proceeds to sever Jeremiah's kinship relations by contrasting a dream that Jeremiah has in school with his experiences upon waking up. His dream is described as follows:

> [H]e could hear the endless stands of spruce groaning within their shrouds of snow, the air so clean it sparkled […]. Four-year-old Champion knelt at the front of his father's dogsled. He hung on to the canvas siding with one hand and, with the other, waved a miniature whip, chiming, "Mush, Tiger-Tiger, mush, mush!" The eight grey huskies were flying through the sky, past the sun, to the heaven of Champion's way of thinking. […] Behind him, his father brandished his moose-hide whip […] below,

> his mother […]. Inside her goose-down sleeping robe, Gabriel lay suckling at her breast. (286)

In this section, Champion is depicted as having agency: he is the one who is waving the whip which prompts the huskies to pull the family's sled. Champion is interacting with the other-than-human and he contributes to the family's goal of moving forward. With his father "behind him" and his mother and Gabriel "below," he is literally amidst his family. The dream takes place on the land and in the sky and hints towards Cree spirituality with the phrase "the heaven of Champion's way of thinking." The landscape and its elements are furthermore depicted as animate: the air sparkles and the spruce groans. Champion and his family interact with this landscape and make use of it. The passage encapsulates the interrelational network that is described by Maria Campbell.

The dream, however, ends abruptly when Jeremiah is woken up by a priest in residential school who commands him to get out of bed and to follow him:

> Sleepily, Champion-Jeremiah slid out of bed. By the light of a moon full to bursting, the now eight-year-old floated down an aisle lined with small white beds, cradles filled with sleeping brown children. Out a door, and up and down corridors, the long black robe swaying like a curtain, smelling of cigar smoke, incense, sacramental wine. […] Father Roland Lafleur, oblate of Mary Immaculate, unbuttoned his cassock, unzipped his trousers. (286-7)

In this passage, Jeremiah is alone. His family is gone, and the open space is replaced by the enclosing and unfathomable environment of the school. Cree spirituality, which was evoked in the dream, is replaced by Catholicism epitomized by the scent of "incense [and] sacramental wine" (286). The abuse that follows in this scene is not only a horridly painful and humiliating experience

that robs Jeremiah completely of his agency but is also incomprehensible to the young boy who asks himself afterwards what he has done to deserve that kind of punishment (287). The novel's direct contrast of these two scenes gestures toward the numerous ways in which the residential school experience attacked Indigenous kinship relations.

The reader does not learn about the sexual abuse that Jeremiah suffered as a child until the end of the novel, when Jeremiah, as a grown-up, is overwhelmed by the memory he suppressed all his life. However, the novel early on describes the moment when Jeremiah witnesses how Father Lafleur abuses Gabriel (79). In this situation, Jeremiah is powerless, and he blames himself for the rest of his life for not protecting Gabriel, crying out his perceived guilt at Gabriel's deathbed: "I promised Mom and Dad I'd take care of you. And I fucked up" (301). The novel addresses the numerous insidious ways in which sexual abuse not only harms the abused but also the interpersonal relationships that they have with others. The abuse not only impacts the relationship between Jeremiah and Gabriel but also the brothers' relationship to their mother and father when they realize that they cannot tell their Catholic parents about the abuse because, as Jeremiah says, "[e]ven if we told them, they would side with Father Lafleur" (92). The silence around the abuse is indicative of the brothers' loss of trust in their parents and thereby addresses the intergenerational effects that generations of residential schooling have had on kinship relations.

Sam McKegney points out how the novel employs the figure of the Weetigo to speak about cycles of intergenerational abuse that are caused by residential schools (*Magic* 170). The Weetigo is a figure from Cree storytelling traditions (it also appears in other Algonquian people's stories, for example as the Windigo in Anishinaabe storytelling) which, in a way, can be seen as an epitome

of the opposite of all the principles that are expressed through wâhkôtowin. [38] As Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew points out, the Weetigo is "a giant insatiable cannibal spirit who eats everything and everyone in its path; it is the personification of greed" (*Taking Back* 176). As such, the Weetigo stands in stark contrast to the principles of balance and reciprocity as Maria Campbell outlines them for the relationships of wâhkôtowin. Omushkego Elder and storyteller Louis Bird offers a distinct description of two different kinds of Weetigos from his storytelling tradition. The first kind "is a wihtigo that was created by starvation – humans starved, went crazy, and ate human flesh when it was decayed. […] And you become a wihtigo – and that wihtigo is very evil" (112). Notably, Bird points out that it is actually the humans' overhunting that causes the starvation. Overhunting goes against wâhkôtowin's principles of reciprocity and balance and Bird's account demonstrates how the Weetigo is created by, personifies, and inspires actions that go against wâhkôtowin. A second kind of Weetigo, according to Bird, "was created when a person was driven extremely insane. People lost their human consciousness and were driven to become a wihtigo by another human's abuse" (112). If driven to become a Weetigo, an abused person "would want to retaliate and hurt or kill someone" (Bird 112). Even though this kind of Weetigo emerges from a different situation, the underlying principles are similar: the Weetigo is created when someone acts against the principles of wâhkôtowin. Bird points out that "[t]hose people committed what we called a sin against nature – our word is *pastahowin*" (115). The Cree Online Dictionary similarly defines "pastahowin" as a "breach of the natural order" ("pastahowin," *Cree Online Dictionary*) which speaks to the ways in which the Weetigo is associated with actions that go against the reciprocity and balance created by wâhkôtowin. Howard Norman, who spoke to over 150 Cree Elders about the Weetigo, points out that Weetigos "are, or soon become 'outsiders' whose

[38] There are different spellings of "Weetigo," and I adopt the one that Highway uses in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Spellings within the quotes are kept in their original.

behavior is a great threat to the community" (4). A Weetigo, according to the stories Norman heard, might be created through "prolonged isolation" and then continues to be without a community as is expressed by the term Upayokwitigo ("He-who-lives-alone" or "Hermit Windigo") (4).

In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, there are instances in which both Jeremiah and Gabriel are associated with the Weetigo: the little girls in Gabriel's ballet class are "making him look, and feel, like a Weetigo" (152). And Jeremiah, according to Sam McKegney, is confronted with "his latent capacity to become an abuser," to turn into a Weetigo himself, when a little boy tells him that he was eaten by a Weetigo (*Magic* 170). While McKegney specifically interprets the Weetigo as a metaphor for cycles of sexual abuse, my own reading is more encompassing and suggests, based on the Weetigo descriptions by Bird and Episkenew, that the Weetigo figure in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* can be understood as a metaphor for behaviour that is detrimental to the reciprocal and respectful relationships that characterize wâhkôtowin.

Because of the ways in which residential school harmed their kinship relations, both Jeremiah and Gabriel struggle with isolation later in life and at times behave in ways that are detrimental to the respectful kinship relations that they were depicted as being embedded in at the beginning of the novel. When Jeremiah moves to Winnipeg after residential school, he feels completely alone and thinks back to his father's stories of being alone with the land—stories that do not offer him any solace now because they "never told us how to spend time alone in the midst of half a million people. Here, stars don't shine at night, trees don't speak" (104). Jeremiah's feelings of isolation in the city do not stem from any incompatibility between Cree wâhkôtowin and the city but rather testify to the fact that residential school's assimilatory practices, while harming wâhkôtowin, also did nothing to teach him how to forge relationships in this new

environment. At the same time, Gabriel similarly realizes on the reserve that “there was no place for him in Eemanapiteepitat or the north” (109) after his father insists on the benefits of the Catholic church that “saved our people” (109). Colonialism and the worldview that comes with it makes it impossible for both brothers to uphold their kinship relations or to forge new ones.

The fact that residential school harmed the brothers’ kinship ties and imposed colonial narratives upon them is crucial for understanding the ways in which the two characters develop in the school’s aftermath. Jeremiah, who adores classical music and Western literature, starts to increasingly favour all things Western and to reject all things Indigenous. When his Anishinaabe classmate Amanda Clear Sky invites him to a powwow in Winnipeg and thereby gives him the opportunity to create new relationships in the city, Jeremiah is not able to see this opportunity for relationship since his worldview is dominated by Western colonial narratives and stereotypes. Upon seeing the dancers, he disdainfully asks himself: “Who did these people think they were, attempting to revive dead customs in the middle of a city” (172). Jeremiah’s perception of the powwow dances as dead customs is indicative of how the school has erased any understanding of contemporary Indigeneity in him and therefore the ability to make meaning of Indigenous cultural practices and their adaptation to the present. That he thinks the dances are “dead customs” shows that he has not been taught to translate them into this new context. Jeremiah’s rejection of Indigeneity is furthermore showcased when he perceives the dancers as “Disney Indians” (172) and “Hollywood Indians” (173) and refers to them as “this conquered race of people” (174)—disassociating himself from being Indigenous.

The novel’s depiction of Gabriel’s life after residential school has been deemed controversial by scholars because of the way in which the novel implicitly connects Gabriel’s homosexuality to his sexual abuse as a child by using similar imagery for both. Mark Rifkin claims

that the way in which Gabriel incorporates the experience of his abuse into his desire "provides a means of repositioning it within his emotional life, producing not an identification with the priests and Catholicism but with the very potential for Indigenous pleasure that the Church sought to foreclose as a condition of becoming civilized" (140). Daniel Heath Justice, on the other hand, argues that "the novel insists on the inextricable association of pedophilia and assault with either twisted and exploitative homosexual desire or excruciating self-hatred, repression, and denial" ("Literature, Healing" n.p.). Whichever reading one chooses to follow,[39] it is important to recognize that for a long time after residential school, Gabriel, just like Jeremiah, does not engage in lasting relationships that are characterized by reciprocity and mutual respect. The kinship relationship to each other is the one form of relationship that Jeremiah and Gabriel are able to maintain the longest. Ultimately, however, this relationship is severed when Jeremiah, who seemingly tries to hold on to a connection with his parents by subscribing to their Catholicism, condemns Gabriel's homosexuality, telling him that their father would call it "sick" (*Kiss* 208). In this moment, Jeremiah also decides to disconnect from his own bodily desires and as June Scudeler points out, "Jeremiah becomes 'intellect-pure, undiluted, precise' (205) when he sees Gabriel kissing Gregory Newman, an act that reminds him of his sexual abuse at residential school" (n.p. fn. 13).

I would not go as far as to say that the two brothers turn into metaphorical Weetigos that are a danger to their community. [40] I rather argue that Highway utilizes the metaphor of the

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[39] A rather disturbing article published in the Toronto Star in 1991 states that "Highway does not attribute his homosexuality to the abuse" (Steed n.p.). The phrasing strongly suggests that this is Highway's answer to a specific question asked by the journalist. This demonstrates how it is always crucial to keep the audience in mind. And while Rifkin's reading certainly constitutes an important act of decolonization that attests agency to Gabriel's actions, Justice's cautions are more than justified considering that not all readers might have the education and the understanding to read the novel like Rifkin does.

[40] I therefore disagree with Nancy Kang's argument that Gabriel in fact turns into a Weetigo and is "gripped by Weetigo madness" as a result of his "escalating struggles and eventual demise" (199).

Weetigo—and its associated cycle of infection—in order to express how residential school, which is designed to sever Indigenous kinship ties, imposes ways of behaviour on Jeremiah and Gabriel that are potentially further detrimental to kinship ties.[41] Because of the way in which the novel strongly intertwines kinship relations and stories in the beginning, and because of Maria Campbell's and Neal McLeod's suggestions that stories and kinship are connected, the central question, that I want to ask at this point is whether story, specifically in the form of testimony, can be a way to restore the relationships that were harmed in residential school. And, might story be a way to metaphorically battle the Weetigo? The last part of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* offers a powerful demonstration of how this is indeed possible.

As discussed in the previous chapter, testimony is essentially a process of communicating story of lived experience that is inherently relational as it involves a teller and an audience. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* was published as a novel in 1998 but Highway had started working on the narrative in the early 1990s. Sam McKegney reconstructs *Kiss of the Fur Queen*'s development through different forms and media, pointing out how the novel was first conceived of as an autobiography, then a play, and then written as a TV movie before it was turned into a novel (*Magic* 152-3). As McKegney points out, each of these incarnations speaks of "Highway's keen understanding of the evolving [residential school] legacy discourse with which [...] he intended his work to engage" (*Magic* 154). The fact that Highway spent countless hours writing and rewriting and yet again rewriting his story speaks to his desire to share his story. Highway himself spoke about his need to tell this story shortly after the novel's publication in 1998, famously

[41]This does not mean that the brothers do not resist this process. Both Jeremiah and Gabriel try to find ways to uphold kinship relations throughout the novel. Jeremiah, for example, at times imaginatively connects to the land he grew up on when he plays the piano (213), and Gabriel expresses his father's dog sled stories in his dance (237). However, the novel suggests that that the temporary relationships that are created by these actions are not sustainable.

stating: "If I couldn't have written it, I would have killed myself" (Highway qtd. in Stoffman n.p.). Towards the end of the novel, Jeremiah, like Highway, feels the need to tell his story. Notably, this need comes after the scene discussed above in which Jeremiah hears about one of the children he teaches being abused—a situation in which he, as McKegney suggests, is himself associated with a Weetigo. After this experience, Jeremiah sits down, writes his life story in form of a play, and "channels his anguish into creative work" (McKegney, *Magic* 171) in which he "entwines both his distant past and the recent trauma in a mythic discourse he can ultimately control as a writer" (McKegney, *Magic* 171).

The play that Jeremiah writes is entitled "Ulysses Thunderchild" and I argue that it is through this play that *Kiss of the Fur Queen* communicates a theory of testimony. In this play, Jeremiah adapts "The Son of Ayash—" an âtayohkewin—to his own life story—his âcimisowin. As pointed out above, âtayohkewina are understood as true accounts, and Jeremiah's blending of stories is therefore not a process of fictionalization in a Western sense. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "fiction" as an "invention or fabrication as opposed to fact" ("fiction," *OED*), which means that fictionalization is a process in which a story moves away from the realm of "fact" into the realm of "invention." Jeremiah's combination of âcimisowin and âtayohkewin is a process in which he blends two stories (which are both true accounts) in a creative manner in order to enhance the meaning of each and to carve out aspects that are important to him.[42] This process is reminiscent of the ways in which listeners of Indigenous storytelling are supposed to understand stories from their personal perspective and adapt their teachings to their own lives (see Cruikshank

[42] This process is furthermore similar to the tradition of telling one's life story in relation to traditional stories. I discuss this process below in my reading of Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*.

on Indigenous storytelling in Chapter 1). Through "Ulysses Thunderchild," Jeremiah stories his process of understanding this âtayohkewin and shares it with others.

One possible way of understanding the way in which Jeremiah braids âcimisowin and âtayohkewin is articulated by Neal McLeod as "aniskwâcimopicikêwin" which literally means "the process of connecting stories together" (*Indigenous Poetics* 8).[43] According to McLeod, the "dissonance" between the stories, the space in-between, allows the reader or listener to understand each of the stories in new ways (*Indigenous Poetics* 8). Meaning therefore emerges not only from each of the stories but also lies within the relationship that is established during the process of aniskwâcimopicikêwin. Jeremiah creates new meanings when he braids his own life story with the traditional Cree Son of Ayash story. There are many different tellings of "The Son of Ayash" but the core essence of the narrative is usually the story of a child who is separated from his parents and finding his way back home (Brightman 94). That Jeremiah resorts to testimony when he recognizes ongoing structures of abuse and realizes how his own actions are potentially harmful for relationships, demonstrates a belief in testimony to be able to bring about change in several ways. By conceiving of Jeremiah's testimony as a blending of âcimisowin and âtayohkewin, the novel demonstrates how old stories can offer frameworks for understanding contemporary situations. Highway himself points out how traditional stories originated in different contexts and that they, at times, have to be "re-worked somewhat […] to be relevant to us Indians living in today's world" ("Native Mythology" 22). Adapting "The Son of Ayash" makes it possible for Jeremiah to make meaning of his own experience while simultaneously reclaiming a story from a tradition that was taken away from him in residential school. At the same time, Jeremiah brings

[43] Even though aniskwâcimopicikêwin is a Cree concept, McLeod suggests that the process of connecting stories also occurs in other Indigenous cultures when he refers to this process as being a part of "Indigenous poetics" (*Indigenous Poetics* 8). And as I will demonstrate below, Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* also foregrounds the importance of connecting stories.

new meaning to "The Son of Ayash" because as Neal McLeod describes: "while we are influenced by the stories of the kêhtê-ayak (Old Ones), we also add to the meaning of these stories through our experiences and understanding, and add in small ways to ancient wisdom" (*Cree Narrative* 11). Therefore, Jeremiah's act of interconnecting âcimisowin and âtayohkewin, his act of aniskwâcimopicikêwin, is also a way of connecting his own story to what McLeod refers to as Cree collective memory.

McLeod emphasizes that aniskwâcimopicikêwin differs from the Western concept of intertextuality because it does not privilege written texts but refers to the process of interconnecting stories that are expressed in all kinds of forms such as "the land itself, dreams, petroglyphs, classical narratives, hide paintings, and so on" (*Indigenous Poetics* 8). Aniskwâcimopicikêwin therefore includes not only the process of connecting different stories but also, potentially, the process of connecting different genres and forms of expression. Jeremiah combines different forms of telling a story by bringing together Indigenous storytelling and theatre. On yet another level, Highway himself performs aniskwâcimopicikêwin and not only connects stories but also different forms of storytelling by evoking Indigenous storytelling as well as theatre within the form of the novel. Neal McLeod's argument that in the process of aniskwâcimopicikêwin, meaning is created in the space between stories mostly refers to the level of content. I would add that additional meaning is also generated for the audience within the in-between space of different forms of storytelling. Connecting different forms of storytelling draws attention to the form itself and makes the reader more conscious of the fact that they are witnessing and participating in a storytelling process. By describing a play within the novel, Highway draws particular attention to the fact that a performance of story occurs—and there are parallels to the way in which the TRC's community hearings created an environment that emphasized the fact that performances of testimony were

occurring as will be discussed in Chapter 4. Drawing additional attention to the act of storytelling reminds the reader/audience of their responsibility to participate and to witness.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, and as strongly suggested in the first part of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Indigenous storytelling creates relationships. The fact that the novel depicts Jeremiah's testimony as a play can be read as Jeremiah's attempt to recreate a storytelling situation in the city far from the storytelling contexts he grew up in. As Highway himself points out, theatre can be seen as "a natural extension of the oral storytelling tradition" (Highway qtd. in Lutz 95) and Cree playwright Floyd Favel calls theatre "the younger brother of our tradition" ("Theatre" 118). Jeremiah's choice of genre suggests his realization that he is in need of relationships. By asking Gabriel "to direct it" (*Kiss* 278), Jeremiah hopes to work with Gabriel on the play, but he also implicitly hopes to work with Gabriel on restoring their kinship relationship. While I agree with McKegney's argument that writing the play allows Jeremiah to claim agency, I disagree with his idea that Jeremiah controls the discourse as a writer (*Magic* 171). Jeremiah certainly *attempts* to control the story as a writer, which becomes visible when he uses James Joyce's *Ulysses* as a second frame of reference and refers to "Ulysses Thunderchild" as depicting "one day in the life of a Cree man in Toronto, 1984" (277).[44] Joyce's novel is usually taught as a primary example for a Western notion of literature that celebrates the author as a solitary genius whose work is directed at a small audience of similarly intellectual readers. Theatrical plays, however, "are not the creation of solitary individuals working in isolation. They are communal both in production and in

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[44] Interestingly, Tomson Highway did in fact write a play that he describes as "one day in the life of a Cree man in Toronto." It is entitled *The Sage, the Dancer, and the Fool* and was staged by Native Earth Performances in 1989. This play, however, does not include any references to the "Son of Ayash" story. There was, however, an adaptation of "The Son of Ayash" by Jim Morris in 1982 who translated the story into a play. In a report on Native Theatre that was given to the RCAP, Doris Linklater remembers how "Tomson Highway came up to observe rehearsals. […] Tomson got really interested after seeing 'Ayash'. He was very interested in Jim [Morris]'s idea of taking a legend and making it into a play" (Matthews 157-8).

performance" (Episkenew, *Taking Back* 147). Jeremiah's attempt to have sole control over the story as a writer goes against the aspect of co-creation that is central to both theatre and Indigenous storytelling. And, eventually, while rehearsing the play, the actors complain that it is "unplayable" (*Kiss* 279) and that "it's all head [...] and no gut" (280). The novel includes this scene in order to emphasize that stories are interrelational and cannot be controlled by one person alone. As Amanda Clear Sky, who becomes one of the actresses in the production, points out to Gabriel, the story is all about "magic" (279). Amanda here not only refers to the supernatural elements that Jeremiah has adopted from "The Son of Ayash" but also to the story's potential to create relationship, because after the accusation that his play "is all head" (279), Jeremiah angrily starts playing the piano singing and shouting the words "the son of Ayash" in Cree (280). The group of actors joins in, making it "a dance, a Cree rite of sacrifice" (280). It is only when they all work together that they turn Jeremiah's play into something that can be understood and felt and that eventually, as the novel states at the end of this collaborative effort, is "magic" (280).

During the rehearsal, when all participants work together to create story, Gabriel teaches Jeremiah that storytelling is an act of embodiment that needs to be felt "with the tips of your fingers, your forehead, the soles of your feet, your toes, your groin" (280). Gabriel's teaching resonates with Dovie Thomason's suggestion that the engagement with residential school testimony is not only an intellectual but an embodied, holistic endeavor.[45] *Kiss of the Fur Queen* therefore conceptualizes testimony as a holistic process of collective and creative storytelling. Working with Gabriel and the actors on co-creating his testimony, Jeremiah experiences the relationship-establishing power of story as he connects with a new, self-chosen community of

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[45] Kuna and Rappahannock playwright Monique Mojica states "that our bodies are our libraries—fully referenced in memory, an endless resource, a giant database of stories" (Mojica 97) and thereby suggests an understanding that stories are not only carried in the mind but also in the body.

artists and starts to restore his kinship ties with Gabriel. The audience-performer relationship in traditional Western theatre is very different from Indigenous storytelling traditions in that it assigns the audience a rather passive role of merely receiving a story. The rehearsal scene in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* suggests that the creative co-creation of story happens not with the audience but amongst Jeremiah, Gabriel, and the actors who grow together to build a community—and this community is more important for Jeremiah than his relationships with the audience.

The audience, however, still plays a crucial role in this particular process of testimony because, as Jeremiah points out to Gabriel: "I want my Muskoosiuk to understand it" (278). "Muskoosiuk" refers to the children whom Jeremiah teaches and who embody the future generation in the novel. Jeremiah here explicitly states his intention to create a situation of intergenerational witnessing as discussed in the previous chapter and further discussed in my analysis of James Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow*. Furthermore, the fact that Jeremiah created his testimony as a play also gestures toward his desire for disclosure and for confronting the public with the atrocities that were committed in residential schools. In his play, Jeremiah discloses an abuse by showing the figure of a Weetigo "shedding his costume at death, revealing a priest's cassock" (285). Jeremiah's disclosure of sexual abuse becomes embedded in the play, and during the eventual staging, the actor community performs Jeremiah's testimony in front of a larger audience whose members are predominantly unknown to Jeremiah. The element of disclosure, however, is not acknowledged as such by all audience members. As Jeremiah reads later in one review of his play: "The image comes from nowhere. And goes nowhere" (285). The review demonstrates that not all of those witnessing the testimony are in fact aware of its testimonial nature and therefore of its political implications and the responsibilities that it establishes. Because of mainstream understandings of testimony as they were discussed in the

previous chapter, the audience is not able to reconcile testimony and the Cree custom of metaphor and does not understand that the metaphor is part of the active engagement that Indigenous storytelling asks of the audience (see Chapter 1). Or as Gabriel puts it: “You didn’t say it loud enough, Jeremiah” (285). By including the image of the priest as Weetigo in his play, Jeremiah enacts what Neal McLeod refers to as the Cree way of “kiskino,” when things are “pointed to, but never completely articulated” (*Indigenous Poetics* 5). According to McLeod, “this space allows the listener or reader to arrive at his or her own understanding” (*Indigenous Poetics* 5). Jeremiah’s radical re-imagining of testimony challenges Western understandings of testimony just as his play challenges Western theatre, as is pointed out when his script keeps getting rejected with comments such as: “No conflict. It’s not a play” (278). But even though the testimony is not acknowledged as such by the broader public, the novel still suggests that the process of seeing his own story performed has an impact on Jeremiah, since it is only after the performance that “his memory open[s] the padlocked doors” (285) and the suppressed memory of Jeremiah’s own abuse is revealed. Here, the novel itself mirrors the disclosure in “Ulysses Thunderchild” by disclosing to the reader that it was not only Gabriel who was abused in residential school.

Even though the performance of “Ulysses Thunderchild” as a collective and creative testimony helps Jeremiah to restore kinship ties, it is not depicted as a magic remedy. In fact, it is only the starting point for Jeremiah’s process of reclaiming kinship ties, which he embarks on further with a second play entitled “Chachagathoo the Shaman.” The story of Chachagathoo is gestured toward throughout the novel. Jeremiah and Gabriel grow up hearing it from their parents who tell them that “Chachagathoo was an evil woman. Because she had machipoowamoowin[, bad dream power]” (90). The story is connected to a specific place, “the island where Father Thibodeau’s men caught Chachagathoo,” and the two brothers are told to not “look at it” (90).

Even though it is their mother who tells them the story, her reliability is questioned right away because the brothers realize that "[i]t was their mother's voice, though as if someone else was giving expression to the words" (90). In fact, the novel later makes clear where the image of "the wicked Chachagathoo" (196) is coming from when depicting a sermon by the reserve's priest Father Bouchard, who tells the community that "[t] here was a woman here who flouted the church, who did not worship the one true God, who practiced witchcraft" and that "[t]his woman was sent to prison in the south, where she died a lonely death" (197). When visiting a powwow on Manitoulin Island, the two brothers later learn from Amanda Clear Sky's grandmother, Ann-Adele Ghostrider, that their "parents' generation" was "[l]ied to and lied to and lied to" (247). Ann-Adele Ghostrider tells the brothers the actual story of Chachagathoo.

According to Ghostrider, Chachagathoo was a shaman in Mistik Lake (the place where the Okimasis brothers are from) at a time of great starvation. Ghostrider tells the brothers how

> one day, a man became possessed by Weetigo, the spirit who feasts on human flesh. At this time, the first priest arrived on Mistik Lake.[46] […] The crazed man was brought to the priest who proclaimed his soul to be possessed by Satan. But the shaman said no. When she started curing the man, when she started exorcising the Weetigo, the priest stopped her. The man died. And the priest accused the shaman

[46] This phrase is usually quoted by scholars who make the argument that Highway utilizes the Weetigo as a metaphor for colonialism. It is crucial, however, to acknowledge that the Weetigo precedes colonialism and existed, as Louis Bird puts it, "many years before the European came" (113), and that Indigenous communities had always been struggling with threats to the relationships of the community. However, it is also very important to acknowledge that the communities have always had their own ways of dealing with the Weetigo, of dealing with those threats to relationship. The temporal arrangement of scenes in Highway's manuscript of *The Last Shaman* puts an emphasis on the fact that the Weetigo attacked the community before the first priest arrived.

> of witchcraft. He had her sent to jail in Winnipeg. There, in despair, she hung herself. (245-6)[47]

Highway's story of Chachagathoo actually draws on a historical event that is referred to as "the Fiddler case" which occurred in Norway House in fall 1907. Jack Fiddler, a "shaman and leader of the Sucker clan from the upper Severn River in what is now northwestern Ontario," and his younger brother Joseph Fiddler were charged with killing "a possessed woman who had turned into the dreaded windigo" (Fiddler and Stevens vii). For *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Highway turned the shaman into a woman in order to create yet another metaphor for what he claims is one of the central statements of his novel: "the killing of one religion by another, […] the killing of God as woman by God as man" (Highway qtd. in Hodgson n.p.). After hearing the story of Chachagathoo, Jeremiah comes to realize: "if machipoowamoowin, bad dream power, was obviously powerful enough to snuff out a human life, then would not mithoopoowamoowin, good dream power, be as strong?" (247). This passage speaks to Jeremiah's recognition of the power of storytelling and as pointed out, "Ulysses Thunderchild" is Jeremiah's first attempt at creating mithoopoowamoowin by creating a testimony that blends âcimisowin and âtayohkewin. For his second play, "Chachagathoo the Shaman," Jeremiah blends âcimisowin and kayâs-âcimôwin, and in order to write this piece, he travels back to Mistik Lake where the Chachagathoo story took place in order to be close to the land whose windy and snowy landscape he writes about (288).

Jeremiah's creation of "Ulysses Thunderchild" and "Chachagathoo the Shaman" is described within 30 pages towards the end of the novel. It is, however, important to keep in mind that the original manuscript of the novel was about 800 pages long before it was edited and cut

[47] The fact that Jeremiah and Gabriel hear this Cree story that originates from Mistik Lake from an Anishinaabe woman on Manitoulin Island speaks to the ways in which stories, although being strongly connected to a place, travel between places and peoples—which can be seen as yet another way in which stories establish connections.

down to the 300 pages that were published (McKegney, *Magic* 153). Drafts and fragments of Highway's longer versions of the novel are available at Library and Archives Canada and an early draft of the novel from 1995 describes Jeremiah and Gabriel's work on staging the two plays over the course of more than 90 pages. Backtracking Highway's thoughts on Jeremiah and Gabriel's plays, I looked at even earlier manuscripts from 1994 when Highway had not started working on the novel yet but was still hoping to have his story told in a two-part TV movie. Highway's screenplay for the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* movie puts even more emphasis on Jeremiah and Gabriel's work towards kinship relations and resurgence through testimonial theatre in the aftermath of residential school. The screenplay particularly focuses on Jeremiah's play about the shaman which in this early screenplay is entitled "The Last Shaman" (rather than "Chachagathoo the Shaman"). The screenplay suggests that the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* movie opens and ends with the staging of this play and it includes several rehearsal scenes that give far more insight into the shaman play than the published novel does. Among Highway's drafts, I came across a complete manuscript of *The Last Shaman*[48] in which Highway imagines how Jeremiah would have written and designed this play. Presumably, Highway wrote this complete version of *The Last Shaman* to make it easier for the filmmakers to stage the rehearsal scenes that are included in the screenplay. I argue that it is crucial to take a closer look at *The Last Shaman* in order to understand how Highway conceived of Jeremiah and Gabriel's continued work of restoring kinship ties—a process of which the ultimately published novel only offers small glimpses.

The Last Shaman is set in the year 1860 in Brochet (which is re-imagined as Eemanapiteepitat on Mistik Lake in the published novel) and tells the story of Kichimakskwew

[48] Over the course of the following pages, I refer to the real-world manuscript of this play that I found at Library and Archives Canada by using italics (*The Last Shaman)*. I refer to the play within the world of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by using quotation marks ("The Last Shaman").

the shaman (who, in the published novel, is called Chachagathoo the shaman). A note by Highway points out that "all dialogue is in Cree, unless otherwise indicated" (*Last Shaman* 1). In 1860, the Cree community of Brochet is struggling with a famine after a harsh winter during which "the caribou have not come" (*Last Shaman* 2). The play opens with the description of a family's fruitless attempts to hunt caribou north of the community's village. As the hunter Migisoo, his wife Cheechagee, and their three children face starvation, a Weetigo takes possession of Cheechagee. The play then focuses on the community which welcomes Father Egenolf, a Catholic priest or "holy boss" as he likes to be called (11). Some in the community have high hopes for the priest to end the famine since they heard stories that one of these holy bosses "changed two trout into five hundred pickerel" (11). Kichimakskwew, the community's shaman, remains sceptic, reminding those voices of the community to "doubt […]. Question. Fight back. [And not to] give in so easily" (11). Soon after Father Egenolf's arrival in the community, he starts to build a church and to teach the community's children about Catholic beliefs and practices. The play's climax unfolds as Migisoo the hunter brings his Weetigo-possessed wife back to the community, asking Kichimakskwew to perform a ritual to help her. The performed ritual requires Kichimakskwew to hold Cheechagee "firmly around the throat" which is perceived with horror by Father Egenolf who runs toward the shaman yelling: "No! Get away from her!" (43). Despite Kichimakswew's warning to not interfere with something he knows nothing about, the "priest continues pulling at the Shaman, trying to break her hold on Cheechagee. In the ensuing confusion, Cheechagee turns on the priest, murderously, with her teeth at his throat" (43). Protecting the priest, Kichimakskwew "intercepts and strikes Cheechagee across the throat," causing her death (43). The play then depicts the ensuing trial in a courtroom in Winnipeg, Kichimakskwew's sentencing and her suicide in prison. The play's last scene displays Father Egenolf's mass in Brochet which is drowned out by

Kichimakskwew whose spirit returns to the community to offer a warning to the priest to "take care of our young men […]. For before you know it, the seventh lifetime will be upon us all, […] [a]nd the souls of men will not die. And the caribou will be plentiful again" (50).

This constitutes the narrative of the play from which Highway intended scenes to be included in the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* movie, where "The Last Shaman" is the play that Jeremiah writes after "Ulysses Thunderchild." When looking at the manuscript of *The Last Shaman*, it is important to keep in mind that within the world of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, "The Last Shaman" is supposed to be written by Jeremiah and staged by Jeremiah and Gabriel. That Jeremiah is the author of the play is emphasized by the fact that even though the narrative of "The Last Shaman" is set in the historical past, the play itself interweaves the kayâs-âcimôwina of the shaman with the life experiences of Jeremiah and Gabriel. In a note that precedes the manuscript of the *The Last Shaman* play, Highway points out that

> bits and pieces of this show will resemble, visually, aurally and otherwise, elements from all the other shows the Okimasis brothers have done before, as well as scenes from their 'real' lives. For instance, the first set piece we see here will be a facsimile of the meadow in the northern Manitoba tundra, with its large rock in the middle, where the herd of caribou almost stampeded over Leo[49] and Jeremiah as children. (*Last Shaman* n.p.)

Highway's note on what the performance of "The Last Shaman" should have looked like in the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* movie suggests that Jeremiah creates yet another act of testimony because he lets the play be influenced by his personal experiences. The way in which the play connects the

[49] In this early film version of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the name of Jeremiah's little brother is Leo instead of Gabriel.

story of the shaman and stories from Jeremiah and Gabriel's lives (such as the incident with the caribou herd, a story for which the rock on stage constitutes a visual marker) is yet another instance of aniskwâcimopicikêwin. If we look at the published *Kiss of the Fur Queen* novel, this aspect of the second play is lost because the novel was edited and shortened for publication. The *Kiss of the Fur Queen* novel only retains fragmented references to Jeremiah's second play and therefore any reader of the novel cannot get the full experience of how this second play works towards the restoration of wâhkôhtowin. I argue that even though the manuscript of *The Last Shaman* is not part of the published novel, it is still part of the story that Highway originally conceived. I also argue that an analysis of how "The Last Shaman" as Jeremiah's play works towards the restoration of wâhkôhtowin explains Jeremiah's turn against Catholicism and toward Cree culture at the very end of the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* novel. I will therefore first perform a reading of *The Last Shaman* as a play written by Jeremiah with the purpose of restoring the relationships of wâhkôhtowin. After this analysis, I will then turn back to the published novel and demonstrate how the insights of this reading shed light on Jeremiah's behavior at the end of the novel.

Looking at the manuscript of *The Last Shaman* and the note from Highway that precedes it, I argue that the fact that Jeremiah stages the kayâs-âcimôwin of the shaman using imagery from his own life experiences demonstrates how he once again uses this form of storytelling to restore relationships. As the quotation of the note above suggests, "The Last Shaman" enables Jeremiah to keep working with Gabriel, since they work together on staging the play. Jeremiah furthermore weaves common incidents from both their life stories into the narrative. In the screenplay as well as in the published novel, the incident with the caribou stampede was, tellingly, an incident in which Jeremiah was able to protect Gabriel and to fulfill what he perceives as his kinship responsibilities. That the image of the rock from this incident features prominently in *The Last*

Shaman can be read as Jeremiah creating a reminder for himself and Gabriel of a time in which their relationship was still characterized by wâhkôhtowin.

The manuscript also suggests that Jeremiah uses the play about the shaman to reconnect with his home territory because the landscape of northern Manitoba and its other-than-human inhabitants feature prominently in *The Last Shaman* where "the wind howl[s] like a mythological beast" (*Last Shaman* 1). The audience is taken to "the bush a distance from the village of Brochet" (22), and snowstorms and starlight (20) are visible on stage. With this production, Jeremiah and Gabriel attempt to bring their home territory to the city—even if this has to happen through the use of such pragmatic props as "125 green garbage bags sewn together" to indicate a lake (13). As pointed out above, the play is furthermore described by Highway as making extensive use of the Cree language, which again helps to restore the brothers' connection to place, since language "is related to place; it is our umbilical cord to our place of origin, literally and symbolically" (Favel "Theatre of Orphans" n.p.). Language, according to Favel, also functions as "a doorway and a window" to former times since, "present in the immediate words are the ancestors" (Favel "Theatre of Orphans" n.p.).

Through the play, Jeremiah furthermore testifies to the atrocities of residential schools and his and Gabriel's suffering of sexual abuse in a number of ways. Even though the play is set in a time before the community was affected by residential schools, it foreshadows residential schools in a scene in which Father Egenolf, "[l]ike the Pied Piper, […] leads the children […] as he teaches them snippets of Gregorian chant from the mass, so that, as they progress, the children's chant changes imperceptibly from Cree to Latin" (*Last Shaman* 33). The play also evokes Jeremiah's experiences in residential school in a scene in which the priest teaches the community's children with a "chart which depicts a map of heaven and hell" (*Last Shaman* 34). In the published novel,

young Jeremiah is described as being taught about heaven and hell with exactly such maps (*Kiss of the Fur Queen* 59-61). *The Last Shaman* implicitly addresses the issue of sexual abuse in a scene in which, according to the stage directions, "three children […] finger Father Egenolf's crucifix with intense curiosity. The crucifix rests just above the priest's crotch" (*Last Shaman* 27). To direct the audience's attention to this, a "pinspot focuses on this visual" (*Last Shaman* 27). This image implicitly connects Catholicism and sexual abuse and Jeremiah then connects Father Egenolf (who is the community's first priest in the play) directly to his and Gabriel's experiences of sexual abuse by adding a scene in which the figure of Father Egenolf "transmutes" into the figure of community priest Jeremiah and Gabriel grew up with as well as the priest from residential school who abused them (*Last Shaman* 49). Thereby, Jeremiah gestures towards a long line of abuse and connects his and Gabriel's experiences to this line. Jeremiah furthermore addresses the transgressions of the Catholic Church once again through the figure of the Weetigo. While depicting the community members' encounters with the Weetigo as originating from starvation, the play connects the Weetigo to the priest in a different way. The Weetigo is usually described as lurking in the back when the priest performs the Eucharist rite. The play explicitly states that when Father Egenolf performs this rite, "subliminally, it is like the Weetigo eating human flesh" (*Last Shaman* 40). Thereby, the play implicitly suggests that the Catholic church brings practices into the community that are associated with the greatest danger for the community's health and their wâhkôhtowin.

The Last Shaman also includes a criticism of Western understandings of testimony and their legal implications. After the exorcism of the possessed hunter Migisoo ends with his death because of the priest's interruption, the shaman stands trial in a courtroom in Winnipeg where she is asked to give testimony. Her explanation of the Weetigo and how the exorcism works is, however, utilized by the Crown Attorney as evidence for her "complete and life-long rejection of

all Christian principles" (*Last Shaman* 48). The defence counsel's statement that his "client cannot and should not be judged by the principles of European judicial procedure" (*Last Shaman* 48) remains unheard and the play ends with the shaman's conviction and her suicide in prison.

All these elements of the play constitute information that the reader of the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* novel has no access to. These elements, are, however crucial for understanding what happens at the end of the novel, which I will now turn to in my analysis. The novel does not include the extensive rehearsal scenes of Jeremiah's second play that feature prominently in the screenplay for the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* movie and for which the manuscript of *The Last Shaman* was written. The novel still mentions, however, that Jeremiah and Gabriel are working together on staging a second play about a shaman (this play is renamed "Chachagathoo the Shaman" instead of "The Last Shaman" in the novel). The novel mentions that the audience deems the play "so controversial that the cardinal of Toronto had snuck into the show dressed as a Rosedale matron" (*Kiss of the Fur Queen* 295-6)—and the *The Last Shaman* manuscript certainly sheds light on why Jeremiah's second play is deemed to be controversial by the church. At the end of the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* novel, Gabriel, who suffers from AIDS, is on his deathbed in the hospital. The novel hints at the fact that Gabriel was supposed to play the community member who is possessed by a Weetigo in the production of "Chachagathoo the Shaman." In the novel, Gabriel dreams about this role, reciting lines such as "Haven't you feasted on enough human flesh" (299). In the dream, Gabriel conflates the Weetigo with Father Lafleur, who abused him in residential school (300). The novel establishes strong parallels between Gabriel's death and the failed exorcism in *The Last Shaman*, when Ann-Adele Ghostrider insists on performing a sweetgrass ceremony for Gabriel (thereby symbolizing the shaman) while his mother brings a priest to the hospital (symbolizing the intrusion of the priest who in turn is associated with the Weetigo). In the end, it is Jeremiah who stands up

against his mother by literally blocking the door, and who ensures that this time, the Weetigo is dispelled. Jeremiah's act is not only a rejection of his Catholic beliefs displayed earlier in the novel but also honours the last wish Gabriel told him: "I do not want priests anywhere near my bed" (299). The fact that Gabriel is protected from the Weetigo (the priest) in death and that Jeremiah honours his kinship relations and prefers the sweetgrass ceremony over Catholic rites is the novel's strong statement on resurgence and its gesturing towards a final restoration of relationships. Neal McLeod states that "[p]art of decolonizing Cree consciousness is for collective narrative memory to be awakened" (*Cree Narrative* 9). Jeremiah's creative and collective testimonies that braid personal story, history, and Cree storytelling (in ways that are similar to Dovie Thomason's performance discussed in the previous chapter) work towards the re-awakening of collective narrative memory. It also enables Jeremiah and Gabriel to restore their kinship ties and to, in the end, vanquish the metaphorical Weetigo. Through their radical re-imagination of testimony, Jeremiah and Gabriel are able to, as McLeod puts it, "find their anchor again and to come home through stories and narrative memory" (*Cree Narrative* 70). As I hope to have demonstrated, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* communicates a strong theory of how testimony that is based in Indigenous storytelling traditions can work toward the restoration of relationships and toward Indigenous resurgence.

2.2 Testimony as Communal Experience: Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*

Like Tomson Highway, Tetlit Gwich'in writer Robert Arthur Alexie's wrote about his experience of residential schools and their impacts in his first novel. Michelle Coupal characterizes Alexie's novel as "semi-autobiographic fiction" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 477) because like his characters, Alexie attended Stringer Hall, a hostel in Inuvik that was run by the Anglican Church. While Alexie's characters struggle with and speak out about sexual abuse, Alexie never

chose to publicly disclose any personal experiences of sexual abuse; however, Coupal says he testifies "indirectly through fiction" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 478). For both Highway and Alexie, the residential school novel was the first novel they wrote. Alexie, however, did not have the extensive experience of working in the arts that Highway had. Instead, Alexie worked as a community leader and chief for Fort McPherson's Tetlit Gwich'in and served as leading negotiator in the negotiations that led to the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement in 1992. Alexie died in 2014. He was found "lying by his vehicle on the Dempster Highway overlooking the mountains outside of Fort McPherson (Coupal, "Teaching Indigenous Literature" 486)—a place similar to the one in which the protagonist of his novel attempts suicide.

Porcupines and China Dolls was first published in 2002 but its publisher Stoddart went out of business shortly after and as Noah Richler points out, "a few copies did get out, mostly to the press" but the novel "was by and large, ignored" (Richler, "First Voices" n.p.). *Porcupines and China Dolls* therefore did not get much attention when it was first published. Theytus Books republished the novel in 2009 and while the book is well-known among academics and writers in the Indigenous literature community, surprisingly few scholarly articles on it have been published.[50] The novel focuses on the Blue People (Alexie's storied version of the Tetlit Gwich'in and Gwich'in cultures), specifically on a community in the town of Aberdeen. This community is described as a harrowing environment in which people's everyday lives are determined by alcoholism, violence, and meaningless sexual encounters. When describing how three men in the community decide to publicly disclose their experiences of sexual abuse in residential school, the novel delineates a theory of residential school testimony that emphasizes its potential for

[50] The most influential articles on *Porcupines and China Dolls* are Martin "Truth, Reconciliation," Hoy "'Never Meant to Be,'" and Coupal "Teaching Indigenous Literature."

establishing relationships. The novel, however, does not suggest that testimony ends all of the community's problems. Instead, the protagonists continue to struggle after their disclosure, and one of the reasons that *Porcupines and China Dolls* is deemed so important is because it defies any easy solutions while still showcasing the importance of story and testimony. Because of Alexie's blunt descriptions of a dysfunctional Indigenous community, academics approach the novel with caution. Helen Hoy admits that that when teaching it, she "deliberately placed it late in the semester" to give her students enough context so that they would not "fall into easy, racist judgements about the community malaise that Alexie candidly depicts" (Hoy 97). Jo-Ann Episkenew similarly states that she teaches the novel "with great caution" since "there is the possibility of things going very badly and [the novel] ultimately reinforcing negative stereotypes at the very least and further traumatizing Indigenous students at the worst" (Episkenew "Indigenizing" n.p.).[51]

Porcupines and China Dolls is certainly a difficult novel—but it is also an important one and it illuminates the interconnections of story, testimony, and relationships. While Highway's novel is about two brothers who leave their community and engage in storytelling and testimony to establish relationships in new places, Alexie's novel is about a dozen characters and their mostly dysfunctional relationships with each other. Where Highway's novel is preoccupied with the question of how to create a new home after residential school, home in Alexie's novel is characterized by dysfunctional relationships and Alexie asks the question of how those might be transformed into sustainable, healthy relationships. In doing so, Alexie scrutinizes the role of stories and testimony in this process. I argue that Alexie imagines disclosure and testimony as an

[51] Scholars' worries about the novel's potential of reinforcing negative stereotypes resonates with the discussions around *Kiss of the Fur Queen*'s depictions of Gabriel's sexuality and its depictions of violence against Indigenous women.

act of interpersonal storytelling that is steeped in collaboration. While scholars usually stress the influence of storytelling on Alexie's text by pointing out how it employs hyperbole, repetition, and colloquial speech (see Ruwoldt 78, Coupal, "Teaching Indigenous Literature" 480), they do not analyze Alexie's novel in terms of Gwich'in storytelling traditions specifically. My goal is to demonstrate how Alexie employs Gwich'in storytelling traditions (but also at times deliberately avoids employing Gwich'in storytelling) in order to teach the reader not only what story can *tell* but also what story can *do*.[52] In doing so, *Porcupines and China Dolls* creates Indigenous theory on story and testimony by enacting story and testimony.

The novel is divided into three parts. The first part offers a brief history of the Blue People, reflects on the changes that colonialism and residential schools brought to the community, and emphasizes how the schools disrupted relationships. The novel's second part depicts 18 days in the community's present and describes the events leading up to the public disclosure of sexual abuse in the community hall which constitutes the novel's climax. The novel's third part is preoccupied with the community's ongoing struggles in the aftermath of the disclosure. Even though Thomas King doubts that the short historical overview given in the novel's first part is enough to educate non-Indigenous readers about the residential school legacy (King 116), I argue that this first part is a crucial and rich section of the novel which accomplishes a lot within 30 pages. By giving the history of the Blue People, Alexie outlines the importance of relationships, reflects on storytelling and testimony, and prepares the reader in a way so that they will understand the harrowing chapters that follow.

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[52] Tlingit Elder Angela Sidney pointed out to Julie Cruikshank that when learning about story, first "you have to learn what the story *says*. Then you learn what the story can *do*" (*Social Life* 41).

From the first page onwards, the novel emphasizes the importance that stories have for the Blue People's (and the reader's) process of navigating their environment. The novel explicitly states in its very first sentence that "to understand this story, it is important to know the People and where they came from and what they went through" (*Porcupines* 4). Right after situating the Blue People geographically "in the Blue Mountains to the west of the Mackenzie River," the novel states that they "have an oral tradition rich in stories and legends" (4). The novel gives an overview of the Blue People's creation story and thereby further evokes the connection between place, story, and people when it describes how, according to the story, "the Creator took some red soil from one of the valleys in the Blue Mountains and created the Old People from whom all Blue People have descended" (4). Their stories not only provide the Blue People with a framework to situate themselves within their surroundings, they also explain their relationships with the-other-than-human such as the caribou "which were revered and respected" (4). The novel does not romanticize this past and points out that the people "did not have an easy life" and that "theirs was a daily struggle for survival" (5). I argue that the Blue People are Alexie's literary version of the Gwich'in People. According to Heine et al., the term Gwich'in "is used by a people who all speak the same language […] and who share the same traditional way of life" (45). There are, however, distinct regional communities, and Alexie's Blue People mostly correspond to the Tetlit Gwich'in who actually live west of the Mackenzie River and for whom the Porcupine caribou herd is "the most vital resource" (E. Alexie 4) just as it is for the Blue People who "followed the caribou north each spring" and "back to the mountains before the winter" (*Porcupines* 5).

Gwich'in stories "reach back to, and begin with, the earliest days of the land" and emphasize "a time when people and animals were equals" (Heine et al. XVI). In Gwich'in, these stories are referred to as *yeenoo dài' googwandak,* long ago stories (Vuntut Gwichin & Smith 3-4), and the

first two paragraphs of Alexie's novel evoke this specific genre. The genre of *yeenoo dài' googwandak* is characterized by referring to a time prior to colonialism, and the arrival of European traders is considered to be the point in history that marks the end of Gwich'in long ago stories (Vuntut Gwichin & Smith 3). The novel incorporates this genre boundary with a slight change in narrative style as soon as it describes the arrival of European traders and settlers: The narrative now evokes Western historiography and refers to specific dates according to the Gregorian calendar and to specific historic figures such as Chief Red Jacket and Chief Thomas (*Porcupines* 6). While the previous paragraphs were written in past tense only, the novel now introduces future tense for the purpose of foreshadowing events with sentences such as: "There would be other explorers, but they are not important to our story" (5). With sentences like this, the novel also draws attention to how it creates a storytelling situation that involves the narrator and the reader. The possessive plural used in "our story" can be read as referring to the story of the Blue People (to whom the narrator belongs). It can also be read as an inclusive gesture towards the audience, the reader, inviting them to be an active part of the storytelling process.

The novel describes how the community of Aberdeen is established after the arrival of the Europeans and how, over time, the Blue People no longer follow the caribou—just as the "introduction of housing norms foreign to Gwich'in, […] altered the way in which Tetlit Gwich'in engaged with space and […] subtly transformed how Gwich'in organized themselves geographically" (E. Alexie 56). The European newcomers also establish residential schools, and as the novel describes this development, the narrative style yet again changes slightly by now applying present tense. The reader is presented with the experiences of two children, a boy and a girl, whose story is exemplary for all of the community's children who are forced to leave their community for school and who, as their "boat arrives at the mission school, […] are herded into a

building and separated" (*Porcupines* 9).[53] In her reading of the novel, Emily Hazlett argues that the present tense that is employed in the description of the children's experiences in residential school forces the reader "to experience and witness the school at the same time as the children" (Hazlett 58). I add that the use of present tense also works against a rhetoric that confines residential schools (and therefore colonialism) and their impacts to the past—a rhetorical move that Keavy Martin and Glenn Coulthard identify in the Canadian government's rhetoric around reconciliation which, according to them, emphasizes closure (Martin "Truth, Reconciliation" 57/Coulthard, *Red Skin* 22). As indicated by the quote from the children's story above, the novel's description of residential school life puts a strong emphasis on the disruption of relationships as well as on the imposition of heteronormative gender norms and the separation of two genders as pointed out by McKegney ("'pain, pleasure'" n.p.). The experiences of the children in the school are subtly summarized in a paragraph which describes the boy's life in residential school in future tense and starts every sentence with "he'll" which, when seen on the page, looks a lot like "hell" (*Porcupines* 13).

The novel then moves forward in time and describes how a hostel is built in Aberdeen, which is "similar to the mission schools and residential schools" (19). At this point, the novel introduces its main protagonists James, Jake, David, and Louise who are forced to live in the hostel as children. In these passages, the novel indirectly reflects on testimony and on the process of telling one's life story. Standard literary categorization would suggest that the narrator of the novel is an omniscient narrator, but I argue that one actually gains a deeper understanding of the novel when one thinks about the narrator as a character who reflects back on past events and therefore has

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[53] Another kind of literature that employs present tense in order to describe residential school experiences are novels that are constructed as residential school diaries such as Shirley Sterling's *My Name Is Seepeetza* and Ruby Slipperjack's *These Are My Words.* An important difference, however, is that Alexie does not employ first-person narration when telling the children's experiences, as discussed below.

knowledge of events that have not happened yet for the protagonists, for example when the narrator says about James that "he doesn't know it but he will never run again" (23).[54] There is furthermore a fascinating scene in which Jake, upon his arrival in the school, walks along a hallway and turns around to look at his parents:

> He can't believe what he's seeing. His father is screaming, and his mother is on her knees. She is sobbing and moaning. He watches as their hearts mysteriously appear in front of them. They beat once, twice, and then stop. His parents look up at him and smile. He blinks and looks at them again. Now they are looking at him with no emotion whatsoever. (23)

By offering two realities, one in which Jake can literally see how his parents' hearts break when they have to send him to residential school, and one in which Jake cannot see any emotion on their faces, the novel comments on the ways in which a speaker re-evaluates the past from the more knowledgeable vantage point of the narrator's present and actively (re)constructs it as story in the process of retelling. The reality in which Jake cannot see any emotion is the one he experienced as a boy. The reality in which he can see his parents' despair is the narrator's retelling with the knowledge of what this must have felt like for the parents. The way in which the novel describes the parents' grief by evoking the image of their hearts leaving their bodies speaks to the ways in which imagery may be employed in life telling to express truths in ways that are not literal.[55] The fact that the novel's events are related by a narrator who describes the characters' experiences, while being himself situated at a later point in time, is a key aspect of the novel because it is the

[54] I agree with Emily Hazlett's interpretation of continuities of voice and perspective between narrator and male characters which hints at the fact that the narrator is male (see Hazlett 64).
[55] The novel's use of imagery, at this point, resonates with Jeremiah's use of metaphor in his theatrical testimony in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*.

basis for the way in which the novel actively theorizes the act of telling one's life-story retrospectively while enacting it. The fact that the narrator does not offer a first-person narrative will be discussed further at the end of this chapter.

In tracing the residential school experiences of several generations, this first part of the novel not only shows the breadth of trauma and relationship disruptions, but it also addresses the schools' intergenerational legacy. The novel emphasizes that the separation of the children from their families results in a loss of trust. Commenting on an unnamed young man, the narrator states: "For as long as he lives, he is never going to forgive his parents for sending him away. He's never going to forgive his grandparents for allowing his parents to send him away" (15). This declaration points out the destruction of kinship ties that are essential in the fabric of the greater community—a destruction that is perpetuated since community members and residential school survivors are described as lacking experience in parenting (17). Much like Beth Brant's residential school short story "A Long Story," this "short history" that opens the novel is in fact a long story that introduces crucial knowledge about Gwich'in storytelling, testimony, and relationships.

The second part of the novel encompasses 18 chapters, and as indicated in the subheadings, each chapter describes one day in the life of the community members from Friday, September 24, 1999 to Monday, October 11, 1999. The very specific temporal references stand in contrast to the first part's references to the genre of "long ago stories" where the Blue People's lives where structured according to seasons and the movement of the caribou. They also speak to the ways in which colonialism and the Foucauldian disciplinary strategies of residential schools introduced Western time schedules. As the narrator states, in residential school children start to count down the days until they get to go home and "time has become important" (30). The very specific temporal references in the novel's second part, however, also ironically contradict the characters'

experiences that are described in the chapters. The beginning of part two is set up to demonstrate the impacts that the legacy of residential schooling has had on the community and all events revolve around the community's bar. Here, the community members drink until they either pass out or leave with a partner to have meaningless drunk sex. The novel here makes extensive use of repetition in order to indicate the monotony and repetitive nature of these events, for example when James orders a beer and Karen, the barkeeper, asks "for the millionth time" whether he wants the usual and James answers with "'why not? […] for the millionth time" (34). Every day seems like the previous one, and the dates that have been placed so prominently at the beginning of each chapter seem meaningless. The characters furthermore escape the present by "time-travelling," which means either losing themselves in memories or temporarily losing any awareness of their surroundings after having had too much to drink (37). This hell of alcohol, violence, and meaningless sex is established as the legacy of the hell that was residential school and it is the blunt description of this dysfunctional community life that makes the novel a challenge to read and to teach.

There is, however, a second layer to these chapters which has not received much scholarly attention yet. Each of the chapters is prefaced with a short excerpt of another story, set apart from the actual chapter through the use of italics. These excerpts relate the story of a wolf who is separated from his pack and tries to hunt down a herd of caribou on his own. I argue that this second layer of story somewhat reframes this second part of the novel and turns it from Western realism, as it is usually defined, into an act of Indigenous life storytelling. How this works is best understood through the teachings about telling one's life story that Julie Cruikshank received

during her work with Tlingit and Athabascan speaking Elders from the Yukon.[56] Speaking to Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned, Cruikshank describes how she realized that these Elders have "a different model of 'life history'" (*Life Lived* 2). Cruikshank points out that the Elders did not tell their life stories in a chronological, teleological fashion that is usually expected in Western life writing and certainly in Western mainstream conceptualizations of testimony. Instead, Cruikshank describes how the Elders often answered her questions about particular life experiences by relating traditional stories first. Angela Sidney, for example, ignored Cruikshank's questions and instead told other stories first, "some from historical memory and others from a timeless repository of myth" (*Life Lived* 25). Over time, Cruikshank came to realize that the "narrators use stories to explain a particular point they are making" (*Life Lived* 17). This practice of applying stories from the storytelling tradition to one's own life story in order to enhance and carve out certain points of one's life story is strikingly similar to Jeremiah's practice of creating theatrical testimony in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*; and I argue that this process also occurs in the second part of *Porcupines and China Dolls*.

Although the wolf story seems to have been written by Alexie himself rather than being a part of Gwich'in oral tradition, it still evokes the practice of applying stories to one's life narrative. The story, which features the wolf, a grizzly bear, and the caribou as protagonists, includes elements of traditional Gwich'in storytelling and encodes Gwich'in teachings of the interactions between these other-than-human entities as described by Gwich'in Elders (see Parlee et al.). The story in the novel is about an old wolf who is separated from his pack and is "alone and an outcast" after a

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[56] Even though these Elders were not Gwich'in Elders, I believe that their knowledge of storytelling is still most illuminating for understanding what this second part of the novel *does* as story. As indicated in Chapter 1, I follow Kim Blaeser's suggestion to adopt "a methodology of reading and interpreting Indigenous literatures that comes from within the texts themselves ("Native Literature" 232). Reading the wolf story in *Porcupines and China Dolls* through the teachings of these Elders emerges from this practice.

"younger male" takes over in the pack (*Porcupines* 32). It is primarily a story about the struggle for survival as the old wolf tries to avoid starvation by eating dead leaves (164) and the kill of other predators (210) as he walks north to find the caribou (154). The story's climax describes a battle between the old wolf and a caribou bull whom the wolf kills (221). However, although the victory in the battle should indicate his survival, the wolf is described as "no longer hungry" but "now lonely" (221). The story ends with the wolf lying down beside a fire, going "to sleep for the last time" (243). In many ways, this story mirrors the struggles of the novel's protagonist James who similarly fights for survival as he daily battles the urge to kill himself. The wolf's battle against the bull is reminiscent of what the novel calls "the battle for souls" (192) in which James and his friends disclose the abuse that they have suffered in residential school. But just as his victory does not ensure the wolf's survival, James still struggles with suicidal thoughts after his disclosure.

The story adds additional layers of meaning to James's story and emphasizes the importance of meaningful relationships which neither the wolf nor James has. The wolf and his pack can be understood in terms of a clan system of enhanced kinship that included the "wolf clan" that some Gwich'in Elders describe (see Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation & Smith 12-14). That the wolf is unable to survive without his pack speaks to how James is not able to live without meaningful relationships to his community.[57] Even though the killing of the bull offers the wolf temporary nourishment, mere food is not enough to keep him alive. For James, the disclosure similarly offers temporary relief, but he still struggles with suicidal thoughts because he does not participate in a network of relationships. Cruikshank describes how the Yukon Elders told complete stories to

[57] In my understanding, meaningful relationships are relationships that sustain one's wellbeing in a holistic sense and that are ongoing lived experiences emerging from and sustained by reciprocity, accountability, kindness, and the commitment of those involved.

preface and frame their own life experiences. It is notable that the wolf story is not offered in one piece as a preface to the novel's second part but is divided up into little snippets that preface respective chapters. As Cruikshank points out, in the Elders' use of stories as a framework for personal experience "there is no simple analogue between the narrative and a reified oral history" (*Social Life* 42). The same applies to the wolf story and the novel's main narrative—any reader's attempt to relate the content of the chapter as analogous to the snippet that precedes it will be frustrated. It is the complete narrative of both stories that reveals their similarities. However, the wolf story is presented in such a fragmented manner that one almost needs to read it separately in one sitting in order to be able to focus on it and to understand its implications. The story's fragmentation does, however, mirror the fragmentation of the various characters' stories which are presented in non-continuous snippets too. In a way, these fragments speak to how the community is fragmented and does not possess a unifying narrative such as the one the narrator gives the Blue People in the first part of the novel.

Another interesting feature about the relationship between the wolf story and the novel's main narrative is that they are not self-contained, separate stories but that they become entangled and seep into each other at certain points. In chapter 9, James and Jake are out on the land and see a wolf that looks "scraggly" and "like he's alone" (132). James takes "two fish and l[ays] them on the side of the road" (133). At the beginning of the next chapter, the wolf story speaks of the wolf "on the highway where he had found the fish" (146). Another one of these moments of entanglement occurs at the end of the wolf story when the wolf dies beside a fire, and James, in the corresponding chapter, finds a dead wolf next to the place where they had had a fire the previous day and he burns the carcass (246). By braiding the two stories in this manner, the novel deconstructs any assumed hierarchy between them and emphasizes that they are equal in the

amount of meaning that they carry. In a way, this is also reminiscent of the way in which Dovie Thomason deconstructs the distinctions between narratives in order to dismantle the boundaries between stories and life.

The wolf's story further emphasizes two important themes that were also already introduced in the first part of the novel: the importance of relationships and the importance of stories as a framework for making meaning of one's own life and one's surroundings. It is conspicuous that apart from the history in the novel's first part, and the wolf story, Gwich'in stories or Indigenous storytelling traditions are almost absent from the novel's main narrative around James and the other community members. While the novel makes countless intertextual references throughout, none of these are references to Gwich'in stories. Instead, the novel is peppered with pop culture references, most of them to Hollywood cinema, for example when the characters compare themselves to the actors Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise after a few drinks (87), or when the community members wonder after a deadly shooting whether "*Clint Eastwood [is] actin 'n directin' this shoot 'em up?*" (119). In another instance, Brenda looks at the people around her through the lens of *Star Wars* and wonders: "*Who're you? Han Solo? Who am I? Princess Leia? Who is Jake? C3PO? Who knows?*" (72). With instances such as these, the novel illustrates that the community members use Hollywood cinema rather than Gwich'in storytelling as a frame of reference to make meaning of their lives. The characters did not grow up with Indigenous storytelling and the only references to "Indigenous" stories are to Hollywood misrepresentations, such as when James jokingly compares himself to Tonto when he tells Jake to "lead way, Kemo Sabe. Me follow" (42). Or the recurring references to *Dances with Wolves*, as when James asks Jake: "What're you, some sort' Injun outta *Dances*?" (132). Although these references are made by the characters in a joking manner, they demonstrate that Hollywood cinema does not offer the

characters meaningful Indigenous stories to identify with and to apply in order to make meaning of their lives. The way in which the characters use these references to make fun of their own Indigeneity also speaks to the ways in which residential school instilled a certain shame of being Indigenous in them—while denying them a life and relationships that would teach them what Indigeneity actually means in the first place. Mi'kmaw writer and residential school survivor Isabelle Knockwood describes how in residential school, "shame […] was associated with learning, particularly in history and catechism where Indians were depicted in a derogatory way as savages and heathens" (Knockwood 52). The characters' mocking of Hollywood's "Indian" characters also speaks to the ways in which pop culture has been complicit in the assimilation of Indigenous people by way of portraying Indigenous characters in either negative or ridiculous ways so that, as Ward Churchill points out, "American Indian children had often become as prone as anyone else to 'root for the cavalry' since the Indian characters were not designed for the audience to identify with" (Churchill 194). The fact that the characters in the novel, despite having been forcefully disconnected from their own storytelling traditions, in a way still make references to stories demonstrates that they still attempt to frame their own experiences through stories as discussed above.

In addition to these direct intertextual references, the novel furthermore includes less specific references by evoking imagery from the genre conventions of horror and fantasy to describe the characters' experiences. There is, for example, a reference to the horror genre when the community's bar is described as a place where in the morning "the lights were turned on to scare the vampires and other blood-sucking critters back to their coffins" (33). When James has nightmares of the sexual abuse he suffered in residential school, he dreams of encountering himself as a little boy with empty eyes (143), which is yet another image that evokes the genre of horror

movies. In his dreams, the land also "looked like something out of a horror movie" (83). Images from the genres of horror and fantasy are most predominant during the novel's climax: the moment when James, Jake, and David disclose that they were sexually abused in residential school. Their acts of testimony are portrayed as an epic battle during which the men become warriors and battle their demons which literally manifest themselves and attack the community hall. The disclosure occurs during a healing workshop whose description, at first, follows the literary conventions of realism, describing how Chief David stands in front of the community, a talking stick in his hand, ready to speak about the abuse to the community members who are looking bored, expecting yet another workshop (196). Everything changes rapidly, however, when David speaks the words no one in the community expects: "Thirty years ago I was sexually abused in the hostel" (196). The community's toxic reality in which such experiences are never spoken about publicly is shaken and the narrative changes genres from realism to fantasy and horror as David's words "woke a million, trillion, gazillion demons, dreams and nightmares from their slumbers. They poked their ugly little heads out of the ceiling, walls and floors to see what the fuck was going on" (196). As the disclosure proceeds and James and Jake stand up to testify to their experiences, the fantastic elements take over as the demons are described as attacking, and the community members are shown to be fighting, kicking, and dismembering the demons (196-207).

Despite the straightforward metaphor of the battle, Alexie's re-imagination of the act of giving testimony is quite complex and merits further unpacking. As Coupal points out, Alexie's "creative act of disclosure is a testimonial fantasy of what public accounts of abuse could be—that is, acts of empowerment rather than rituals of shaming" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 478). Coupal also suggests that Alexie's use of elements from the genre of fantasy to frame the public disclosure scene could be "suggesting that testimony should be a fantasy or can only be an act of the

imagination" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 480). It is crucial to take a closer look at Alexie's use of fantasy because it is somewhat reminiscent of the incompatibility of Western mainstream understandings of testimony and certain principles of Indigenous storytelling traditions as discussed in Chapter 1. The genre of fantasy (much like the idea of 'fiction') imagines worlds, creatures, and powers that do not exist in the Western genre of literary realism. Fantasy might therefore be understood as an antithesis to testimony, which is supposed to be a realist narrative that reproduces what "really" occurred. The question is why Alexie chooses to depict a process of truth-telling in terms of a genre that celebrates the imaginary. I think the answer is that Alexie's description of the disclosure speaks more to what testimony *does* than to what it *says*. Daniel Heath Justice argues that fantasy is "an extension of the possible, not the impossible; […] it challenges our assumptions and expectations of 'the real,'" (*Why Indigenous* 149). Since the "reality" in Alexie's novel (as opposed to the fantastic elements of the disclosure scene) describes the struggles of a dysfunctional community, a state the narrator sardonically describes as "normal" (93), the depiction of the disclosure "challenge[s] oppressive lived realities through the intentional employment of the fantastic to imagine otherwise" (Justice, *Why Indigenous* 143).

By imagining otherwise, Alexie theorizes testimony and what testimony can do. His focus is thereby on the ways in which the act of telling one's story establishes relationships and creates community. Alexie's metaphor of the epic battle is, in fact, a metaphor for the relationship-establishing potential of storytelling which arises from the Indigenous point of view that story is created in collaboration. Relationships and mutual support are at the heart of Alexie's fantastic battle, for example when Jake watches "his big brother [James] with nothing but fucking pride, then [growing] seventy feet tall" (202). The fact that James and Jake are not related by blood but nevertheless think of each other in terms of kinship during this process speaks to the strength of

the relationships that are established. Alexie employs the image of the men growing supernaturally tall in order to demonstrate the empowerment that occurs when the community members support each other. When James sees four women walking up to him, he grows “one hundred and twenty-five fucking feet tall” (204). This empowerment makes it easier for the men to fight against the demons of the past that materialize during the battle. By describing the men’s fights in very physical terms when James “was slamming dreams into the floor” and Jake “was kicking nightmares in the balls” (205), the novel emphasizes that testimony is an embodied performance. This is also emphasized in Highway’s novel where testimony is embodied and performed by actors. Both novels therefore showcase how testimony engages the whole body and all senses and is not a process during which one merely communicates what was conceived by the mind. The importance of embodiment is even more pronounced in Richard Wagamese’s *Indian Horse* which I discuss in Chapter 3.

As the battle intensifies, the men not only receive support from each other and their partners but also from the community members who are now anything but bored and become deeply engaged in the battle, as there are “too many demons, dreams and nightmares for one man to take alone” (206). For example, when “one head fell into the lap of Old Pierre. He picked it up, poked out its beady little eyes and threw it on the flor. Dora stomped its ass into oblivion” (205). The whole process is evocative of how in an Indigenous understanding of storytelling, listeners are not passive audience members but adopt an active role and help facilitating the story. In Alexie’s idea of testimony, the whole community is strengthened by the experience of fighting together and the members of the community that were first referred to as “[o]ne hundred people” (199) become “the People” (201). The mutual support that the community members offer each other counters the loss of trust from which the residential school survivors suffer and the disclosing men are enabled

to reconnect with their kin, partners, and community while the community members are simultaneously enabled to reconnect with each other. Alexie therefore outlines a theory of testimony as a collaborative process of interpersonal narrativization.

Alexie's description of testimony as a relationship-establishing process in connection with his focus on embodiment suggests that in order to take part in those relationships, one needs to be present. This resonates with Cruikshank's argument that tellings of Indigenous stories "acquire meaning in the situations in which they are used, in interactions between narrators and listeners" (*Social Life* 40). The novel demonstrates how important it is to actually be present for the testimonial process when it recounts the events in the community hall for those who were not present: "What really happened at the community hall in Aberdeen? Despite all the thunder and gore, it was all very simple: three men had disclosed. They'd talked honestly about a sexual abuse that had occurred thirty years ago. They'd spoken of oral sex and sodomy" (211). This realist depiction is unable to capture the relationships that were established, the energy that was released, and the empowerment that those who participated felt. The novel therefore suggests that place and presence are important for testimony, just as they are important for storytelling.[58]

In its reflections on testimony, *Porcupines and China Dolls* clearly focuses on the element of disclosure, of making public something that has never been talked about. This focus is indicative of, and influenced by, the time and context of the novel's publication when residential school survivors still fought hard to have their voices heard. This fight against processes of silencing that had been occurring in relation to residential schools for decades is epitomized in the novel by

[58] This also explains why Indigenous stories lost some of their power as they were collected, transcribed, and published by Western anthropologists for the sake of "preservation." While the transcripts might have been able to capture what those stories say, they are not able to capture what those stories do for those who are present at the time and place of the telling.

screams so full "of utter rage and immense hatred that the whole building [shakes]" (199). Up to this point, the novel has established the image of "porcupines crying in the dark" (11, 90) as an image for the silence around sexual abuse and other traumas that were inflicted on Indigenous children in residential schools. Over the course of the battle for souls, the sound of porcupines crying in the dark is replaced by the sound of "a million Plains Indians all singing at once" (206). The transformation from porcupines into Plains Indians suggests the breaking away from the silencing. In disclosing what was done to them, the survivors reclaim agency and transform the stifled sound of crying into the joyous and powerful sound of singing. The application of the Plains Indians image remains alien as a description for members of a community in the Northwest Territories. "Plains Indians" still connotes the limiting stereotypes of Hollywood cinema and the fact that the term "Plains Indians" is used instead of "Blue People" suggests that the community members, while resisting the silencing they experienced in the past, are still not completely breaking free from the stereotypes that Hollywood representations instilled in them. The narrator's references to "Plains Indians" in order to frame the characters' actions are discussed in more detail below.

As I have argued, Robert Arthur Alexie re-imagines testimony as a fantastic epic battle that is facilitated by interpersonal collaboration. However, the novel also emphasizes that despite the fact that at the end of the battle, "cool air rushed into the community hall" and "it smelled like new beginnings" (207), the disclosure is not a magic solution for all of the community's struggles. I argue that the way in which Alexie applies certain story frameworks (and the way in which he omits certain story frameworks) helps readers to understand what happens in the community after the disclosure. Julie Cruikshank emphasizes the importance of local stories when she argues that "narratives providing the most helpful guidance are inevitably locally grounded, highly particular

and culturally specific" (*Social Life* xii-xiii). It is therefore important to note that among the numerous stories that Alexie applies as frames of references there are no Gwich'in stories. The Gwich'in storytelling tradition includes several heroes fighting heroic battles with supernatural abilities such as Ch'ataiiyuukaih, who is the creator and transformer of the world, or Kò' Ehdanh who is a warrior whose name translates to "man without fire" (Vuntut Gwichin & Smith 8). Instead of applying these stories as a frame of reference the way Highway's protagonist does in his testimonial plays, the only Indigenous references that Alexie employs during the disclosure scene are foreign to the Gwich'in. An example of this is when James stakes himself to the ground "like he'd heard some Plains Indians did in another time" (200). Amongst the "Plains Indians" who practiced this custom are the Cheyenne and the Kiowa. The so-called "dog rope men" (Moore 112) amongst the Cheyenne warriors were those fighting at the front and "[vowing] that once the stake was driven in the ground, they would not pull it up […]" and would fight to the death (Moore 107). If a Kiowa warrior staked himself down in battle, he "required his society partner to rush to his side and make a stand with him to the death" (Meadows 239). James' gesture therefore not only shows his determination to go through with the disclosure at all cost but also his willingness to be among the first to do so while trusting in the support from others. The fact that James does what he heard Plains Indians were doing shows how he still relies on foreign representations rather than stories from his own place and community. As pointed out above, the image of the Plains Indian is connected to Hollywood cinema, which is one of the main sources from which the community members draw in order to story their own lives in the residential school induced absence of Gwich'in story. Ward Churchill discusses how Hollywood cinema constructed an image of Indigeneity based on the misrepresentation and conflation of Indigenous cultures (175). According to Churchill, "nothing, perhaps, is more emblematic of Hollywood's visual pageantry than scenes

of Plains Indian warriors astride their galloping ponies" (186). Thomas King explores (and mocks) this misrepresentation that was born in and reinforced by Hollywood cinema in works such as his short film *I'm Not the Indian You Had in Mind*. James's imitation of a custom he "heard some Plains Indians did" (*Porcupines* 200) indicates how he is still relying on foreign representations of Indigeneity rather than on his own community's traditional stories in order to express a sense of Indigeneity. And this once again speaks to the ways in which traditional stories were silenced by the residential school system.

Alexie's metaphor of the battle is empowering but it is also gory, a "fucking commotion what with blood, guts, arms, legs and heads flying every which way" (206). As such, it still seems to be steeped in the Western genre of horror—a genre that is more about survival than it is about lasting relationships.[59] However, as the novel makes clear through its use of the wolf story discussed above, mere survival is not enough. The horror genre and its focus on survival as a framework for disclosure suggests that giving testimony is also not enough. Even though testimony establishes relationships, the community members need to be able to uphold these relationships and to make them sustainable. Alexie's use of the genre of Western horror suggests, however, that this is not the case, and after the fantastic battle, the community is once again in the state the narrator refers to as "normal" (93). To be clear, I do not argue that Alexie's novel suggests that if residential school survivors frame their testimonies with stories from their own storytelling traditions, they are more likely to establish sustainable relationships. Instead, I argue that Alexie omits references to Gwich'in stories in order to demonstrate how his characters are impacted by two effects of residential schools that affect their ability to create and maintain relationships: (1) that they grew

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[59] Compare for example Western slasher movies with the Cree "horror stories" of the Weetigo that Highway applies. While both are in a way about a deadly threat to community, slasher movies focus on the survival of the individual while Weetigo stories focus on the survival of the community by including teachings about balance and reciprocity.

up without stories that teach about "mutually sustaining relationships that ensure the continuing well-being of the world" (Cruikshank, *Social Life* xii) because these stories were silenced by the residential school system, and (2) that they were also not allowed to grow up with their families and in their community where they could have experienced those relationships that the silenced stories speak about. Despite the community's return to "the dysfunctional normal," however, the novel's third part remains hopeful.

Before discussing the novel's third part and its focus on relationships, it is important to discuss a concern that Emily Hazlett raises about the disclosure scene in particular and Alexie's novel in general. Hazlett points out that while the men in the novel disclose publicly, the women do not speak up during the epic battle. Instead, they either disclose the sexual abuse they suffered in and because of residential schools "within the domestic space" of the home or they never speak up at all and therefore "do not have access to healing within their community" (Hazlett n.p.). I agree with Hazlett's astute observations, but I think it is important to ask why Alexie chose to write his novel this way, assuming that it is far from his intention to suggest that public testimony and empowerment are not accessible for women. One possible explanation lies, once again, in Alexie's ideas about framing one's life experiences through storytelling. As Coupal points out, the epic battle is presented in a very masculine testimonial style ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 479) and, as discussed above, Hazlett herself makes the point that the novel's narrator is male. Julie Cruikshank points out how "Native women's stories differ […] from Native men's accounts" and that they employ different frames for their stories (*Life Lived* 3). Furthermore, in Gwich'in culture there is knowledge that is for men and then there is knowledge for women to which the men do not have access (Heine et al. 100). I therefore wonder whether Alexie simply resists subsuming his female characters under his masculine testimonial style and thereby resists imposing a frame

on their testimony that is not theirs. The fact that the narrator stays rather distant from the women and their experiences furthermore underlines the ways in which relationships between genders were harmed through the enforced segregation in residential schools and the imposition of Western gender values as analyzed in Sam McKegney's reading of *Porcupines and China Dolls* ("pain, pleasure" n.p.).

The fact that *Porcupines and China Dolls* does not end with an empowered community right after the disclosure scene is the novel's most scholarly debated characteristic. In an often-quoted article, Keavy Martin points out that through its "eschewing of endings, of resolution, and of conclusions, […] *Porcupines and China Dolls* adds an invaluable contribution—or complication—to current discussions of reconciliation" ("Truth, Reconciliation" 61). It is one of the novel's most important messages that "healin' is a journey—there is no end" (*Porcupines* 201), as James yells during the disclosure battle. "Healing" relationships, which is central to processes of Indigenous resurgence, is an important theme in the novel, and Alexie himself said about his protagonist: "He's trying to get back home, wherever home is" (Alexie qtd. in Richler "Hard Truths" n.p.). Alexie's statement about finding home in the aftermath of residential school resonates with Neal McLeod's ideas of residential schools as imposing a spatial and spiritual diaspora (*Cree Narrative* 55-6). If one thinks of home in the way Leanne Simpson defines it as the place where people "have the strongest and most familiar bonds and relationships" (*Dancing* 89), the community that is described in the novel does not seem to fall under this definition of home because of the many dysfunctional relationships that define the characters' lives. There are, however, hopeful instances throughout the novel in which the characters commit to meaningful relationships and adopt the responsibilities that come with them.

One of these relationships is the one between James and Jake whom the narrator refers to as brothers, suggesting an understanding of kinship that goes beyond the narrow definition of being related by blood. In Tetlit Gwich'in culture, relationships are defined by the "traditional principles of respect, sharing, and reciprocity" (E. Alexie 1). Notably, in the moment when James adopts these principles and commits himself to his kinship relationship with Jake, "for the first time in his life, he spoke the language" (*Porcupines* 242). Speaking Gwich'in, James tells Jake: "My brother, […] I'll always be here for you" (242). And Jake answers: "So will I" (243). It is significant that when both men adopt responsibilities and commit to a reciprocal relationship, they speak the Gwich'in language which seems to enable them to say things they were not able to say in English. In this moment, "they then did something they'd never done in their lives. They hugged each other like brothers and held nothing back" (243).

It is notable that another relationship that the narrator frames in terms of enhanced kinship is similarly connected to Gwich'in culture: the relationship that James and Jake have with Martin and Ernest, two of the community's Elders. When spending time out on the land with the Elders, James realizes that "Martin was telling him […] that James was his son and he was his father. Not biologically but traditionally" (180). The narrator then emphasizes that these kinds of relationships are sometimes "even stronger and more lasting" (180). In this moment, James realizes that although he lost both of his parents, he has never been without family.[60] As Hazlett points out, these moments of enhanced kinship with the Elders "always happen 'in the hills' outside the town" (Hazlett n.p.). It is the Elders who still have knowledge of their people's relationship with the land—a relationship that is also encapsulated in the Elders' names. Alexie named the two Elders

[60] In a way, *Porcupines and China Dolls*' emphasis on the possibility of forming new relationships resonates with *Kiss of the Fur Queen*'s reflections on building new communities in a foreign environment.

who take the young men on a trip up the river Ernest and Martin. In *Gwichya Gwich'in Googwandak*, where the Elders of Tsiigehtshik speak about the importance of place names for understanding the traditional way of life (Heine et al. 54), they also describe how Gwich'in families moved up the Red River to move from their summer to their winter camps. On their way, these families would take breaks at various campsites, two important ones being "Ernest Cabin" and "Martin House" (Heine et al. 73, 77). Regardless of whether Alexie intended to name his characters after these actual places or whether the common names are a coincidence, the names establish a connection between the characters and traditional Gwich'in places. That the Elders in the novel are in this way connected to traditional ways of being on the land suggests that traditional knowledge is not all lost but still embodied by members of the community.

As pointed out above, *Porcupines and China Dolls* defies simple ideas of closure and towards the end of the novel, James seems to be back at the beginning. When his brother Jake and his wife Mary die in a boat accident, James despairs and finds himself on the highway, attempting to commit suicide. This scene is word for word the same as the one that prefaces the novel, suggesting that "James's journey had come full circle" (306). This time, however, the story goes further and now, James gets support from Louise, the woman he loves secretly because of his inability to express his feelings. Louise embodies "the voice of hope" (305) and she declares her love and speaks out what James "[wants] to hear more than anything" (305). Hearing this voice of hope, James overcomes his own silence and speaks out what nobody has never heard him say: "I love you" (305). Even though Michelle Coupal refers to this scene as "the seemingly tacked-on ending of healing through the love of a woman" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 486), it is important to keep in mind that this scene is about hope. Although the novel carries out the important work of debunking myths of closure, as Martin points out, one must not forget that the novel also

constitutes a narrative of and for the Gwich'in people. And as the novel suggests, hopeful narratives that emphasize the importance of relationships as a framework to live by are needed for repairing the interpersonal relationships within a community.

There is one last argument I would like to make when it comes to the ways in which the novel offers hope. Considering the novel's narrator and his masculine voice, it is worthwhile to think about whether this narrator is actually James himself who, in the future, tells the whole story retrospectively. When analyzing the novel as Robert Arthur Alexie's fictionalized testimony, Michelle Coupal argues that the "third-person voice allows Alexie the narrative distance he seems to require to tell his story" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 479). Since the novel's protagonist James "is modelled after Alexie himself" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 478), one could make the argument that James also finds it easier to tell his story in the third person and that he is the one looking back on his life.[61] Reading the novel with the knowledge that its narrator is actually James adds another layer of hope that goes beyond the fact that James has survived. It also suggests that James is now able to find frames of references other than Hollywood cinema since the narrator includes the story of the wolf as another frame of reference. The wolf story's narrative voice displays marks that are distinct for the narrator of the novel's main narrative. An example is when the wolf is described as calling out into the sky, and "he waited for an answer. None came. None would ever come" (154). This particular way of laconic repetition is a device the narrator of the main narrative employs throughout the novel, for example when he describes the children in residential school whose "cries are silent. They'll always be silent" (11). Reading the novel as

[61] The convention of telling one's life story in third-person also does not necessarily have to originate from trauma. In fact, the Elders Julie Cruikshank worked with at times recounted their own childhood experiences speaking about themselves in third-person (*Life Lived* 29). It is therefore important to keep in mind that there might be other things at play here that the lens of trauma might foreclose. This is especially important to keep in mind when engaging with survivors' testimonies.

being narrated by James retrospectively suggests that later in his life, he will find ways to reconnect with Indigenous storytelling traditions—and thereby the novel closely links storytelling and hope.

To sum up this chapter, I would like to reflect on the ways in which *Porcupines and China Dolls* and *Kiss of the Fur Queen* act as testimonies themselves. Michelle Coupal argues that *Porcupines and China Dolls* can be understood as Robert Arthur Alexie's fictional testimony. According to Coupal, "Indigenous fictional testimony is literature that gives evidence to the experiences of individuals or communities, often with pedagogical, therapeutic, or activist impulses for a broad, that is, Native and non-Native reading public" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 477). While I agree with Coupal's argument that fiction can be testimony, it is striking how strongly it stands in opposition to John Beverley's definition of the Latin American genre of testimonio from which he specifically excludes fictional narratives (see Chapter 1). The reason for this might be found in the Western understanding of the term "fiction" which, as pointed out in my discussion of Jeremiah's testimonial plays, is commonly understood as "invention or fabrication as opposed to fact" ("fiction" *OED*). In this definition, fictionalization is therefore a process in which a story moves away from the realm of "fact" into the realm of "invention." I propose that in order to understand the workings of fictional testimonies (and fictionalized testimonies), it is necessary to decolonize the idea of "fiction" itself—and the novels' reflections on testimony as a braiding of stories, a process of aniskwâcimopicikêwin, offer such an alternative understanding.

When comparing *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and *Porcupines and China Dolls*, Noah Richler emphasizes that their authors have "dealt with trauma in an entirely different manner" because "where Alexie, not quite graphic, writes with unrelenting realism, Highway, who is Cree, is lyrical and even flamboyant" (Richler "First Voices' n.p.). While Richler's observations are true on the

level of the novels' writing styles, it is important to point out that the novels actually share important similarities when it comes to the way in which they present the act of braiding stories for the sake of testimony. Highway reflects on ways in which wâhkôhtowin can be restored through the process of telling one's life story by combining âcimisowin and âtayohkewin or âcimisowin and kayâs-âcimôwin. The figure of the Weetigo as a metaphor is crucial for this process. The novel's protagonist Jeremiah employs âtayohkewin and kayâs-âcimôwin in a creative manner in order to emphasize certain elements of his own life story. Robert Arthur Alexie similarly thinks about ways in which traditional stories can function as frames of reference for one's own life story, as I have demonstrated with the example of the wolf story in the novel's part two. The wolf story encapsulates the teaching that mere survival is not enough and that relationships are needed. At that point in the novel, the characters have not adopted this teaching yet and the wolf story therefore adds an additional layer of meaning. At the same time, Alexie's novel reflects on what can happen if one does not have meaningful stories to live by and one resorts to other stories as a substitute as can been seen when the characters story their lives in terms of Hollywood cinema rather than local narratives that are meaningful to their own particular place and people.

Both novels suggest that combining one's own testimony with other stories enhances the meaning of one's life story and helps to showcase certain points. This helps the person giving the testimony, but it also helps the audience to better understand the person's life story—if they are familiar with the conventions and content of the stories that are applied as frames of reference. Combining one's own life story with other stories, the novels suggest, also enhances the relationship-establishing potential of testimony as it connects speaker and listener to additional places, additional voices. This process is not captured by the concept of "fictionalization" which is commonly understood as a way of making a story more universal. The authors of the novels

(and their characters), however, add stories to life stories in order to make them more specific and more grounded in place and culture. Telling one's story through other stories does not take away from the truth of the testimony. In fact, the authors (and their characters) are deepening their own truth by storying it and setting it in relation to other stories. The novels themselves work in a similar way. Tomson Highway and Robert Arthur Alexie blend their own life stories with other stories in order to tell their personal truth about their experiences. Their novels are not "fictional" testimonies in a Western sense but rather they are several stories, carefully braided to form testimony—not unlike the way in which Dovie Thomason braids stories and testimonies as discussed in Chapter 1.

If these novels are understood to be fiction in a Western sense, their potential to implicate the audience might be diminished. John Beverley worries that fiction does not create the same political responsibilities that testimony creates. However, understanding these novels as a braiding of life story with other stories in order to enhance meaning certainly implicates the audience, engages them, and in a way establishes the testimonial responsibility to remember and pass on a story, to engage with a story in a respectful manner, and potentially the responsibility for further action. It also, as Michelle Coupal points out, might be "inspiring a community of readers to think creatively about the legacy of the residential schools" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 485) because the ways in which the novels give testimony to the residential school experience differ from other testimonies readers might have engaged with, and the novels therefore might be "reinvigorating an engagement with testimony in a way that avoids the pitfalls of public confession" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 480). Just like Dovie Thomason's metaphor of testimony as dung makes listeners approach what they might think they know in new ways, residential school novels engage in truth-telling while still inviting their readers to, as Justice puts it, imagine otherwise.

Chapter 3: Witnessing the Experience:
Residential School Novels in the Age of the TRC

This chapter analyzes two residential school novels written by authors who were not survivors themselves: Anishinaabe author James Bartleman's *As Long As the Rivers Flow* (2011) and Anishinaabe author Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* (2012). Written a decade after Highway's and Alexie's novels, these novels were composed at a time when the TRC held hearings all over Canada, calling on communities and the public to witness survivors' narratives. The TRC's definition of witnessing asked everyone who was present during a testimony "to store and care for the history they witness[ed] and most importantly, to share it with their own people when they return[ed] home" (TRC "Honorary Witness"). This idea of witnessing, of respectfully sharing survivors' stories, speaks to the ways in which Wagamese and Bartleman crafted their residential school novels. Therefore, this chapter will be attentive to the ways in which the idea of witnessing is woven into the novels when analyzing how they re-imagine testimony.

While both authors are Anishinaabe, Wagamese's novel is more deeply steeped in Anishinaabe storytelling, and I will therefore open with a discussion of *Indian Horse* (even though it was published later than Bartleman's novel) in order to establish important foundational understandings of Anishinaabe storytelling. These will also be helpful for understanding parts of Bartleman's novel. Wagamese's *Indian Horse* conceptualizes the process of giving testimony as a process of embodied narrativization that emerges from Anishinaabe storytelling principles and that requires survivors to physically return to places from their past to restore disrupted relationships. In my discussion of Wagamese's novel, I will focus on how the novel theorizes the intersections of story, land, and body, and I will demonstrate how Anishinaabe storytelling emerges from the relationships between these elements. Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow* is predominantly

concerned with the negative impacts residential schools had, not only on the lives of individuals but also on the relationships these individuals have with their own children later in life. My analysis demonstrates how the novel theorizes and enacts testimony as a process that can help to restore intergenerational relationships. Both novels furthermore emphasize processes of witnessing, and at the end of this chapter I will discuss what the novels teach about the responsibilities of witnessing and re-imagining residential school stories. For this discussion, my chapter builds on the TRC's conceptualization of witnessing as described above. As David Gaertner points out, this conceptualization was inspired by West Coast Salish principles of witnessing,[62] and Sto:Lo writer Lee Maracle describes the role of "mythmakers" who, after witnessing someone's personal story, transform it when they share it because it is their task "to deepen the story, broaden it, and find intersecting, connecting moments between human and the being/phenomenon" ("Oratory on Oratory" 67). My understanding is that Wagamese and Bartleman act as such witnessing mythmakers when they turn the residential school stories they heard from survivors into novels. This understanding once again challenges the Western system of literary classification which defines the two novels under discussion as "fiction."

3.1 Testimony as Intersection of Story, Place, and Body in Wagamese's *Indian Horse*

Richard Wagamese's 2012 novel *Indian Horse* is a widely taught residential school novel that gained even more prominence when it was turned into a movie in 2017. Richard Wagamese is not a residential school survivor but an intergenerational survivor, and in several of his nonfiction books he discusses the effects that his parents' residential school experiences had on his own life. Wagamese, who passed away in 2017, was affected by the 60s Scoop and grew up

[62] Gaertner demonstrates how similar the TRC's definition of witnessing is to the one adopted by the Organizing Committee of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics which was based on Coast Salish protocols: "The role of a witness is to record the message of the event in their hearts and minds, and afterward, remember and validate the special occasion by carrying the message and sharing it with […] community members" (qtd. in "Aboriginal Principles" 140).

separated from his Anishinaabe family and traditions. Reconnection and the search for identity are themes that are woven into all of Wagamese's novels and life writings, which tend to echo one other. Of the four novels discussed in this dissertation, *Indian Horse* is the one that was published last—and I argue that the theory of testimony that it puts forward is also the one that diverges the most from Western understandings of testimony. While Bartleman's novel still seems to be informed by the (at the time ongoing) TRC processes, Wagamese's novel offers a radical re-conceptualization of testimony that is deeply immersed in Anishinaabe forms of storytelling. Wagamese himself points out that he learned about Indigenous storytelling before becoming an author:[63]

> I sought out stories and storytellers. I sat with them and asked questions and learned about the role of storytellers in our tradition and about the principles that guide that role. I learned about the importance of perpetuating the tradition of storytelling into a new time with powerful new tools. Then I began to write. (*One Native* 123)

An analysis of the role of story in Wagamese's novel therefore needs to take Indigenous and specifically Anishinaabe storytelling into account. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how *Indian Horse* conceptualizes residential school testimony as the product of an embodied storying process that emerges from a person's living relationships to place and all entities within that place. In fact, I argue that the novel contrasts two different approaches to story and testimony: a non-Indigenous approach that resembles that of autobiography (the first 190 pages of the novel which are the life story that Saul writes down in a rehabilitation centre) and an Anishinaabe approach based on embodied relationships (the last 30 pages of the novel where Saul leaves the centre to

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[63] Wagamese highlights a storytelling workshop on Manitoulin Island where he had the opportunity to learn from traditional storytellers. According to him, Tomson Highway attended the same workshop and wrote his play *The Rez Sisters* right afterward (*One Native* 163). For me, this anecdote is a reminder of relationships that exist between the authors discussed in this dissertation and between Anishinaabe and Cree storytelling.

return to his family's territory in order to re-create relationships that are storied as testimony and retold at a future point in time). The contrast between these two different forms of story and storytelling begets the novel's intricate narrative structure, which, as I will demonstrate, features Saul as narrator at two different points in time. It is important to keep in mind that all of *Indian Horse* emerges from its protagonist's various acts of remembering and retelling and that the novel's basic structure is therefore somewhat similar to that of Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*. My discussion of *Indian Horse* emphasizes the connections between place, story, and embodied action, and I first focus on Saul's memories of his childhood, which demonstrate how he is taught about Anishinaabe relationships through story and traditional practices such as ricing. Then I demonstrate how residential school attacks these relationships through physical separation, violence, and Christian settler colonial ideology, and finally I discuss how Saul restores these relationships through an act of embodied storying through which his testimony emerges.

The argument that *Indian Horse* is informed by Indigenous storytelling has already been made in an article by Jack Robinson in 2013. Robinson's reading, however, is based on what Laguna Pueblo and Sioux scholar Paula Gunn Allen identifies as markers of "orally influenced literature" such as a circular structure, repetition, and the conflation of "the commonplace and the spiritual" ("Re-Storying" 90). While Robinson's centering of these rather pan-Indigenous markers is certainly not wrong, his interpretation runs the risk of erasing the specifically Anishinaabe narrative approach of the novel. I argue that for understanding what the novel teaches us about story, it is important to be familiar with certain basic principles of Anishinaabe storytelling which centre around relationships that emerge from and are reinforced by communication.[64] Anishinaabe

[64] I am aware that as a non-Indigenous academic, I speak as an outsider about a culture that is not my own. My readings are indebted to Indigenous scholars, writers, and storytellers who generously share their knowledge. Anishinaabe scholar Niigaan Sinclair's work on narrative thoroughly changed how I understood Wagamese's *Indian Horse*.

scholar Niigaan Sinclair emphasizes the importance of language when he points out that from an Anishinaabe perspective, "[c]reation is constituted by a universal order" based on language as a "relationship-making structure" (*Nindoodemag* 5). According to Sinclair, human and other-than-human beings (such as animals, water, rocks) enter into relationships with each other by communicating with each other (*Nindoodemag* 8). These communicative interactions beget not only words but whole stories and as Anishinaabe poet and scholar Margaret Noodin (born Noori) points out, the first stories that humans heard, were told to them by an other-than-human-being, by a rock (Noori 175).

The words that humans and other-than-humans exchange when they are communicating, are not always spoken words in human languages. Via Anishinaabe Elder Basil Johnston, Sinclair argues that other-than-human beings "are not only inviting us to listen to, feel, read, smell, and touch their expressions but live alongside them in a relationship of mutual responsibility and reciprocity" (*Nindoodemag* 10). This holistic understanding of the exchanges between humans and other-than-humans gestures toward the fact that communication, words, and stories are not merely taking place in a language as it is defined from an anthropocentric point of view, but they often take place in a language of embodied (inter)action. Both Johnston and Sinclair point out that these acts of communication create living relationships (*Nindoodemag* 10). According to Sinclair, these relationships are referred to as "enawendiwin" in Anishinaabemowin: "strands of relationship that tie Anishinaabe and all living entities together in a colossal universal network" (*Nindoodemag* 105). Since they emerge from communicative interactions, enawendiwin are relationships that are grounded in specific places and times and include rights and responsibilities (Sinclair, *Nindoodemag* 106). Furthermore, enawendiwin not only emerge from communication, they are, in turn, also expressed through stories and narratives (*Nindoodemag* 106). Stories, from an

Anishinaabe perspective, therefore carry, affirm, and reinforce reciprocal relationships between humans and other-than-humans (*Nindoodemag* 106). Taken together, enawendiwin create "nindinawemaganidog," which is the Anishinaabemowin word for the understanding that the "universe is made up of a family with many different but interconnected parts with many responsibilities shared between one another" (*Nindoodemag* 104).

Stories carry and reinforce the enawendiwin that make up nindinawemaganidog, and for understanding how this is reflected in *Indian Horse*, it is important to keep in mind that Anishinaabeg distinguish between two main genres of stories: aandisokaanan (sacred stories) and dibaajimowinan (personal stories, narratives, and histories) (Simpson, *Dancing* 45, 46). Interestingly, the word "dibaajimowinan" is connected to "dibaajimo, the act of collecting and redistributing the truth that you've heard" (Noori 176) and therefore implies the idea of witnessing that I discussed above. Aandisokaanan on the other hand "are summaries of self-knowing, the core means of communicating the complexity of life" (Noori 176).[65] Both aandisokaanan and dibaajimowinan exist in an interdependent relationship since aandisokaanan express teachings whose interpretations are personal and carried out by Anishinaabe individuals through embodied action (Simpson, *Dancing* 40). When living according to the teachings of aandisokaanan, the life story of an Anishinaabe person, their dibaajimowinan, echoes the aandisokaanan and thereby keeps these stories alive (Simpson, *Dancing* 46, n58). I argue that all of these Anishinaabe understandings of the interconnectedness of communication, relationships, stories, and embodied action are expressed in *Indian Horse* and they are key to understanding how the novel theorizes and re-imagines residential school testimony.

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[65] These Anishinaabe genres certainly resonate with the Cree genres of âtayohkewin and âcimowin as discussed in the previous chapter. However, the genres and the distinctions between them are not completely the same and might even differ from community to community.

Saul's introduction at the very beginning of the novel testifies to an awareness of enawendiwin, the relationships that constitute nindinawemaganidog. Saul first gives his name and then situates himself within his family as "the son of Mary Mandamin and John Indian Horse" (*Indian* 1) and as the grandchild of Solomon Indian Horse. His own name Saul is "the diminutive" of his grandfather's name (1).[66] That Saul introduces himself in relation to his family shows the extent to which his Anishinaabe identity is informed by these relationships. His introduction furthermore follows Anishinaabe customs for introducing oneself which puts an emphasis "not on the place of origin of birth but on an affiliation" (Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage* 60). Saul introduces his affiliation with "the Fish Clan of the northern Ojibway" (*Indian* 1) and thereby emphasizes the importance of Anishinaabe nindoodemag, the Anishinaabe totemic system.[67] Saul introduces his people's home territory along the Winnipeg River and his description inextricably links land and people:

> They say that our cheek bones are cut from those granite ridges that rise above our homeland. They say that the deep brown of our eyes seeped out of the fecund earth that surrounds the lakes and marshes. The Old Ones say that our long straight hair comes from the waving grasses that thatch the edges of bays. Our feet and hands are broad and flat and strong, like the paws of a bear. (1)

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[66] It is noteworthy that both parents' last names connote ideas of change that emphasize the ability to incorporate the new within Anishinaabe culture. The name Indian Horse is addressed in the novel itself where it is described how the "first Indian horse came to [Saul's] people" (4) and is perceived as a teaching for the community to "learn to ride […] these horses of change" for future survival (7). As Basil Johnston points out, "mandamin," the Anishinaabe word for corn, comes "from manda (wonder) and meen (seed or berry)" (*Ojibway Heritage* 34). Johnston tells a story which "expresses the fact that maize is not native to the area" but becomes incorporated and "of all foods it is the most constant for the Anishnabeg" (*Ojibway Heritage* 34). I therefore read the names of Saul's parents as reminders that change is part of Anishinaabe culture—as long as new elements are incorporated in ways that comply with Anishinaabe principles. This idea of change is especially important for understanding the role of hockey in the novel.
[67] Sinclair offers a detailed discussion of the importance, meaning, and workings of Anishinaabe nindoodemag in *Nindoodemag Bagijiganan: A History of Anishinaabeg Narrative*.

Saul's description not only emphasizes the relationships between people and the land but specifically gestures towards the embodied nature of these relationships. He therefore speaks to the way in which enawendiwin are what "grounds Anishinaabeg to their territories and living things within these lands" (Sinclair, *Nindoodemag* 106)—or, in other words, to the way in which enawendiwin and their expression constitute an Anishinaabe sense of "home" (Sinclair, *Nindoodemag* 106).[68] The sources that Saul "cites" for his knowledge range from an indeterminate "they" to more immediate ancestors called "the Old Ones" and eventually to himself. Saul thus connects himself to a line of ancestors, all of whom had an embodied connection to the land. Through his introduction, Saul therefore presents himself as embedded in a network of living relationships to his kin (including his ancestors), community, the land, and other-than-human entities. These relationships constitute Saul's home, and his embodied interactions with all elements in this network create stories that become woven into his own life story, his identity. It is important to remember that Saul writes this introduction as part of a testimony he creates later in life in a rehabilitation centre. The introduction therefore testifies to the fact that through all his life, Saul has preserved a memory of these relationships even when, as I will demonstrate, he is not actively embodying them because of the impacts of Christian settler colonialism.

In the first part of the testimony that Saul writes in the rehabilitation centre, he describes his childhood and how he was living on the land at God's Lake, his family's territory, with his family and their small community. For Saul, this time encapsulates "[a]ll that I knew of Indian" (8). Stories, place, and embodied action feature prominently in these memories. When Saul mentions his grandmother and her "stories of the old days," such as the stories about his "grandfather and the medicines he carried" (12), Saul gestures towards the way in which

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[68] Leanne Simpson similarly defines home as "the place [where people] have the strongest and most familiar bonds and relationships" (*Dancing* 89).

knowledge is imparted through stories within families and communities. As Anishinaabe scholar Kimberly Blaeser points out, storytelling "involves a web of connectedness and continuance" through which Indigenous people "do not so much teach, but rather *story* their children"—and Blaeser emphasizes that both aandisokaanan and dibaajimowinan are utilized as teachings ("Wild Rice" 240). When describing how he learned to "fashion elaborate braids out of red willow bark" (*Indian* 25) or to harvest wild rice, Saul always recalls the way his grandmother "talked as she worked" (25) with him and his brother. Saul's description of how his grandmother teaches through stories as well as through accompanying actions gestures toward the way in which stories become embodied in actions and vice versa. When discussing traditional practices such as ricing, the practice that Saul learns from his grandmother, Kimberly Blaeser draws a connection between ricing and story that similarly emphasizes the connection between story and practice. She points out that "just as each traditional seasonal activity in the Anishinaabeg yearly cycle necessarily involves both doing and telling, likewise each storytelling is both harvest and reseeding" ("Wild Rice" 253). Blaeser observes that "telling stories is also planting stories" and that "[s]omewhere there is intersection between the motion of stories, the motions of life, and the mobile centers of meaning" ("Wild Rice" 253).

In his childhood, Saul learns to listen to the land, and when he thinks he "could hear songs sung in Ojibway" in the "curling wash" of the river, this voice is as sustaining for him as "the firm, warm hand of [his mother] Naomi on the thin blade of my shoulder" (12). This demonstrates how Saul's relationship with the land is as nurturing as the ones to his human kin, and Saul communicates with the land through his body by listening and feeling. Another way in which Saul listens to the land is illustrated by his ability to receive visions. When he is alone on the land, he hears his name called without being able to identify a human caller (22). When Saul looks again,

he sees people who are "busy in canoes setting nets" (22). Over the course of this vision,[69] Saul witnesses how the people, whom he comes to realize are his ancestors, are killed by a landslide and he realizes: "because part of our family had died there, […] their spirits still spoke from the trees" (25). Saul's vision speaks to the way in which relationships and stories are not only embodied by humans but also stored in place. And for Saul, this idea of spirits speaking from the trees is not a scary notion of ghosts but a comforting ancestral presence on the land (25).

Saul's home, however, breaks apart when his brother Benjamin, who escaped from residential school and made his way back to his family, dies of a coughing sickness he caught at the school. Insisting on a Christian funeral, Saul's parents and their relatives leave God's Lake to take Benjamin's body to a priest—against the will of Saul's grandmother who is left behind with Saul. Unable to survive the winter in God's Lake on their own, Saul and his grandmother are forced to leave for the nearest town, Minaki. On their difficult journey by foot and canoe through the snowy and freezing Northern Ontario landscape, the two of them are guided and comforted by stories such as those "of the Star People who had come to our people in the Long Ago Time and brought teachings, secrets of the cosmos and the basis of our spiritual way" (40). As Anishinaabe scholar Brian McInnes points out, for Anishinaabeg, "stories provide direction and hope during even the most challenging times" as they constitute "[a] map to both the structure of the universe and our lives" (17). Saul's grandmother's aandisokaanan of the Star people comfort Saul as they remind him of the relationships that create home for him. And since aandisokaanan embody

[69] As a child and later as an adult, Saul has several visions of his ancestors which are crucial for the novel's plot. Interestingly, these visions are not included in the *Indian Horse* movie. I had a chance to ask representatives of the filmmakers at a pre-screening at the NCTR in Winnipeg why they had decided to omit these visions. Their answer was that they had tried to film these visions, but that every result turned out to look "cheesy" and somewhat "stereotypical." For me, this speaks to the way in which visions are a highly personal experience, and it is interesting that film, which offers the same visual images for every viewer, is unable to translate this experience while words (written or spoken) seem to leave the audience enough room to "envision" such an experience for themselves.

teachings about the responsibilities of these relationships, Saul's grandmother offers Saul a map to mino-bimaadiziwin as they are both trying to find their way to Minaki. At the same time, Saul's grandmother's dibaajimowinan offer the two of them very literal instructions for how to navigate their immediate environment. This is visible when Saul's grandmother remembers that "[t]here was a trail your great-grandfather cut that led from those raids through the bush to the railroad tracks south of here" (40). The dibaajimowinan of their kin's embodied presence on the land helps Saul and his grandmother to find their way, and the novel thereby emphasizes the importance of aandisokaanan and dibaajimowinan for guidance and ultimately for survival.

However, while Saul's testimony of his childhood gestures toward healthy, embodied Anishinaabe relationships, Wagamese does not create a romanticized picture of Saul's life in the bush. Instead, he shows how residential schools and settler colonialism have already impacted Saul's parents who have lost two children to the schools. As Saul puts it, "there was a spectre in our camp" (8). Trying to cope with their loss, his parents start drinking and Saul's grandmother and her stories keep him "away from the adults when they were in the grips of the drink" (14). Not all members of Saul's family listen to his grandmother's stories, and the novel subtly suggests that those members have heard other stories: speaking about a ricing ceremony, Saul's grandmother explains that the ceremony "teaches us to remember that rice is a gift of Creator" (25). Her explanation, is, however, immediately countered by Saul's aunt who points out: "It is a gift from God" (25). I argue that one of the key points of the novel is that it not only emphasizes the importance of Anishinaabe storytelling for being Anishinaabe but that it simultaneously discusses the active role of stories in the colonial project. The first instance of this is visible when Saul's grandmother does not want him to read Zhaunagush (white people) books because according to her, "[t] heir talk and their stories can sneak you away as quick as their boats" (10). This statement

encapsulates an argument that is explored in the remainder of the novel: that stories—also known as ideologies[70]—are a crucial component of colonization. I started my discussion of theory in Chapter 1 with the point that stories are anything but neutral. While they can create good relationships, Anishinaabe scholars emphasize that stories can also "participate in trickery and indoctrination" (Sinclair, *Nindoodemag* 14), that they can "cause great harm," and that they can "become obstacles of growth" (Borrows 398). Saul's grandmother's warning of stories that sneak you away refers to how ideologies lead away from mino-bimaadiziwin—a process that Leanne Simpson captures with her term "cognitive imperialism" which is a "lens of colonial thought" because of which "we are often unable to see our Ancestors. We are unable to see their philosophies" (*Dancing* 15-6). I argue that this is what happens to Saul—not only in residential school but also when he plays hockey in its settler colonial institutionalized form—and I will demonstrate how the physical and ideological colonial violence within both of these institutions harms Saul's enanwediwin.

When his grandmother dies on their way to Minaki, Saul is brought to residential school where he is far away from his family's territory. When Saul's testimony describes how he is taken away, the predominant theme of relationships is superseded by the theme of loneliness:

> I was sore inside. The tearing away of the bush and my people was like ripped flesh in my belly. […] And so I took to isolation. I wasn't a large boy and I could disappear easily. I learned that I could draw the boundaries of my physical self

[70] My use of the term "ideologies" refers to settler stories that directly or indirectly support the system of settler colonialism. Cree-Métis scholar Emma LaRocque has conducted a thorough analysis of such ideologies in her works *Defeathering the Indian* (1975) and *When the Other is Me* (2010). In the context of the residential school system, Christian stories became ideologies when they were instrumentalized to support Christian settler colonialism.

> inward, collapse the space I occupied and become a mote, a speck, an indifferent atom in its own peculiar orbit. (49)

Saul's act of pulling himself inward stands in stark contrast to the opening of the novel where, by introducing himself, he reaches out to all the entities he has relationships with. Saul's self-description as "an indifferent atom in its own peculiar orbit" stands in complete opposition to an Anishinaabe identity that is embedded in the interconnectedness of nindinawemaganidog. Saul's description of how the land and his people were torn away from him like "ripped flesh" once again emphasizes the embodied nature of these relationships which, he feels, are now lost.

The school not only prevents Saul physically from embodying his relationships, but it also keeps him from revisiting and upholding these relationships through language and story by prohibiting both. Instead, the nuns and priests at the school force Christian settler colonial ideologies upon him: they tell him and the other students that the school is supposed to save them from their "heathen ways" and to bring "the light of the salvation of the one true God" (78). Saul's comment on how as soon as the priest "was satisfied that the message had been pounded into us, we were marched to the dining room for breakfast" (78) highlights the passive position of the students as the ideology is imposed on them. This passivity stands in contrast to the agency with which Saul actively embodies his grandmother's stories. The school's Christian settler colonial ideologies are supposed to produce what Michel Foucault terms "docile bodies" (Foucault 136)—which is gestured towards by the fact that the students are not described as walking but as *being marched*. Saul's statement that "[t]hose of us who remembered the stories told around our people's fires trembled in fear at the images of hell, damnation, fire and brimstone" (80) speaks to how, through physical violence and ideology, traditional Anishinaabe stories become associated with fear.

When Father Leboutilier, a new priest at the school, introduces the students to hockey, Saul's life *seems* to change for the better. Significantly, Saul's first contacts with the sport are through stories in books, which give him the impression "that hockey had an alchemy that could transform ordinary men into great ones" (57). Settler scholar Sam McKegney and Métis scholar Trevor Philips point out that the TRC's final report "says that 'the opportunity to play sports at residential schools made their lives more bearable and gave them a sense of identity, accomplishment, and pride' (TRC 2015a, 199)" (McKegney & Philips 171). However, there is also a different side to sport in residential school. When Saul watches *Hockey Night in Canada* on the priest's TV, he observes the skaters and wants "to copy those motions" (63). His wish resonates with settler scholar Andrew Woolford's theory that sports, while offering an enjoyment during the bleak routine of residential school life, nevertheless "contributed a degree of seduction to the assimilative project, offering students social and physical pleasures alongside an attempt to reshape their identities" (164). Hockey is furthermore especially closely tied to the construction of a Canadian national identity, which is why Langston and Chaulk argue that it can be understood "as a colonizing force, another assimilatory measure" (176).

At the same time, however, hockey provides Saul solace because it creates a feeling of community, and when playing hockey, Saul does "not feel lonely or afraid, deserted or abandoned, but connected to something far bigger" (*Indian* 62). Hockey seems to offer him "a shelter and a haven from everything bleak and ugly in the world" (90). The descriptions of the hockey games and the way in which the players work together is somewhat reminiscent of Sinclair's description of nindinawemaganidog, especially when Saul describes how, through his gift of visioning, he is able to "see" the game—and not only "the physical properties of the game and the action but the intent" (58). Because of this ability to "read" the play as a living system, Saul can predict where

the players will move next. He agrees with Father Leboutilier's observation that "[t]here's a genuine rhythm under all this mayhem" (58). Similarly to hockey in the novel, nindinawemaganidog, as Sinclair points out, "is not without shape, meaning and purpose" and this shape is "waawiyeyaag (translated to 'it is round' or 'circularity')" and defined by "cycles and repetitions, departures followed by inevitable returns" (Sinclair, *Nindoodemag* 107). I suggest that these parallels between nindinawemaganidog and hockey that the novel establishes are one reason why Saul finds comfort in the game: it reminds him of the relationships he used to be embedded in when he was home. And eventually, his talent for hockey allows Saul to leave the school and to live with the family of Fred Kelly, an Anishinaabe hockey coach whose team plays in "Native tournaments" (*Indian* 94).

Scholars often point out the double-edged qualities that hockey has in the novel. Julie Cairnie goes so far as to argue that "[i]n *Indian Horse*, hockey is both complex and contradictory" (Cairnie n.p.). I do not think that the novel's portrayal of hockey is contradictory. In fact, when looked at from the Anishinaabe perspective that I introduced in the beginning, the ambiguities dissolve. The key lies in the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to hockey. In the Native league, hockey is about relationships and community, which is also what McKegney and Philips observe when they argue that the novel imagines "an indigenized apotheosis of hockey that might foster individual healing by elaborating an ethic of community" (169). As Fred Kelly explains in the novel, the Native tournaments are about visiting and shared experience as much as they are about hockey. When a team travels to another reserve, they "bunk with families" and "even if it's fifty below, a crowd turns out to watch" (*Indian* 94). The reserve teams play in outdoor rinks on the land, which is why their games occur in relation to the land—something that Saul only realizes when his team starts playing against white teams in their indoor

arenas. Saul describes how "[i]n the arena, yellow lights were above us instead of the sun and rafters instead of clouds" (74), and he later points out to his teammate Virgil that "it feels different" (88). Saul later articulates this difference as the lack of interaction with the land that he feels in indoor arenas. He remembers the reserves' outdoor rinks and how, for example, "[t]he ice in Heron Bay was rough where the wind cut through the black spruce and made ripples and ridges" and how "[w]e had to know that. Had to use it in our game" (130). The reserve rinks allowed the players to embody their relationships to the land because they were required to listen to the land—the arena's artificial environment precludes the embodiment of these relationships.[71]

While the Indigenous hockey league is portrayed as being about relationships, the novel portrays the non-Indigenous Canadian hockey leagues as racist, capitalist, and pervaded by the ideologies of settler colonialism. Being confronted with this system and its players, Saul's team encounters racial slurs, physical violence, and they suffer degradation and humiliation when the white players urinate on Saul's teammates after beating them up (136). The racist system changes Saul's teammates and they "went from jubilant boys to hard, taciturn men in no time at all" (131). When Saul accepts the offer to play for a professional team in Toronto, he leaves the Kellys and lives with a white couple.[72] In his new team, he encounters the same hostility and racism, and the novel emphasizes the role of stereotypes and ideologies as the following dialogue shows: "'Thirteen don't talk much.' 'I heard they're like that.' Or, 'Thirteen never smiles.' 'None of them do.'" (162-3). Settler colonial ideologies also determine the way Saul as a hockey player is framed by the Canadian press: "When I hit someone, it wasn't just a bodycheck; it was a counting coup.

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[71] It is crucial to keep economic factors in mind to avoid a romanticization of the reserves' outdoor rinks. The rinks are outdoors because in the settler colonial system, reserves do not have the money for indoor arenas. Nevertheless, in the novel, the Indigenous teams are portrayed as turning this lack of money into an opportunity for relationship.

[72] This is reminiscent of the way in which Indigenous children from Northern Ontario often have to leave their communities and move to bigger cities in order to go to school. Tanya Talaga discusses the devastating effects that the new, mostly unsupportive, and often racist environment has on Indigenous youth in *Seven Fallen Feathers*.

[…] If I inadvertently high-sticked someone during a tussle in the corner, I was taking scalps. When I did not react to getting a penalty, I was the stoic Indian" (163). The articles prove McKegney's argument that in Canadian society, "young Indigenous men are subject to the hypermasculine images of the Hollywood Indian […] from emotionless stoicism to rugged virility to rage, fury and bloodlust" ("Masculindians" 358). These stereotypes are created and perpetuated by the stories (or rather ideologies) of popular culture, and Saul's reaction resonates with the behaviour of the characters in Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* when he starts to accept and adopt these images which suppress everything that traditional Anishinaabe stories taught him about Indigeneity: "Finally, it changed the game for me. If they wanted me to be a savage, that's what I would give them" (164). Saul starts to fight back on the ice, and when his coach scolds him, Saul defends himself by bitterly asserting the identity that the racist ideologies imposed on him: "'Don't you read the papers? I'm the Rampaging Redskin'" (165). Saul's written testimony offers a drastic metaphor for his character change when he pairs this part of his story with his memory of Rebecca Wolf, a girl in residential school whom he witnessed committing suicide (167). This pairing suggests parallels between the impact of residential schools and national hockey as oppressive settler colonial institutions and bluntly demonstrates how these institutions and the ideologies that operate within them attempt to kill Indigeneity.

Saul eventually stops playing hockey, moves restlessly from place to place and starts drinking. After he collapses on the streets of Winnipeg, he eventually seeks help at the New Dawn Centre where he is asked to write down his life story as he has indicated at the beginning of the novel. However, writing his testimony does not offer Saul the cathartic relief he was promised, and he states that he "felt dissatisfied" because he thought he would "discover something new, something powerful that would heal me" because that is what he was told the process of writing

"was supposed to lead to" (191). The idea of linear progress that leads to catharsis resonates with the way in which, as Renate Eigenbrod observes, reviewers chose to read the novel as a story of linear progress that leads to healing and redemption ("Dark Side" n.p.). According to Eigenbrod, the reviewers' desire to read the novel as progressive healing narrative "reflects our society's desire for reconciliation" ("Dark Side" n.p.). I agree with Eigenbrod's point that *Indian Horse* is more complicated than that, and I would add that the novel's structure is not determined by linearity but that, like nindinawemaganidog, it is determined by circularity, as I will demonstrate in this last part of my discussion. Saul's disappointment after finishing writing his life story is the point in the novel where the narrative moves away from Western autobiography. As is stated on the novel's first pages, *Indian Horse* is comprised of the narrative that Saul writes down at the New Dawn Centre (3). On page 191, however, the narrative has taken the reader to the present moment when Saul is at the Centre. As of this point, the reader no longer reads Saul's written story because Saul stops writing his life story after this disappointment since "[t]here wasn't much to write after that" (191). However, the novel still goes on and I suggest, that the reader now "listens" to a different narrative voice, namely to a Saul who is located at an unknown future point in time and who shares what happened further.As I will demonstrate below, this different narrative level emerges from a form of Anishinaabe embodied testimony.

After years of being exposed to physical violence and the pervasive ideologies of settler heteropatriarchy in colonial institutions, Saul no longer seems to actively embody the relationships and the stories that defined his early childhood. And even though he remembers these relationships in his written life story, as Niigaan Sinclair points out, "novels, essays, and poems do not perform, forge communicative strands, or do much of anything—until a reader comes along" (Sinclair *Nindoodemag* 21). The novel suggests that the solitary act of writing a story that is not shared does

not support Saul's restoration of relationships to his kin, the land, and the-other-than-human-entities of nindinawemaganidog. In his autobiography *For Joshua*, Wagamese similarly suggests that for (re)establishing relationships, the act of writing is not enough. He describes how he "filled the pages with drawings, stories, poems, and songs of the people he missed so much but could not remember. But he always awoke, the stories and poems always ended, and the songs faded off into the night" (1). Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday writes in *The Man Made of Words* that "[t]here is good, too, in actual, physical return" (118). Disappointed by the outcome of his writing process, Saul goes out on the land and, for the first time since his childhood, has a vision of his family whom he sees "walk[ing] slowly into the depths of the fog" (*Indian* 193). The image of the retreating family symbolizes Saul's fear of losing his connection to them after not being able to reconnect with them through writing. But as Anishinaabe scholar Lindsay Keegitah Borrows points out, "[i]t is usually during the hardest times that premonitions and visions come from this other-world, teaching, warning, and guiding" (398-9). The vision of his family offers Saul such guidance, and he decides to leave again—"[o]nly this time I knew exactly where I was going" (*Indian* 193). I suggest that Saul realizes at this point that he needs to find another way to restore his relationships and that this other way is what I refer to as an embodied act of "rewriting" his life story that leads to an Anishinaabe form of testimony.

Leanne Simpson emphasizes the importance of process for creating meaning in Anishinaabe culture, and she states that "the way in which something is done becomes very important because it carries with it all of the meaning." (*Dancing* 91). Instead of focusing on a retrospectively described written life story, Saul embarks on a more process-oriented form of remembering his life and his relationships by physically revisiting places of his past. His journey back to the site of the now closed residential school and later back to his family's home territory

is a rewriting of his written testimony through embodied action that blurs the boundaries between life and story. On this journey, Saul not only remembers but revisits relationships physically and I argue that Saul's approach is captured by Anishinaabe scholar Margaret Noodin's words that: "Ezhianishinaabebimaadiziyaang, mii sa ezhianishinaabeaadisokaankeyaang. (The way in which we live, that is the way we write stories.)" (Noori 175). Saul "writes" a testimony by living an act of testimony through embodied re-visiting which restores relationships.

Saul revisits the former hockey rink at the residential school, which is now a crumbling, closed building (*Indian* 195). Standing at the rink, Saul closes his eyes "and in the still air I could hear the wild calls of boys and [...] I remembered the prick of ice crystals and the numb feeling in the soles of my feet in their thin rubber boots and the shovel in my hand" (198). Saul's body starts to remember when he inhabits the place and listens closely. This speaks to how, as Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests, stories can be stored "within the landscape" (33). It addresses the way in which stories are also stored in bodies—and Saul's act of embodied re-visiting and listening lets his mind remember these stories. Saul, however, also starts remembering harmful experiences, and for the first time, he becomes consciously aware of the fact that Father Leboutilier sexually abused him (199).[73] Saul now realizes that hockey was an escape for him and he understands that he therefore "played with abandon. To abandon myself" (199). Despite the devastating nature of this memory, this realization makes it possible for Saul to understand his own life story and in a way, he is thereby able to reconnect with the self he tried to abandon. From this, he moves back even further in his life story and visits God's Lake, his family's territory.

[73] The idea that not only stories but also trauma can be stored in place is explored by Anishinaabe writer Louise Erdrich in *The Round House* where the narrator's mother suffers an atrocious and violent act of sexual assault at the round house. The narrator, upon visiting this place, feels the trauma that is stored there: "I knew. He had attacked her here. The old ceremonial place had told me—cried out to me in my mother's anguished voice" (Erdrich 60).

When describing Saul's return to the place of his most important relationships, the novel puts an emphasis on Saul's embodied experience. When he enters the territory, the land seems to embrace Saul and "the bush close[s] off behind [him]" (204). Simultaneously, Saul opens up to the land and experiences it with his senses: he *touches* "the broad span of ferns," *smells* that "the air [is] rich and earthy," *hears* that it is "filled with birdsong" and *gazes* "up at the cliff" (204). Saul starts to communicate with the land through embodied action and he is able to listen to its stories. In *One Story, One Song*, Wagamese explains this process, pointing out that the land

> transports you. It takes you to a common human time [...] when the land was filled with magic and teachings. The land spoke to all of us then. It whispered. It told stories, and those who came to it most often learned to hear that voice through the closed skin of their eyes, the soles of their feet, the palms of their hands as they rested upon stone and tree and earth and water: the storytellers. (2)

Saul is similarly transported to a different time when he has another vision and encounters his family and his deceased ancestors, "[his] people" (*Indian* 205). Surrounded by his people and the land,[74] Saul mourns for everything he lost and he lets every "ounce of sorrow and desperation, loneliness and regret" out (206). Being thus emptied, Saul hears his name. Sinclair explicitly refers to the act of naming as a "relationship-making practice" (*Nindoodemag* 5) and the call that seems to come from his ancestors, the land or both, therefore re-establishes the relationship among Saul and these entities. Saul subsequently "offer[s] tobacco to the lake where everything started and

[74] In *One Native Life*, Wagamese describes how he himself had a similar experience when he was looking for his Anishinaabe roots and "wanted to see where it had all started. There was something in those territories I needed. Exactly what that was I didn't know. I only knew that I needed to walk there" (254-5). Wagamese emphasizes the importance of embodied experience and states that on the land, he was able to find "the essence of my Ojibway self (256).

everything ended" (*Indian* 206), which, according to Sinclair, is an act of thanks-giving and a relationship-making practice as well (*Nindoodemag* 5). Saul thereby undergirds the reciprocity of the newly re-established relationships. Significantly, in this passage the land is described in terms of human features: "the great northern lights [emerge] to dance" and the moon has an "unblinking eye" (*Indian* 205). These descriptions form the complement to the descriptions of the people embodying features of the land at the beginning of the novel, which underscores the reciprocity embedded in the relationship between people and land once more. Saul eventually offers his thanks again, this time "aloud in an Ojibway prayer" (206), and this is the first instance in which the novel suggests that Saul speaks words in Anishinaabemowin. Anishinaabe storyteller Kathleen Delores Westcott shares a story about a woman going out on the land and she points out that non-Indigenous listeners often misinterpret this story, thinking the woman goes into isolation in order to find to herself (Garroutte and Westcott 68). Westcott, however, interprets the story differently: "The woman was engaging in an act of co-creation *through her kinship ties*" (Garroutte and Westcott 68). Westcott's interpretation of her story also fits as an explanation for Saul's return to God's Lake: Saul reconnects and restores kinship ties through embodied action—something that was not possible through the isolated process of Western autobiographical writing.

If, as I argue, Saul's physical return to places of his past is an act of rewriting his testimony in an embodied manner, the emerging story still needs to be shared. During his vision at God's Lake, Saul's great-grandfather tells him that he has to learn to "carry this place within" (*Indian* 205). Hence, Saul has to find a way that allows him to maintain the relationships to his people and the land as a constant part of his story after he has reconnected with them. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Niigaan Sinclair explains that enawendiwin are expressed through "the creation, exchange, and acceptance of stories, songs, and other narrative forms" (*Nindoodemag*

106). Based on this notion, I argue that Saul crafts his embodied testimony in form of a story, and the medium of the story (and in this case also testimony) allows him to express and carry the relationships he restored. Saul's sharing of this story is what the reader gets to read in this last part of *Indian Horse* after Saul has finished his written testimony. Whether Saul shares this story in written or in oral form is never specified, which suggests that once Anishinaabe enawendiwin are actively embodied, they can be honoured through the act of telling or through the act of writing. The novel shows how Saul's embodied actions become story and thereby support Wagamese's famous saying that "[w]e are all story" (*One Story* 2).

Interestingly, the novel distinguishes between Saul's acts of talking about his past and his act of telling his story. When he returns from God's Lake, Saul returns to the New Dawn Centre. He states: "I went back to talk" (207).[75] Saul's words are reminiscent of the words Dovie's father uses in "The Spirit Survives." As discussed in Chapter 1, Dovie's father distinguishes between "talking about the past" and "telling the story." *Indian Horse* seems to make a similar distinction which even strengthens the idea that Saul's story is more than just words, namely a carefully crafted act of communication that carries and upholds relationships. Western forms of testimony do not necessarily incorporate the same element of upholding relationships to place and kin. The ending of the novel suggests that Saul has learned to carry not only the relationships of his home within himself but also that he is once again on the path to mino-bimaadiziwin by embodying the teachings of the aandisokaanan. This becomes visible when Saul starts playing hockey again but approaches the game differently. In the last game described at the very end of the novel after Saul has returned to the Kellys and their community, Saul states that they should play this game together

[75] Jack Robinson argues that Saul shares his written testimony at the New Dawn Centre by reading it aloud (90). However, there is no textual evidence that would support this interpretation.

"'[l]ike we shoulda all along'" (221). As McKegney and Phillips point out, "[r]ather than seeking after his own singular transformation to hockey superstar […], Saul needs to recognize that his capacity to become the fullest expression of himself is deeply interdependent with his community's capacity to transform the game" (182). Saul's return to a relational approach to hockey (and to life as another interpretation of the wording "the game" suggests) is both resurgence because of his return to Anishinaabe teachings and decolonization because of his overcoming of cognitive imperialism. Saul's new position as coach of the hockey team furthermore suggests that he will adopt a guiding position in the community's future.

The question that remains, however, is in what ways does Saul's testimony support not only his own but also the community's wellbeing? In order to answer this question, I would like to return to the idea that Anishinaabe stories and their genres always serve specific purposes (*Nindoodemag* 56). The narrative that Saul creates in the end has several purposes and effects. For Saul himself, this story is a way to carry and take care of the relationships that constitute home. At the same time, because of the relational nature of storytelling, his story reaches out to an audience and it can, as Jud Sojourn argues, work as "narrative medicine" (15). According to Sojourn, narrative medicine involves "[t]he reframing or reorientation of perspective" (15), and I argue that this is what Saul's narrative accomplishes by demonstrating how decolonization and resurgence can be accomplished through embodied acts of restoring relationships. As Sojourn points out: "a medicine person does more than heal: they also seek knowledge which comes most often in the form of broadened or reoriented perspective which is then used to diagnose illness and advise action" (8). This, according to Sojourn, is also true for narrative medicine—and I argue that it is true for Saul's story in particular. Just like Saul offers guidance for community empowerment as a hockey coach at the end of the novel, his story offers this guidance to those who listen—or read.

And Niigaan Sinclair's argument that "[s]ome dibaajimowin become aadizookan over time" (*Nindoodemag* 55) additionally suggests the possibility that Saul's personal story, which incorporates numerous teachings, might adopt additional purposes and functions for its audience in the future.

3.2 Intergenerational Testimony in Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow*

Like his fellow Anishinaabe writer Richard Wagamese, James Bartleman is not a residential school survivor himself. He is, however, well-familiar with the genre of life-writing, and his first novel *As Long as the Rivers Flow* is his fifth book after four memoirs which Bartleman wrote about his life as the first Indigenous Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. His residential school novel's structure (three chapters, each of which describes a certain time span in the protagonist's life) is similar to those of his own memoirs, but the novel features a female protagonist—a choice which I will discuss in more detail below. When speaking about his motivation for writing a residential school novel, Bartleman points out that he spent his political career focusing on "issues of mental health, anti-racism, and the well-being of Native children" ("Interview" 1:18 – 1:27), and that when he was no longer able to mobilize the same resources after his retirement, he chose to address these issues by writing about them ("Interview" 1:28 – 1:40). According to Bartleman, his first novel "in a sense is a summary of all the years I spent as Lieutenant Governor travelling in the north and working with Native kids" ("Interview" 1:48 – 1:57). The novel describes the life of its female protagonist Martha, an Anishinaabekwe from Cat Lake First Nation, who grows up living with her family and community on the land but is then taken to residential school where she is sexually abused for years by one of the priests. When she returns to her community as a young woman, Martha feels out of place, starts drinking, and gives birth to two children: a boy named Spider and a girl named Raven. The novel addresses the 60s Scoop as a continuation of the

residential school system when Spider is taken away by Ontario's Children's Aid Society and Martha eventually abandons her daughter Raven in order to look for Spider in Toronto. Years pass, and when Martha and Spider return to the reserve, Raven is a teenager who has joined her friends in a suicide pact. As this brief synopsis shows, the novel tackles a series of very sensitive topics within 250 pages in order to demonstrate how the residential school system impacts intergenerational relationships up until the present. As I will demonstrate, Bartleman's novel puts a strong emphasis on the role of stories and storytelling for both relationships and resurgence. Similar to *Indian Horse*, it also showcases how stories, or ideologies, can be harmful and can work, as Daniel Heath Justice puts it, as "bad medicine" that has a negative impact on one's sense of identity and mental wellbeing (*Why Indigenous* 2-4). As a theory of testimony, the novel demonstrates how testimony as *intergenerational process* restores relationships.

Of all the novels discussed in this thesis, *As Long as the Rivers Flow* is the only one that considers residential school survivors' relationships to their own children, and one of the reasons for this is Bartleman's concern to address youth suicide in Northern Ontario Indigenous communities. As Anishinaabe journalist Tanya Talaga points out in her award-winning book *Seven Fallen Feathers*, "Northern Ontario Indigenous communities had battled the plague of suicide since the end of the residential school era in the 1990s" (130). According to Talaga, between 1986 and 2016, "there have been more than five hundred suicides in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation territory alone. A staggering seventy of those suicides were of children between the ages of ten and fourteen and more than two hundred were youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty" (130). Bartleman's novel is set in Nishnawbe Aski Nation territory and its story is rooted in observations Bartleman made while he was travelling to those communities. Bartleman is convinced that "one of the major reasons why these kids give up and die […] is because of the residual effects of the residential

school experience" ("Interview" 2:36 – 2:51). He therefore utilizes his novel to demonstrate the connections between residential schools and youth suicide by focusing on intergenerational relationships. When writing the novel, Bartleman had a predominantly non-Indigenous audience in mind whom his novel is supposed to educate and to make aware of the situation of Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario ("Words" 28:30 - 28:45). The novel's title is well-known as a translation of a phrase that Indigenous people employed during processes of treaty-making, and the title therefore already gestures towards relationships. And even though, as the novel comprehensively shows, treaty-relations were broken and abused by non-Indigenous people, the novel's title still gestures towards the hopeful expectations with which Indigenous people entered into treaty relations. For many Indigenous readers, however, the title also evokes intergenerational continuance. As Cree scholar Sharon Venne explains in the context of Treaty Six, the water that is gestured toward by the phrase not only refers to actual rivers "but to the water that breaks when a woman gives birth. Because the Treaty is supposed to last for as long as water flows when women give birth" (1). The novel's title therefore evokes the importance of intergenerational relationships and intergenerational continuance and the novel examines how stories and the process of giving testimony support this continuance, the restoration of relationships, and therefore resurgence. Bartleman himself championed the importance of story when, as Lieutenant Governor, he established book drives, literacy summer camps, and reading clubs for Indigenous communities in Ontario ("The Honourable James K. Bartleman" n.p.). Despite being specifically directed at a non-Indigenous audience, *As Long as the Rivers Flow* has a considerable Indigenous readership because copies of the book were "sent by Canada Council to every First Nation community across Canada" ("Words" 33:27 – 33:38). As my discussion will demonstrate, of all four novels in this dissertation, *As Long as the Rivers Flow* is the one that is most aware of and openly reacting to the

Truth and Reconciliation process—the TRC is even mentioned when one of the characters reads an article that announces that the Canadian government "will establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to tour the country to compile a historical record and allow Indian survivors to tell their stories" (*As Long* 212).

Even though Martha is the only female main character discussed in this dissertation, it is important to remember that her character was conceptualized by a male author. But even though Bartleman's depiction of Martha is at times in danger of being somewhat stereotypical (for example when Martha feels her "maternal instincts kick[…] in" when she sees her son for the first time (75)), I personally do not see the novel as being in danger of appropriating female survivors' voices. As Bartleman emphasizes in the book's acknowledgements as well as in the interviews quoted from above, his character is based on numerous conversations with female residential school survivors and Elders who trusted Bartleman with their experiences—and as I will discuss further at the end of this chapter, I argue that the novel therefore constitutes an act of witnessing rather than an appropriation of voice. It is noteworthy in this context that the narrative voice of Bartleman's third-person narrative is rather distanced from the characters—which, for example, is not the case in Highway's third-person narrative. While Highway, for example, utilizes free indirect discourse to evoke the voices of Jeremiah and Gabriel despite the third-person perspective, Bartleman's narrative voice does not and instead evokes an anonymous narrator whose task is to describe events and to offer background information on a lot of characters.[76] This becomes visible

[76] Bartleman's novel is also the only novel discussed in this thesis that offers the perspectives of non-Indigenous characters—including the priest who abuses Martha. In this regard, the novel is similar to Métis author Joan Crate's residential school novel *Black Apple*, which tells the story of a girl's time in residential school from the perspective of the girl and the perspective of the nuns. However, while Crate's novel gives the unsettling impression of being too sympathetic towards the school's employees, Bartleman avoids this impression by still being highly critical of these characters' actions and by revealing their colonial intentions. I argue that Bartleman's novel offers numerous perspectives because of its immersion in Canada's truth and reconciliation process and because Bartleman thought he would "try and write a novel which would show the good and the bad in all of us" ("Interview" 6:00 - 6:09).

when comparing passages from both novels that describe the children's encounter with the plane that takes them to residential school. In Highway's novel, the third-person narration describes the experience through Champion's eyes. When Champion is on the plane and looks down, he sees "endless lakes that looked like his mother's doughnut cut-outs, except of rabbits' heads, caterpillars, and human faces with great big eyes" (48). In Bartleman's novel, the narrator gives an external description of Martha's experience: "The roar of the engine and the sight of the propeller slashing the air panicked the little girl and she began screaming for her mother" (26). This distance is also felt by the reviewers and one of them complains that Bartleman "writes very plainly and is occasionally inclined to tell rather than show" (Mackey 61). As Algonquin scholar Michelle Coupal points out, the narrative voice "sounds a lot like James Bartleman's public voice when he discusses the book and its purpose" (*Storied Truths* 196). Therefore, even though the novel offers a female protagonist and, thanks to the female survivors who shared their experiences with the author, female perspectives, the novel does not have distinctly female narrator. Instead, Bartleman chooses to tell the story through the voice of an anonymous narrator whose descriptive, almost journalistic voice, does not allow the reader to experience the story through the characters' eyes.

The first part of the novel opens with Martha's birth and then describes her early childhood on the land with her parents and the community. Similar to *Indian Horse*, the novel describes an Anishinaabe community that still upholds Anishinaabe ways of life and that remembers Anishinaabe stories. Coupal argues that the novel emphasizes Anishinaabe stories "as both ways of knowing the world and as coping mechanisms to deal with trauma, so that Indigenous storytelling becomes an alternative to Western, psychoanalytic practices of understanding and healing" (Coupal *Storied Truths*). While Coupal makes a convincing argument, I want to

emphasize that my own approach—for reasons spelled out in Chapter 1—does not focus on trauma and healing. Instead, I intend to demonstrate how Bartleman employs storytelling in order to highlight its importance not only for relating to the world but also for upholding and restoring relationships—and to offer a warning of what happens when stories get distorted by cognitive imperialism. In order to do so, it is crucial for my analysis to be attentive to the particular Anishinaabe stories that are told in the first part of the novel.[77] The novel describes how the children are told important Anishinaabe aandisokaanan such as "stories about Gitche Manitou, the Great Spirit, and his supporters and the good things they do for the Anishinaabe people" (*As Long* 19). As pointed out in my discussion of *Indian Horse*, aandisokaanan convey teachings that help Anishinaabeg to navigate their environment and to live in ways that strengthen the enawendiwin they have with all elements around them. Significantly, during her last summer before being taken away to residential school, the community's storyteller also tells Martha and the other children "some things normally too awful for kids to hear. About monsters and bad things" (19). Some of these are stories about the bearwalkers who "take possession of the minds and bodies of people" (19), "cause sickness and death," and are "easy to recognize because they dress in black, are really old and are always in a bad mood" (20). According to Theresa S. Smith, "bearwalking is strictly a human practice, whereby a shaman takes the form of a bear to exercise a menacing power over an individual or community" (Smith qtd. in Toth 101), and according to Lawrence W. Gross, bearwalkers are "one of the most feared types of shamans" in Anishinaabe culture (Gross 52).[78]

[77] While there are numerous reviews, scholarly work on *As Long as the Rivers Flow* is surprisingly scarce. While the novel is often mentioned in passing, Michelle Coupal's doctoral dissertation is the only work that discusses the novel in detail. However, except for short references to the novel's use of the figures of the Wendigo and the bearwalker, Coupal does not offer a detailed analysis of the stories that are told in *As Long as the Rivers Flow*.

[78] The figure of the bearwalker establishes an interesting parallel to Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and its incorporation of the Fiddler case discussed in Chapter 2. In 1997 and therefore 90 years after the Fiddler case, a 19-year-old man on the Sheguiandah reserve near Sudbury bludgeoned a 45-year-old man "who was reputed to be a bearwalker" (Laghi A6). The 19-year-old was acquitted in court through what newspapers termed the "bearwalker

As the novel proceeds, the bearwalkers become connected to the priests and nuns at residential school who, to use Smith's words, similarly exercise a menacing power over individuals and communities.

The storyteller also tells Martha and the other children a graphic story about a trapper who is attacked by a Wendigo which eats his arms and his legs and leaves the trapper not to die but to become a Wendigo himself (*As Long* 22).[79] The storyteller teaches the children that "if someone is bitten by a Wendigo, that person turns into a Wendigo with a great hunger for fresh human flesh" (22). Similar to Highway's use of the Weetigo figure in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Bartleman employs the figure of the Wendigo to address the intergenerational effects of residential schools. Basil Johnston argues that Wendigos, in contemporary times, have been "reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals" (*The Manitous* 235). Gerald P. McKinley, who makes a short reference to *As Long as the Rivers Flow* and the Wendigo in an article on historic trauma, builds on Johnston's view that the Wendigo has become a metaphor for "colonialism and capitalism" and argues that the "new victim of the Modern Wiindigo is isolated as before, but this time narratives of historical traumas are central to the isolation" (McKinley 143). As I will demonstrate, the Wendigo in *As Long as the Rivers Flow*, just like the Weetigo in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, is a force that is detrimental to relationships. Both, the Wendigo and the bearwalkers foreshadow the harmful environment of the residential school and in a way, the storyteller prepares Martha for encounters yet to come. The novel then demonstrates how Martha employs the stories about the Wendigo and the bearwalkers in order to navigate her environment—just how she would have been taught to employ the teachings of aandisokaanan: when she is on the plane to residential school, lonely and

defense" (Laghi A6). Anishinaabe writer and Elder Basil Johnston testified as expert witness in the court case (Laghi A6). The case itself testifies to the important role Anishinaabe stories play in communities until today.

[79] As with the Cree word "Weetigo," there are numerous different spellings for "Wendigo," and I adopt the one that is used in Bartleman's novel. Spellings in quotations are left in their original.

scared, stories offer her a framework for understanding her situation. When she falls asleep, she realizes in her dream that the pilot, "the man with the hidden eyes carrying her away was a Wendigo" (27). Later, when they arrive at the school and Martha sees a nun for the first time, she sees "an unsmiling creature with unfriendly eyes, […] dressed in a black dress" and she is convinced that the nun, "if not a Wendigo must be a bearwalker. For bearwalkers were mean-looking and dressed in black" (28). These scenes demonstrate how Martha, when being confronted with an unknown situation which she perceives as threatening, resorts to Anishinaabe stories in order to make sense of and navigate her environment. Even though she later learns that the priests and nuns are not literally bearwalkers and Wendigos, the threats that they pose are still in a way comparable to those of these monsters.

The novel not only emphasizes the importance of story for navigating one's environment, it also emphasizes the importance of story for maintaining relationships. Being physically separated from her family, community, and the land, Martha finds solace in memories and stories. As Michelle Coupal puts it, "Martha learns to nurture herself through stories that become her internal medicine at school" (*Storied Truths* 202). When she is in bed at the school, Martha starts to reconnect to her family and the land imaginatively by "pretend[ing] that she was back home in bed, drinking in the wild smell of the balsam needle mattress and snuggled up under soft bearskin covers between her parents" (*As Long* 32). Martha's imagination involves several of her senses and allows her to bring a feeling of home to the school. Martha further reconnects by imagining the land: "[t]he first dusting of snow on the black spruce trees, the outstretched wings of crows, ravens, pelicans and eagles framed against the late fall sky, the lake so calm it had turned to glass" (32). Through memory, Martha maintains the relationships that create home. In these moments, she enters what Andrew Woolford calls a "terrain of resistance" when he argues that children in

residential school "were able to combat distance" from their communities and their families "through the use of memory" (226). Martha then reminds herself of aandisokaanan by recreating "in her mind the storytelling sessions she had attended" (*As Long* 32). This inspires her to also forge new relationships by "making up her own stories and creating her own imaginary friends" (33). In her mind, Martha creates for herself a community of little animals which is reminiscent of Anishinaabe relationships to the other-than-human. Martha specifically creates life stories for two of her animal friends, a little bear named Makwa, who has been badly treated at residential school (33), and a little raven named Kagagi, "who had fallen from his nest" (34). The animals' names, which are the Anishinaabemowin words for bear and raven, allow Martha to remember her language when she is not allowed to speak it. It is significant that these are not stories about how she might be rescued from the school. Instead, Martha imagines stories about how she and her animal friends rescue her parents from dangerous situations (35). In these stories, Martha is able to take care of others, and she has an agency that allows her to fulfill her kinship responsibilities imaginatively in an environment which aims at suppressing all agency and kinship. In this way, Martha is able to imaginatively escape the residential school by "blotting out" the "dreary life of the school" (36).[80]

Her ability to escape imaginatively and to reconnect through story and memory is disrupted when Martha is sexually abused by Father Antoine. The novel refrains from describing the abuse in detail but states that the priest pulls her onto his lap "against her will," and "thrust[s] his hands under her clothing" (47). After this incident, Martha is "no longer able to use her imagination to escape the reality of life at the school" (48). I agree with Coupal's argument that Martha's abuse

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[80] In Anishinaabe author Ruby Slipperjack's *These Are My Words* (2017) and Nlakapamux author Shirley Sterling's *My Name is Seepeetza* (1992), the female protagonists employ similar strategies of remembering and imagining to maintain relationships to home while being in residential school. The books are written to resemble diaries and while their main characters are imagined, they draw from their authors' own experiences in residential school.

results in a "traumatic loss of her ability to story herself, to create a healthy life narrative by which she can live" (*Storied Truths* 203), but I would add that Martha's inability to create story speaks to the way in which the invasion of her very self harms Martha's ability to uphold relationships. Martha is forced to visit the priest "[i]n the weeks and months that followed" (48) and as the years pass, the priest is described as going further and further (53). Martha is no longer able to imagine stories that center around kinship relations. Instead, she imagines stories full of violence and revenge when she starts to "devise[…] imaginary tortures for [Father Antoine]" and she imagines how "she was lashing him as the nuns once beat her" and how he suffers in hell, "immersed in fire and brimstone" (57). These imaginings demonstrate how, in Martha's mind, Christian ideologies supplant Anishinaabe stories. Not unlike Saul Indian Horse, Martha experiences cognitive imperialism which, as discussed earlier, is Leanne Simpson's term for colonial ideologies that make it impossible for Indigenous people to think according to their own philosophies (*Dancing* 15-6).

Martha is not only robbed of her ability to re-imagine and uphold relationships through story, but the residential school also indirectly harms her relationships to her family when her mother refuses to listen to Martha's experiences at the school while she is home during summer (*As Long* 49). Another relationship is harmed when her aunt asks her to protect her little cousin at the school. Martha cannot fulfill this task due to the strict gender separation that the schools employed—a separation that was also directed toward severing (kinship) relationships (see McKegney, "pain, pleasure")—and Martha is eventually blamed for her cousin's death (55). Just as Martha is no longer able to take care of her kin in her imagination, the school makes it impossible for her to take care of her kin in the actual world. In addition to separating Martha physically from her family and the land, the school also indirectly harms relationships by effecting

the loss of trust when Martha's parents refuse to listen to their daughter's experiences of abuse. The way in which residential school creates the loss of trust is similarly described in Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* as discussed in Chapter 2. When Martha eventually returns to the reserve as a young woman, the extent to which the school has harmed the relationships she was embedded in as a child becomes visible. In addition to destroying trust, the school imposed a poor Euro-Christian education on Martha and prevented her from receiving an Anishinaabe education, which Martha would have needed for her life in the community. As Basil Johnston points out, Anishinaabeg adopt responsibilities to support the community and while "[y]outh are required to acquire skills such as hunting and fishing, sewing, and cooking," adults are "responsible for ensuring survival through caregiving and providing" (Johnston qtd. in Anderson 8). Martha was prevented from learning these things and her mother tells her that she "can't shoot a gun, set a net, light a fire" (*As Long* 59). Her mother also remarks: "when I was a girl, I could do these tings before I was ten" (59). The narrator is quick to explain the mother's harsh judgement for the assumed non-Indigenous reader and points out that "Martha's mother was not alone in finding it hard to love a child from whom she had become estranged after years of absence at residential school" (59). As the novel demonstrates, the school has harmed Martha's relationships with her family, community, and the land and has forcefully replaced the stories which capture and uphold these relationships with Christian settler colonial and ideologies.

Struggling with the loss of these relationships, Martha becomes depressed, and when addressing the issue of mental health, the novel once again focuses on stories. As Daniel Heath Justice points out, "sometimes the stories are noxious, bad medicine, and even when told with the best of motivations, they can't help but poison both the speaker and the listener" (*Why Indigenous* 2). The colonial ideologies that were imposed on Martha in residential school are such bad

medicine and they are described to impact the relationship Martha has to the land after her return by influencing how she perceives her environment: “The wind in the black spruce trees whispered that she came from bad seed, from a flawed inferior race […]. It said the nuns had been right […]. It said she was weak, friendless and unwelcome in her mother’s house, in her community and in her country” (*As Long* 60-1). In this scene, the land and its voices are covered with a layer of colonial ideologies, which demonstrates how cognitive imperialism transforms Martha’s perception and hence her relationships. While she remembered home as a comforting place during her first nights in school, she now perceives home as a sinister place. The description of “cold moonlight flood[ing] in through the open window, casting sinister shadows against the walls, and the normal sounds of the northern community assum[ing] a menacing air” (60) constitutes an antithesis to the description of Martha’s memories of her home discussed above. In Martha’s perception, even the community members and her other-than-human kin appear hostile: “Children running and playing behind her house were making fun of her, the hoot of an owl was a premonition of death, and the distant howling of wolves was a direct threat” (60). Martha experiences the bad medicine of settler colonial ideologies which, as Justice puts it, seep “into our bones and [eat] away at our spirits, undermining our potential, eroding our capacity to hold one another up and build affirming relationships” (Justice, *Why Indigenous* 3).

In this moment, the only Anishinaabe stories that Martha can remember are those which the novel ties to settler colonialism: Martha fears that a “malevolent force, perhaps a bearwalker, perhaps the Wendigo, was coming and was about to attack her” (*As Long* 61). Martha then falls asleep, and in her dream, a storyteller warns her that the Wendigo “can remove children from their mothers, steal their souls, make them hate themselves and their people, ruin their culture and turn them into soulless devils. Worse, it can change the children of these children into Wendigos” (62).

While addressing the ongoing intergenerational impacts of residential schools, the dream also foreshadows how Martha's future relationships to her own children will be impacted. At the same time, the storyteller offers her hope when he points out that "[t]he cycle will continue until a shaman arrives in the form of a raven to break the cycle" (62). As the narrator once again points out for non-Indigenous readers, to the people on the reserve "dreams were not the meaningless activity of cerebral neurons firing randomly during sleep but messages from the other world about the future" (63)—and the dream indeed foreshadows how Martha's daughter Raven will help to break the cycle as discussed further below.

First, however, the novel describes how Martha resorts to drinking in order to cope with her situation, and how after a short relationship with another residential school survivor on reserve, she gives birth to a son, Spider. Martha's inability to take care of others and to uphold relationships, which was caused by the residential school, is now further perpetuated by her drinking, and even though "[w]hen she was sober, Martha made an effort to feed Spider, to play with him and to keep him clean. More often than not, she drank too much and forgot he was even there" (77). Eventually, Spider is taken away by Ontario's Children's Aid Society. Martha's separation from her child reflects the cycles of colonial violence which her dream foreshadowed, and the novel draws connections between the residential school system and Canada's 60s Scoop—connections which have also been pointed out by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, whose report argues that "the interventions of social agencies reflected colonial attitudes and attempts to assimilate Aboriginal children and continue the work begun by residential schools" ("Families" 24). That Spider is later depicted to be suffering from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome demonstrates yet another way in which residential schools harmed intergenerational relationships. When discussing these complicated relationships, the novel, similar to *Porcupines and China Dolls* and *Indian Horse*,

does not offer a linear healing narrative but draws a more complicated picture of Martha's struggles. After Spider is taken away from her, Martha is at first able to improve her relationship to her mother when she starts learning to speak Anishinaabemowin, to interact with the land in traditional ways, and to adopt the roles that are expected of her as an Anishinaabekwe in the community (80). After Martha's daughter Raven is born, however, Martha decides to leave Raven with her grandmother and to move to Toronto in order to look for Spider. By abandoning her daughter, Martha yet again severs relationships, and Bartleman utilizes this act of abandonment in order to raise the issue of youth suicide in Ontario First Nation communities.

Tanya Talaga speaks of "an acute crisis among children and youth" (*All Our Relations* 173) when she addresses youth suicide in Northern Ontario Indigenous communities. According to the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), which represents 49 Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario, "[t]here have been more than 500 suicides across in NAN First Nations from 1986 to 2016. More than 70 were children aged 10-14; nearly 200 were youth aged 15-20" (NAN "Backgrounder"). Bartleman's novel introduces the topic rather bluntly when the narrator states that "just as matters seemed to be going their way, the young people began to kill themselves" (*As Long* 82). When she hears about the suicides, Martha thinks about how "parents, grandparents and great-grandparents had spent their childhoods and much of their teenage years in residential schools where no one ever hugged them" and about how "[d]ysfunction had cascaded down through the generations with survivors neglecting their children as they had been neglected" (84).[81] The novel also emphasizes that the crisis is further perpetuated by the disruption of relationships to the land and the other-than-human kin—relationships which used to be captured and

[81] The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identifies factors for suicides in Indigenous communities. One factor is "early childhood trauma (e.g., disrupted relations with caregivers)" (*Choosing Life* 20-1). Bartleman's novel identifies disrupted intergenerational relationships as lying at the heart of the crisis and attributes this disruption to the residential school system while demonstrating how disruptions are then cyclically perpetuated.

strengthened by stories. In the novel's present, however, fewer community members "sat around their campfires listening to the elders tell their stories" (85) and instead, "[m]ore and more people were now attending services at new churches and accepting what they were told on Sunday mornings as the literal truth" (85). With Christian colonial ideologies being perpetuated on reserves, "[t]he old view that the land was sacred and that there was mystic power and current running through and uniting all things was being quietly abandoned" (85). The fact that Martha's daughter Raven, who grows up learning traditional teachings from her grandmother, still becomes part of a suicide pact when she feels abandoned by her mother demonstrates that the novel emphasizes the importance of all relationships that constitute an Anishinaabe identity.

That Martha spends more than a decade in Toronto without finding her son, only to then accidentally meet him on the street when she decides to move back to the reserve after the death of her mother has been criticized by reviewers as too coincidental (see for example de Vries "Generations Lost"). This use of coincidence, however, makes it possible for the novel to further focus on the intergenerational relationships between Martha and her children. When Martha and Spider then return to the reserve and Martha meets her daughter for the first time since Raven was an infant, Raven is "torn between joy at seeing her and anger at being abandoned" and asks her mother: "'Who are you? […] I've never seen you before. What do you want from me?'" (*As Long* 175). The novel once again emphasizes the disruption of intergenerational relationships and the cyclical nature of the perpetuation of these disruptions, when, "[w]ithout realizing it, Martha [begins] treating her daughter the same way the nuns had dealt with her when she was a girl" (200). When Martha is confronted with the dysfunctional relationship to her own daughter, she starts drinking again, and when Raven confesses that she is part of a suicide pact, Martha, "in the grip of her depression, and either drunk or hungover most of the time" (203), is unable to listen. Finally,

on its last pages, the novel's theory of intergenerational testimony and the ways in which it potentially enables the restoration of disrupted relationships is established.

Raven finally tells the community's Elder Joshua about the suicide pact, and Joshua suggests to have a healing circle.[82] Raven, however, is sceptical at first and points out that " '[j]ust holding another meeting where everyone talks forever and never comes to any conclusions won't help'" (206). Joshua then suggests a healing circle that invites Father Antoine, who abused community members in residential school. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, which was published in the same year as Bartleman's novel, Leanne Simpson envisions what the truth and reconciliation process would have looked like if it had been shaped by Anishinaabe legal systems which are fundamentally "restorative" (23). Simpson champions an approach that is similar to "the Community Holistic Circles of Healing in Hollow Water First Nation" where "the abuser must take responsibility for his or her actions and is required to sit in a circle of community Elders, the extended family of the survivor and his or her extended family" (23). The healing circle in *As Long as the Rivers Flow* is somewhat similar to this approach. However, because of the fact that Joshua intends to invite Father Antoine so that his victims can forgive him and "start to heal themselves" (207), the novel at first seems to run the risk of championing a depoliticized healing circle that focuses more on trauma than on restorative justice for the impacts of systemic colonial violence. The novel therefore seems to be part of those discourses of trauma and healing that are criticized in Chapter 1. When depicting the healing circle itself, however, the novel changes course, and as Coupal points out, "[w]hat might seem to be an over-simplified healing process of apology and forgiveness assumes greater complexity and substance as the healing circle becomes a space to

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[82] During his time as Lieutenant Governor, Bartleman himself witnessed numerous healing circles. The purpose of these circles was "the whole issue of strengthening families" ("Words" 56:25 – 56:28).

share and reclaim personal stories" (*Storied Truths* 205). While I agree with Coupal's assessment of the novel's healing circle, my own interpretations of the workings of the circle differ from that of Coupal, who argues that the circle constitutes "a therapeutic site of group testimony" (*Storied Truths* 205). I argue that intergenerational relationships and traditional storytelling are key to the healing circle's working, just as they are key to the overall novel. I further argue that the novel establishes a theory of intergenerational testimony.

The community's healing circle is attended by Martha and her children, by the parents of the youth who died committing suicide, by residential school survivors, and by Father Antoine, who is accompanied by his superior bishop. When he is handed the talking stick, Father Antoine shows no remorse and instead emphasizes the "good memories of the years I spent with so many of you here in this room tonight up at the residential school" (*As Long* 227). The priest's words are met with angry shouting by community members who directly confront him with the abuse he committed. Still lacking any remorse, the priest denies the abuse, defending himself by assuring: "I love Indians. My own grandmother was a Huron from Wendake near Quebec City" (229). The novel here not only ridicules ideologies of colonial benevolence, but it also avoids opening a space for colonial apologies. The novel instead bestows the agency over the healing circle—and eventually over the future of their own community—on the survivors and intergenerational survivors. Thereby, the novel ultimately imagines the healing circle as a space for self-determination emerging from (intergenerational) relationships and story. The parents of the three children who killed themselves start sharing stories about their children's lives, the relationships they had with them, and how they should have listened more closely to what the children had to say (229-33). Raven stands up and speaks out about the suicide pact, about the youths' feeling that their parents did not care about them (234), and the feeling of not having a future (236).

Emphasizing the importance of intergenerational relationships, Raven states: “I just wanted my mother to say she loved me. I think the others just needed some reason to live and the love of their families” (236). After Raven’s testimony, “[t]he parents, jolted back to reality, straightened up in their seats and began hugging each other” (236). The way in which Raven’s words transform the community resembles the way in which the disclosure in *Porcupines and China Dolls* transforms the listeners. Even though there is no epic battle in Bartleman’s novel, the way in which testimony is described to strengthen relationships between those giving testimony and their audience as well as among the audience members themselves is similar. The novel suggests that Raven’s testimony restores her relationship with her mother when “Martha took Raven in her arms and hugged her and whispered that she loved her and that she had always loved her” (237).

Her daughter’s testimony encourages Martha, and, “grasping the talking stick in one hand, she took the floor” (237). Martha herself publicly speaks up for the first time, and the fact that she does so in the presence of her children speaks not only to how testimony might restore intergenerational relationships, but also to how intergenerational support undergirds testimony. In her collection of poetry *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, Cree poet and residential school survivor Louise Halfe turns a quotation by Rupert Ross, author of *Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Aboriginal Reality*, into a poem. In this quotation/poem, Ross reminisces about the TRC sharing circles and states: “I kept wishing / that every teller would have two grandchildren / beside them as they spoke, a boy, a girl, / so they could support the old people / as they fell into their dark holes / of memory” (76). The novel suggests that Raven offers Martha this support. At the same time, Raven learns more about her mother’s story,[83] and the novel thereby speaks to ways in which

[83] Cree author David Alexander Robertson and Scott B. Henderson’s graphic novel series *7 Generations*, which tells the story of Edwin, a young Cree man who attempts to commit suicide, also emphasizes that Edwin needs to learn about his family’s history—and especially about his father’s experiences in residential school. As Judith Leggat points

during the TRC's sharing circles, survivors who testified "remembered so that their families could understand what happened" (*Honouring the Truth* 272).

As discussed in Chapter 1, Dovie Thomason's story "The Spirit Survives" emphasizes the importance of understanding testimony as a process of intergenerational witnessing. *As Long as the Rivers Flow* additionally emphasizes that intergenerational witnessing is a reciprocal process: not only is it important for intergenerational survivors to know the stories of their parents, it is also important for the residential school survivors to know the stories of their children. The novel therefore showcases not only the importance of telling stories but also the importance of listening, and therefore, like the other examples discussed in this dissertation, establishes parallels between testimony and storytelling. These parallels are even more pronounced when, after her mother and the other community members have decided to indeed forgive their abuser, Raven speaks up again and shares another story. With this story, Raven testifies to a dream she has had the night before and in which she "visited the spirit world […] and met Nanabush" (238). In her dream, Raven seeks guidance from Nanabush, a figure who, according to Leanne Simpson, "is also a powerful teacher, our first teacher" (*Dancing* 73). Nanabush is a figure who appears in stories that are characterized as aandisokaanan (sacred stories) such as for example the Anishinaabe re-creation story. Raven's story of her dream therefore brings together elements from dibaajimowinan (personal stories) and aandisokaanan—a braiding that is similar to Jeremiah's testimonial plays in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Raven's testimony of her dream and of her encounter with Nanabush suggests that Raven is able to embody the teachings and values that are encapsulated in aandisokaanan and to incorporate them into her own life and the dibaajimowinan that it inspires.

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out in her reading of the graphic novel series, "healing can move in both directions across generations" (Leggat 39). This bidirectional movement is also visible in *As Long as the Rivers Flow*.

Raven's testimony furthermore reminds the community of their traditional stories and their traditional teacher, and according to the novel, this reminder changes the community members and "[t]hey now understood that the land they lived on was sacred, and by forgiving their enemies and connecting with their ancient culture, they could find the strength to heal their wounds" (*As Long* 240). Raven's testimonial braiding of aandisokanaan and dibaajimowinan therefore restores relationships by reminding the community members of the teachings of traditional stories. Métis scholar Kim Anderson prefaces the introduction to her book *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine* with a quote by Mosôm Danny Musqua, who states that it will be the young people who have "got to dig up the medicines, to heal the people. And the medicines, in this case, are the teachings" (Musqua qtd. in Anderson 3). Musqua's quote captures what Raven accomplishes at the end of the novel: she embodies Anishinaabe teachings that work as medicine and she imparts them through testimony and storytelling. The fact that *As Long as the Rivers Flow* ends with Raven's story and the community's transformation once again testifies to the importance that the novel attributes to stories and their ability to capture and restore relationships.

3.3 Residential School Novels as Acts of Witnessing

At the end of the previous chapter, I discussed the need to decolonize the concept of "fiction" in the context of residential school literature. While the two novels discussed in the previous chapter are usually categorized as *fictionalized* life-writings, the two novels discussed in this chapter are more firmly located in the Western literary category of fiction due to the fact that the authors are not drawing from personal residential school experiences. However, I do remain critical of the concept of fiction in the context of residential school literature. I am critical because of the connotations of "imaginary" and hence "invention" that "fiction" carries, especially for a

mainstream readership. I am also critical because I am convinced that Indigenous storytelling concepts once again offer better conceptual alternatives. A remark made by one of the reviewers of Bartleman's novel offers a good starting point for thinking about the place of *As Long as the Rivers Flow* and *Indian Horse* within discourses of truth, fiction, testimony, and storytelling:

> Reading Bartleman's novel, I couldn't help asking myself why the author chose to tell this horrific story of the Indian Residential Schools, and their enduring effects on Native people, as fiction. There is so much actual 'truth' in Bartleman's descriptions of life for residential school students, that I suspect the actual stories of former students could readily replace this fictional one. (Charleson n.p.)

The reviewer's comment gestures towards the very prevalent notion of a binary relationship between "truth" and "fiction," and it resonates with John Beverley's argument in the context of Latin American testimonio where Beverley emphatically excludes fictional literature from the genre of testimonio since "fictionality" deprives testimonio "of its power to engage the reader" (Beverley 40).[84] As also pointed out in Chapter 1, Indigenous literary scholars such as Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew and Algonquin scholar Michelle Coupal work against this binary opposition of truth and fiction by highlighting the important ways in which fiction can function as testimony. I generally agree with Coupal's argument that there is a category of "Indigenous fictional testimony" which "gives evidence to the experiences of individuals or communities" ("Teaching Indigenous Literature" 477). At the same time, however, I think that the status of the two novels discussed in this chapter is even more complicated. I argue that in addition to

[84] Beverley also argues that testimonio is conveyed by survivors who are not necessarily literary writers. Testimonio is therefore characterized by a certain rawness which contributes to a 'truth effect' in ways that polished literary writing does not (Beverley 32-3). I disagree with Beverley, and as I hope to have demonstrated throughout this thesis, there are numerous ways in which well-crafted storytelling enhances the effects of testimony.

functioning as testimony, the two novels constitute acts of witnessing—and I argue that the concept of witnessing offers a helpful alternative to the concept of fiction when it comes to understanding the workings of these novels.

When discussing Dovie Thomason's "The Spirit Survives," I pointed out how Thomason's story does not claim the status of an eye-witness account. Even though some elements of her story are based on personal experience, others are not—and Thomason reflects on what is essentially an act of braiding when she says: "[t]here are some stories we all need to tell" (03:42) and not only tell but retell by "adding our voice to it" (03:42). I discussed this kind of braiding of personal story with other stories in relation to the two novels in the previous chapter. Here, I want to think more specifically of acts of witnessing that retell (and thereby take care of) others' stories. These acts emphasize a relationship between the speaker who acts as witness and the stories they retell by including what Thomason describes as one's own added voice.[85] When we are witnessing a story, Métis activist Samantha Nock argues in a blog post on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, "that story becomes part of us. When you witness someone's story, […] you are carrying a part of that person with you now" ("Being a Witness" n.p.). In the context of the TRC, the imperative to witness residential school survivors' stories became a dominant paradigm. The TRC emphasized the importance of witnessing survivors' stories, appointed prominent honorary

[85] When we witness others' stories and share them, we create testimony—even though this testimony differs from the one that is given by the survivor. Shoshana Felman quotes Eli Wiesel on the "loneliness" of testimony and includes a line from the Jewish poet Paul Celan's poem "Aschenglorie" ("Ash Glory") which reads: "Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen" ("No one bears witness for the witness") to make the argument that testimony "is a radically unique, noninterchangeable and solitary burden" (Felman and Laub 3). The emphasis that Holocaust testimony puts on the role of eye-witness testimony is important, however, I think that especially in Indigenous contexts, witness-testimonies as they emerge through acts of witnessing stories can also play crucial roles because of the ways in which they emerge from and reinforce relationships.

witnesses, and established principles of witnessing which foregrounded the need to not only carry the stories one witnesses but to share them further (TRC "Honorary Witness).[86]

Lee Maracle describes how acts of witnessing inspire story when someone else's story is reflected upon, and shared further by mythmakers.[87] According to Maracle, mythmakers are storiers who "are present to bear witness, see, and understand the subject under study" ("Oratory on Oratory" 57) and "[o]nce an understanding is achieved, the mythmakers story it up in a way that they hope leads humans toward social maturity and growth" (57). Maracle herself draws parallels between mythmakers and novelists because both, she says, contribute to the creation and recording of "a vast body of patterned movement and conduct observed through many sets of eyes" (65). Mythmakers essentially take already "storied observations" into the process of mythmaking in order "to deepen the story, broaden it, and find intersecting, connecting moments" (67). In the context of residential school testimony, acts of witnessing play an important role—especially when the truth is still not heard by mainstream society. Mythmaking as described by Maracle is similar to the ways in which Richard Wagamese and James Bartleman perform acts of witnessing with their novels: both witness other survivors' stories and retell them while simultaneously deepening and broadening them, and they put themselves in relation to the story (or stories) by adding their own voices.

Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* is an act of witnessing through which he honours the stories of residential school survivors he listened to. In his acknowledgements, Wagamese names

[86] For a detailed discussion of witnessing in the context of the TRC, see Gaertner "Aboriginal Principles."
[87] It is important to be aware that "mythmakers" as they are described by Maracle are a specifically Sto:Lo tradition and not an Anishinaabe tradition. An understanding of Sto:Lo processes of witnessing is still important for any engagement with the two novels because it is not unreasonable to assume that both Wagamese and Bartleman as they wrote their novels were aware of the TRC's principles of witnessing which were inspired by West Coast Salish traditions.

residential school survivors, stating that "I have never forgotten your stories and your experiences with the schools. Even if you're gone now, the spirit of them, and you, are here somewhere" (n.p.). *Indian Horse* is not fiction in the sense of invention but instead Wagamese's retelling, deepening, and honouring of other survivors' stories. Even though Saul never existed, Fred Sasakamoose, who became a hockey player after residential school, did.[88] Furthermore, Wagamese might not have been a residential school survivor himself, but he was an intergenerational survivor and thereby strongly affected by the impacts of the residential school system. As he points out in *One Story, One Song*: "I am a victim of Canada's residential school system. I never attended a residential school, so I cannot say that I survived one. However, my parents and my extended family members did. The pain they endured became my pain, too" (28). Wagamese further describes how members of his family "were filled with bitterness from their residential school experiences, and that unhealed energy erupted often in drunkenness and violence" (*One Native* 241). The way in which Wagamese describes residential school as a looming "spectre in our midst" (*One Story* 28) resonates with Saul's description of residential school as "a spectre in our camp" (*Indian Horse* 8), which demonstrates how Wagamese adds his own voice and experience to the story of a residential school survivor. *Indian Horse* also straightforwardly reflects on the responsibilities of sharing residential school stories when Saul, in his testimony, intertwines his own residential school memories with the stories of nine children who suffered under the brutality of the residential school system and for whom he performs an act of commemoration with his personal narrative. Saul's recollection of his time at school is interspersed with passages such as this one:

[88] Sasakamoose testified at the TRC event in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and his testimony can be found as video "SP043" in the online collection of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

> Sheila Jack. They'd brought her all the way from Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island. She was twelve. In the old way of her people, she'd been raised by her grandmother and been taught the traditional protocols of the medicine way. Her grandmother was a shaman, and Sheila would take her place one day. When she arrived at St. Germ's the kids were in awe of her. She walked into the school quietly, humbly, regally almost. [...] We surrounded her like acolytes and that enraged the nuns [...] and they set out to break her. (50)

There are eight more passages similar to this one, and in all of them Saul tells the story of one child's experiences in residential school. Saul therefore not only shares his own experiences with the reader but also shares the stories of others and thereby performs an act of witnessing. Some of these children died in the school and where never able to share these truths. Most passages open with the evocation of the child's name, which counters the schools' acts of renaming and the anonymity that is still prevalent in archives where pictures of children do not include their names. Wagamese weaves stories of other residential school survivors together in a process of witnessing and mythmaking. Wagamese adds to these stories and also puts himself in relation to them, which is visible when he includes personal experiences in Saul's story. The scene in which Saul and his grandmother seek shelter in a railroad depot resonates with Wagamese's description of how he and his sister once "huddled in the railroad depot, cold, hungry and crying" (*One Story* 28).[89] The way in which Saul embodies Wagamese's personal experiences and the stories which Wagamese witnesses is reminiscent of the way in which acts of witnessing establish a particular form of

[89] Jack Robinson also identifies Wagamese's personal experiences in *Indian Horse*, however, his interpretation makes a strict distinction between "fiction" and "memoir" rather than acknowledging an act of story relationality (92).

relationality in which, as Nock in the quote above argues, one carries a part of the person whose story one witnesses.

As pointed out earlier in the chapter, James Bartleman's novel is similarly based on the experiences residential school survivors shared with him as well as on observations he himself made when visiting Northern Ontario Indigenous communities. How close the events in the book are to Bartleman's observations becomes visible when one listens to Bartleman speaking about one observation he made during his travels in northern communities:

> what is very common up in those communities is that when there is a suicide pact among the kids, the first one dies, and then the others are visited. They don't say in their dreams but probably in their dreams—cause it's a very real things for members of the community—are visited by the person who killed herself. And the person says: 'Its your turn. Nobody has ever kept their word with us. Now you have given your word and you have to die.' And the second one dies. And then those two spirits visit the third. ("Words" 11:01: - 12:03)

By including the stories that he has heard from others, Bartleman writes a novel that is an act of witnessing which emerges from relationships Bartleman created in the past. At the same time, the novel is an act of what Michelle Coupal calls "public testimony" (*Storied Truths* 191), which reaches out to a broader audience.[90]

As I hope to have demonstrated, there are important differences between the workings and the purposes of the novels discussed in the previous chapter and the novels discussed in the present

[90] Gerald P. McKinley argues that Bartleman "has created a narrative world that is part fictional and part personal testimony" (138), which once again reflects the Western binary between truth and fiction and which, I think, is neither productive nor completely accurate in the case of Bartleman's novel.

chapter. Tomson Highway and Robert Arthur Alexie testify by blending their own life stories with other stories in order to tell their personal truth about their experiences. Wagamese and Bartleman, however, perform acts of witnessing others' stories: they retell stories that they have heard and add their own voices to them. Thereby, they put themselves in relation to these stories, and witnessing becomes an act of relating in two ways: as an act of retelling and as an act of empathy. The acts of witnessing that are performed by Wagamese and Bartleman are furthermore acts of mythmaking as the authors deepen the truths of the stories that they heard by creating characters that come to carry this network of woven stories. Eventually, the novel is the form through which these acts of witnessing are shared further.

Anishinaabe story scholars emphasize the importance of listening to story in order to embody their teachings in one's life, and their insights also teach about the importance of testimony and witnessing. Going back to the genre of aandisokaanan, sacred stories, I find an analogy helpful that Kathleen Westcott draws between these stories and a garden. She points out that a planted garden "exists regardless of who knows about it" (Garroutte and Westcott 68) and that "[a]t every moment, things are changing all around the garden" (68). A sacred story, Westcott argues, is similar: "it is living… it's a living part of its living context" even if it is not told or, as Westcott puts it, "even when no one is visiting the story" (68). Westcott's statement testifies to a power of Indigenous stories that defies the colonial argument that oral stories need to be recorded before they vanish, as discussed in Chapter 1. However, it is important to be aware of Westcott's phrase "living context" because, as Leanne Simpson's idea of dibaajimowinan as echoing aandisokanaan suggests, sacred stories are this powerful because their teachings are embodied and lived by Anishinaabeg in their everyday lives. As mentioned before, Simpson warns that "[i]f we do not live our stories and our teachings, the echoes become fainter and will eventually disappear"

(*Dancing* 105). I argue that this understanding of the relationship between story and Anishinaabeg lives houses important teachings about testimony and witnessing: as long as residential school survivors' truths are not embodied by the people in Canada (and by embodied I mean that Canadians are aware of colonial violence and injustice and adopt responsibilities of redress, decolonization, and reconciliation), these stories need to be retold, witnessed, and shared. All four novels discussed in this thesis offer important contributions to this process. As my readings of the novels suggest, it is also important for Indigenous people to embody residential school survivors' truths, namely for the sake of understanding one's history, for the sake of entering relationships, and for the sake of learning from the teachings of resilience and resurgence that are incorporated in these stories. The following chapter will take a closer look at residential school survivors' testimonies in order to demonstrate how they establish relationships and teach about resilience and resurgence.

Chapter 4: Listening Differently: An Analysis of Survivors' TRC Testimonies

By telling residential school stories, the novels discussed in the previous chapters reflect on residential school experiences and their aftermath. Simultaneously, they reflect on what it means to share one's story: what it means to give testimony. All of the novels emphasize the importance of community-specific Indigenous stories and bring storytelling and testimony together to demonstrate how Indigenous testimony is underpinned by storytelling principles. Thereby, the novels develop theories on testimony as a form of storytelling, and they do so through the act of storytelling itself. Each of the novels I have discussed foregrounds different aspects of residential school testimony that can be traced back to principles of traditional storytelling (creative retelling in Highway, interpersonal collaboration in Alexie, relationships between the body and the land in Wagamese, and intergenerational witnessing in Bartleman). At the same time, the novels' theories of residential school testimony interconnect in numerous ways. As a synthesis of all the elements of residential school testimony that are addressed by the novels' theories, I propose that there are five main principles at play in residential school testimonies. All five principles are grounded in Indigenous storytelling traditions, and all five principles contribute to the (re)creation of relationships in different ways. Furthermore, these principles are at play in different testimonies to different extents, and they do not exist in a hierarchical relationship. Instead, they are interconnected and reinforce each other. The first principle is that testimony is a process during which a speaker re-tells their life story from the vantage point of the present moment and braids it with other stories to enhance understanding and knowledge. The second principle is that testimony is a highly relational process that emerges from the interaction between teller and listener. Both of these principles are highlighted in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and *Porcupines and China Dolls*. The

third principle is that testimony is a process during which the speaker embodies relationships to the land and the other-than-human. *Indian Horse* puts a strong emphasis on this principle. The fourth principle is that testimony is an intergenerational process. This principle is predominant in *As Long As the Rivers Flow*. The fifth principle is that testimony is a process of telling one's own story but potentially also a process of witnessing others' stories. This principle is strongly emphasized in both *Indian Horse* and *As Long as the Rivers Flow*.

My goal in this chapter is to analyze to what extent the principles above are at play in the testimonies that survivors gave at hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to reflect on how survivors (re)create relationships when their testimonies reflect these principles. I argue that survivors' testimonies are informed by Indigenous storytelling principles, and that the theories that are developed in the novels can help a listener (especially a non-Indigenous listener such as myself) to see how Indigenous storytelling affects residential school testimony and how this affects relationships. The novels and their theoretical reflections on the interconnections between storytelling and testimony can teach the audience to listen to survivors' testimonies differently and help them to better understand the workings of story. I begin with a short discussion of how the TRC's statement-gathering process was set up.[91] First, I summarize some of the critique of this setup by other scholars, then I analyze the extent to which the TRC parameters allow for the aforementioned testimonial principles to occur. I will then take a closer look at the testimonies themselves in order to analyze to what extent survivors' testimonies reflect the five principles, and how they work toward the restoration of relationships.[92] Here, my discussion is organized around

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[91] The TRC referred to the life stories that survivors shared as "statements" rather than "testimonies." There is no official explanation, but this choice could be read as an attempt to distinguish the TRC process from all simultaneously ongoing legal processes such as the Common Experience Payment and the Independent Assessment Process.

[92] I was confronted with the question of whether to discuss the TRC testimonies in past or present tense. Performance studies scholar Philip Auslander reflects on a similar question when working with audio and video recordings of music performances. Auslander refers to audio recordings in the present tense because for him, these performances "are

the different kinds of relationships that are affected (and, at times, effected): the relationship to one's story, the relationship to one's kin, the relationship to one's community, and the relationship to the land and its other-than-human-entities. As Indigenous scholars (such as Daniel Heath Justice and Glen Coulthard) whose work focuses on Indigenous relationality emphasize, Indigeneity is rooted in the ongoing process of engaging in the relationships to kin, community, the land, and the other-than-human and accepting the rights, but also the responsibilities that come with them. The restoration of these relationships therefore contributes to Indigenous resurgence. My discussion will furthermore be attentive to how the testimonies affect (and effect) relationships to non-Indigenous audience members and the commissioners themselves. The TRC gathered about 5,000 statements, and when choosing testimonies that were given at community hearings for my analysis, I focused on place and community: I chose testimonies given at places and in communities where the novels are set and testimonies that were given by survivors who come from Anishinaabeg, Cree, and Gwich'in contexts. My selection includes hearings in Manitoba (Thompson), Ontario (Manitoulin Island, Thunder Bay), and the Northwest Territories (Tulita, Aklavik).

Between 2009 and 2014, the TRC gathered thousands of testimonies from residential school survivors and, in this process of truth-telling, brought together residential school survivors, intergenerational survivors, and non-Indigenous Canadians. Since the TRC began its work in 2008,[93] scholars have scrutinized the commission's format and its work. It is not my intention to

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taking place at the moment I'm listening to them" ("Sound" 2). He discusses video recordings in the past tense because he experiences them "much more as historical records documenting a specific event that took place at a particular time and place" ("Sound" 2). I decided to discuss the TRC testimonies in present tense because although they are historical records, they are first and foremost acts of storytelling, and as such, their workings actively involve their audience—including viewer of the recording whose active engagement is required in the process of witnessing. In this chapter, I therefore refer to specific moments and processes that are visible in the recordings I witnessed in present tense.

[93] The TRC first started its work with Justice Harry S. LaForme, Claudette Dumont-Smith, and Jane Brewin Morley as commissioners. After disagreements about how to proceed with the commission's work, the commissioners stepped back in late 2008 and early 2009. Then, Justice Murray Sinclair, Wilton Littlechild, and Marie Wilson were appointed in 2009. For a detailed description of the this change of commissioners, see Miller *Residential Schools*.

rehearse all the many thoughtful arguments that have been made. I do want to highlight, however, the thoughts of some scholars who criticize the way in which the TRC gathered testimonies and who articulate what they identify as the main flaws of the TRC. My purpose is to later demonstrate how survivors, through their testimonies, were able to mitigate many of these "flaws." Indigenous scholars such as, for example, Leanne Simpson have argued that the TRC format was too Western and did not follow Indigenous protocols of justice (*Dancing* 22-3). Other scholars have argued that the discourse of reconciliation did not include political issues such as treaty rights, Indigenous land claims, and sovereignty (Alfred "Restitution" 181). Dian Million argues that the TRC "reaffirms the people's systemic inequality and endemic social suffering as a pathology, a wound that is solely an outcome of past colonial policies" ("Trauma" 6). David Garneau states his conviction that the truth and reconciliation process is "primarily a non-Indigenous project designed to reconcile settlers with their dark history in order that they might live in this territory more comfortably" (Garneau and Yeh 74). His critique resonates with Paulette Regan's warning that TRC testimonies potentially become a spectacle that allows settler audiences to "feel good about feeling bad" and therefore allows them to feel absolved from the responsibility of taking any further action (*Unsettling* 47).

When scholars discuss the structure of the Canadian TRC, many of them start by discussing its legal potential, its judicial abilities—or rather the lack thereof. Roland Chrisjohn and Tanya Wasacase, for example, question the TRC's ability to uncover truths about residential school, since the commission can "subpoena no witness," and "compel no testimony," and "requisition no document" (222).[94] Ronald Niezen sets out to give a description of the TRC's setup and

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[94] Rosemary Nagy reconstructs the history of the TRC's formation and describes how the question of whether the TRC should possess the power to subpoena was discussed in the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement negotiations. Based on interviews with participants, Nagy points out that the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) argued for the TRC to have the power to subpoena, while the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS), the

acknowledges that, when compared to other truth and reconciliation commissions, "Canada's TRC to a unique degree gives preference to information-gathering and dissemination over judicial process" (3). While Niezen's description of the TRC might seem neutral at a first glance, his word choice betrays that he considers the focus on information gathering instead of judicial processes a flaw rather than a strength.[95] Niezen discusses how the commission "is prevented from 'naming names,'" (4) how it "has been prevented" from receiving names into the record, and how, from the outset, it has been released "into a limited enclosure, with no range of authority that might lead to some sort of reckoning for the responsible or extend the information it receives beyond a focus on victim narratives" (5). While Niezen never straightforwardly states it, his choice of words such as "prevented" or "limited" suggests that he perceives what he calls the Commission's "a-judicial qualities" (4) as a flaw. As these quotations demonstrate, Niezen's and Chrisjohn and Wasacase's discussions of the TRC evoke discourses around Western judicial systems to which the TRC is—at times implicitly and at times explicitly—compared. In both scholarly works, this comparison seems to be fuelled by a worry that a lack of judicial qualities might diminish the potential for justice. Chrisjohn and Wasacase point out that the TRC was not designed to produce legal justice and provocatively ask: "What is a succession of individuals testifying publicly about painful

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churches and the government argued against the power to subpoena (210-1). According to Nagy, the IRSSS and the Protestant churches argued against the power to subpoena because of their focus on "restorative justice, healing, and reconciliation" (211), while the Catholic church and the government did not want these powers "for strategically defensive reasons" (211). Looking at Ireland's dispute resolution for Industrial School Survivors, where the "Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse had been held up for two years by the Catholic Church contesting subpoenas in court," the AFN "realized that such powers would hold up the truth and reconciliation process and lead to more litigation" (211). I agree with TRC critics that the way in which certain parties to the settlement agreement favoured the TRC's lack of judicial qualities in order to protect themselves from being held accountable for past crimes is highly problematic. However, I think it is also important to note that the Indian Residential School Survivors Society called for a process that focused on community events with national witnesses (Nagy 214)—which the TRC was able to achieve in the form that it had. We might not have all the survivor statements that we have today if the commission had been held up by litigation because of contested subpoenas. It is now on the listeners of these statements, however, to engage in meaningful ways and to work toward societal change and justice.

[95] I am using the word "strength" here because I think that the TRC's non-judicial nature allowed for a greater focus on Indigenous communities and survivors' stories—even though the Western format of the commission still entailed certain constraints as discussed later in this chapter.

memories actually aimed at accomplishing?" (225). In this chapter, I am less interested in what the TRC as an institution aimed at accomplishing. I am more interested in what survivors themselves were potentially able to accomplish with their testimonies in terms of the restoration of relationships. As this chapter will demonstrate, survivors' testimonies are accomplishing more than providing evidence of past experiences—and most certainly, they do more than, as Wasacase and Chrisjohn put it dismissively, "complaining publicly" (225). I worry that if we, as scholars, focus too much on comparing the TRC to Western judicial institutions and processes, we run the risk of evaluating survivors' testimonies according to the standards of Western courtroom testimony. As discussed in Chapter 1, these standards of Western testimony are often incommensurable with Indigenous worldviews, and they are certainly incommensurable with Indigenous storytelling principles. Analyzing the TRC testimonies according to the principles of courtroom testimony prevents any listener from perceiving what survivors' stories are potentially able to accomplish in non-legal terms. In order to identify the potential effects of the TRC testimonies, I will therefore analyze the TRC's parameters according to the residential school testimony principles identified above rather than focusing on its judicial qualities.

Schedule N of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) offers a framework for all TRC activities, but my analysis focuses on those parts that concern survivors' testimonies—which were "the strongest emphasis of the TRC throughout its existence" (Miller, *Residential Schools* 215). As part of a settlement agreement, Schedule N originates from litigation and it is, therefore, naturally rooted within Western legal traditions.[96] This does not mean,

[96] Because of its litigation background, the IRSSA drew boundaries and defined who was eligible under the settlement agreement and who was not. While anyone could testify at the TRC events, the IRSSA only applied to survivors of schools mentioned in the agreement. Day school survivors and the survivors of many Métis schools were excluded. Cree poet Gregory Scofield addresses this in his poem "Dangerous Sound," where he thinks about ways in which those who have been excluded by Western courtroom processes can still be included via processes of witnessing (73).

however, that all of the TRC's framework is. As I will demonstrate, Schedule N creates spaces in which the five principles of residential school testimony may be adopted to a large extent.[97] I agree with Julia Emberley, who points out that the production of testimonies as done by the TRC "is not entirely disconnected from the cultural production of Indigenous storytelling" ("Epistemic Heterogeneity" 150). Schedule N does not specify the form in which survivors were supposed to give testimony, but it stipulates that the TRC needed to "provide a holistic, culturally appropriate and safe setting for former students, their families and communities as they come forward to the Commission" (*Honouring* 340). As I will demonstrate, the TRC's focus on holism and culturally appropriate settings made room for the five testimonial principles introduced above. The way in which the TRC put a strong emphasis on "support[ing] commemoration of former Indian Residential School students and their families" (*Honouring* 340) speaks directly to the principle of witnessing others' stories. Schedule N suggests both Indigenous methodologies (such as oral and legal traditions) and non-Indigenous methodologies (historical fact-finding and archival methodologies of statement taking) (*Honouring* 342-3). It is because of this methodological mix that the survivors' way of giving testimony at times clashed with the TRC's format.

In terms of community hearings,[98] the kind of TRC events that this chapter focuses on,[99] Schedule N states: "community events will be designed by communities and respond to the needs of the former students, their families and those affected by the IRS legacy" (*Honouring* 347). The

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[97] The TRC is only one element of the IRSSA. Other prominent elements are the Common Experience Payment (CEP) and the Independent Assessment Process (IAP). Both, CEP and IAP testimonies emerge from non-Indigenous legal contexts. And although these processes led to some financial redress, I argue they gave survivors very little agency over their stories. Testimonies were shaped by questions and necessary questionnaires; the demand for specificity when talking about abuse potentially led to survivors' re-traumatization and re-victimization.

[98] The TRC also facilitated National Events which brought together survivors from all over a certain province. The audiences at National Events were much more heterogenous, and the relationships that were established through testimonies given at these events would merit further study.

[99] Specifically, this chapter focuses on the sharing panels at community hearings, which were an opportunity for survivors to give public testimony. There was also the opportunity to give private statements to one of the TRC's many statement gatherers. However, recordings of these statements are not publicly available.

fact that communities were supposed to design their own hearings makes room for community-specific protocols as well as for community-specific accompanying events such as dances, songs, and feasts. This accounts for the highly distinct contexts in which residential school testimonies were given at community events. Schedule N states that one of the purposes of the community events is "developing collective community narratives about the impact of the IRS system on former students, families and communities" (*Honouring* 348). Here, Schedule N demonstrates an awareness of how truth can be established collectively; how, at times, truth is a process rather than an object that is stored within the container of a single memory. For the community events, Schedule N also emphasizes "the goal of witnessing in accordance with Aboriginal principles" (*Honouring* 348), which I discussed at the end of the previous chapter. Because of all the elements listed above, I argue that Schedule N does make room for Indigenous storytelling principles and specifically the residential school testimony principles that I identified in the previous chapters. The only principle that is not straightforwardly accounted for is the third principle, according to which the speaker embodies relationships to the land and the other-than-human. However, even though these relationships were not specifically incorporated in the TRC parameters, I will demonstrate how survivors still managed to address them.

Even though Schedule N does make room for the principles of residential school testimony as they are theorized by the novels, its parameters are far from ideal, and all participants of the TRC process were confronted with constraints that they had to navigate. As discussed above, scholars who engage with the TRC tend to focus on these constraints. While I agree that it is necessary to point these out, I also believe that the TRC's constraints should not be the only focus of scholarship since this approach obfuscates instances in which the survivors had agency. The TRC testimonies emerge from a mesh of relationships, material realities, colonial constraints, and

Indigenous resurgence. I caught a glimpse of this mesh when I was working as a research assistant on a project that the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation organized in order to establish a history of the TRC. I was given access to the TRC's internal records (such as, for example, emails, meeting minutes, event planning documents). At first, my personal understanding of the TRC had been influenced by the TRC critics quoted above. When reading these documents, however, I realized that those working for the TRC were working with the goal of being as sensitive to survivors and their stories as possible. I came across discussions in which people reflected on how to make the process of giving testimony to the TRC more holistic and how to incorporate community protocols. I realized that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission itself was more of a process than an entity and that it changed throughout the years. This is visible, for example, when one looks at the videos from the Winnipeg National Event (the TRC's first event). The statements in these videos are given in a "sharing corner" where survivors spoke to statement gatherers directly in front of a camera—a format that is very different from the sharing panels, which were developed after the first event. The video recordings of the Winnipeg event are also highly mediated by voice-over commentary. The TRC changed its mode of documentation later, especially in the community hearings. The recordings of these hearings were left uncommented and mostly unedited. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the TRC itself adapted and changed throughout the process.

When I was working with the TRC's internal documents, I realized that two of the major constraints that influenced the commission's decisions were time and money. The TRC was confronted with the task of collecting as many testimonies as possible within a set number of years with a budget of $60 million dollars that came out of the settlement agreement. When the TRC budgeted its different activities, the task of collecting residential school documents competed with

the task of collecting of survivors' testimonies. Eventually, the budget had several impacts on the environment in which testimonies where given. Based on an interview with Murray Sinclair, Rosemary Nagy points out that the TRC's limited funding influenced community hearings because of the way in which "communities must apply to host TRC-funded events, which then often end up becoming add-ons to existing gatherings" (216). Furthermore, when visiting communities, the commission usually gave the community organizers a layout for how the hearing space should be organized. Alternative formats, such as for example giving testimony on the land, were not accommodated. This attempt at efficiency certainly led to a standardization of the environment in which testimonies were given. That the TRC did entail constraints when it came to the environment in which survivors told their stories is without question. The focus of my research, however, is to point out the ways in which survivors found ways to challenge these constraints to express their own agency despite the institutional restrictions they faced. Even if this was not always completely possible for all survivors, I think this focus makes an important contribution to existing scholarship because it opens up alternative ways of engaging with these recordings in terms of looking at the relationships that they establish, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter. [100]

[100] It is necessary to briefly contextualize the recordings by discussing the virtual environment in which they exist today. Currently, these recordings are on the website of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). Even though the NCTR is an Indigenous archive, the online archive does not currently reflect Indigenous archival practices in its structure. One way of accessing the recordings is through the website's search function—and the categorization and tagging system are not much different from that on the website of Library and Archives Canada. Another way to access the recordings is via the website's map of Canada that indicates locations of residential schools, TRC events, and hearings. The map is accompanied by a timeline. Rather than putting a focus on individuals, communities, and their histories, the archive works with the rather colonial tools of maps and linear timelines behind which the recordings are hidden. In the Introduction, I voiced my worry that the survivors' testimonies might disappear in an archive. The current structure of the NCTR archive and the way in which the stories are stored on sub-sites that are like drawers in a Western archive substantiates this fear to a certain extent. It is therefore all the more important to learn how to listen to these stories in order to see how they are gifts that are meant to be engaged with. If we listen to these testimonies with Indigenous storytelling principles in mind, we attempt to listen around the ideological and practical constraints that are produced by the structure of the Western style archive. If we listen with Indigenous storytelling principles in mind, we are invited to engage in the relationships that are being offered by the gifts that these stories are.

Since communities were determining the program at TRC community hearings to a great extent, these hearings were often accompanied by actions that aimed at strengthening relationships among those who were present. In the recording of the Thompson hearing, for example, Elder Irene Young opens the second day of the hearing by inviting survivors and other audience members to hug each other. The TRC recording captures some of the laughter that fills the room as people step toward each other and hug each other (SP083 02:45-05:30).[101] The hearing on Manitoulin Island opens with a group of women who are singing a drum song (SP086 6:30-13:57), which is yet another way of establishing relationships as I will discuss later in this chapter. Audiences not only include present Indigenous community members but also non-Indigenous people from the area, the commissioners, the viewers of the online live-stream, and, located at a different point in time, the viewers of the archived TRC recordings. At all TRC events, the presence of cameras, microphones, and video screens emphasized the recording process. According to Philip Auslander, "live performance is always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technical mediation (i.e., mediatiziation) that defines it as live" (*Liveness* 53). The TRC events were "inscribed" with the recording process in this manner because of the seating arrangements, the microphones, and the commissioners' constant reminders. These traces of the recording process influenced the performance of testimony to a certain extent and emphasized that giving testimony is a performance. In a way, the traces of the recording process emphasize that what the survivors were about to do was more than just talking—similar to Dovie Thomason's distinction between talking and telling a story discussed in Chapter 1. The traces of the recording process emphasize the "staged" nature of the TRC events, which for me, is reminiscent of the way in which Highway nests the genre of the play in the genre of the novel and thereby draws further attention to the

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[101] The recordings of the community events are cited by document number. Anybody looking for the recording can enter this number into the search field on the NCTR's website and will be directed to the recording.

processes of storytelling and testimony as discussed in Chapter 2. Similarly, the performance of residential school testimonies was nested within the bigger performance of the community hearing, and the traces of the recording process put additional emphasis on the act of giving testimony.

Although the TRC events were specific to host communities, certain elements were the same at every hearing, such as for example the seating arrangements. The commissioners usually sat opposite the audience at the front of the room. When testifying, survivors would usually sit at a table facing the commissioners' table, so that the community members were behind them. This seating arrangement highlighted the importance of the commissioners as audience. However, in the recording of the Manitoulin Island event, Marie Wilson explains that the seating arrangement is also supposed to support survivors who might not feel comfortable facing an audience of their community when testifying to very personal experiences (SP086 1:50:56). The formalities of some TRC community hearings I witnessed furthermore remind one of a Western courtroom setting—for example when Ed Azure, MC at the event in Thompson, reminds every survivor to first state their name "in full for the record" (SP082). At all events, survivors were limited in terms of time. While it never occurred that survivors were interrupted for time reasons at the events I analyzed, they were reminded of the time limit in different ways. On Manitoulin Island, a huge timer at the foot of the survivors' table faces the commissioners, so that they could see how long the testimony had been going on (SP086). In Thompson, the MC gives survivors a sign when their testimony is nearing the 20-minute mark (SP082).

While factors such as these potentially constrain survivors' testimonies and the extent to which they reflect the principles outlined above, it is also important to emphasize that survivors "are able to challenge these constraints, asserting their own agency and empowerment through the

process" (Angel 201).[102] Whenever the setup of the hearing is detrimental to the way in which survivors intended to testify, they simply break with the format. Mary Lou Debassige at the Manitoulin Island hearing makes it clear from the beginning that she will not conform to all the "guidelines" of the hearing: first, she asks five women to share the table with her during the testimony, sitting around it, so she can see some of their faces. Then, Debassige mentions the time limit, stating that "this is not the Native way" (SP086 58:20-58:25). Later, Debassige refers to Marie Wilson's reminder of the TRC rule of not naming abusers. Her reaction: "We are still told what to do. It almost made me upset. But she has to say what she has to say, I thought" (1:03:42-1:04:00).[103] Debassige announces that she will mention the name of one of her former teachers because "we will say what we need to say" (1:05:53-1:05:56). Other examples of survivors challenging the TRC format include Darlene Necan in Thunder Bay who, by turning back and forth, indicates how difficult it is to speak when the seating arrangement does not allow her to see the community (SP093 2:26:50). Rose Mary Andrew in Tulita points out to the commissioners that even though the TRC said it was here to help, all its banners are in English and French and not in the Dene language of the community (SP018 1:33:55). All these instances demonstrate how survivors purposefully challenged the TRC format.

The following analysis of how survivors restore relationships by giving testimony is highly influenced by what Julie Cruikshank learned from Elders in the Yukon: that it is not only important what a story tells but also what a story does (see Chapter 2). The TRC itself focused mostly on the content of the testimonies. When starting to look at what the testimonies do (their workings and their effects), it becomes clear that they support the restoration of relationships through the

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[102] Naomi Angel's article analyzes the Winnipeg National Event. Her work, however, does not focus on the testimonies that were given and instead analyzes the many ceremonies and cultural expressions that surrounded the TRC's first National Event.

[103] Here, Debassige speaks in her language (Odawa), and the audience hears the simultaneous interpreter.

principles of Indigenous storytelling and residential school testimony discussed earlier. As Wagamese's novel demonstrates, testimony can be a process of taking care of relationships. Highway's and Alexie's novels furthermore suggest that it can also be a process of creating relationships for the first time, and Bartleman's novel describes testimony as a process that changes relationships. Before analyzing how the testimonies impact relationships to one's story, kin, community, the land, and the other-than-human, it is important to emphasize that all of these relationships are interconnected, and one element of testimony may address several relationships at the same time. Any reader therefore needs to be aware that the medium of the dissertation as a linear text necessitates a system of organization that might, at times, create artificial boundaries.

Survivors' relationships to their own life stories are potentially impacted by testimony. Thomas King famously said that story is "all that we are" (King 2). As discussed in Chapter 1, Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew suggests that in order to heal from trauma, Indigenous people need to "reconstruct" a "complete and coherent" personal story and share it with others (Episkenew, *Taking Back* 15). However, as *Indian Horse* strongly suggests, reconstructing one's personal story is not a process that can be done in isolation since Indigenous life stories emerge from a network of relationships that a person is embedded in (see the discussions of wâhkôtowin and nindinawemaganidog in Chapters 2 and 3). I argue that testimony changes survivors' relationship to their life story because it potentially enables them to decolonize their life story. As all the novels have demonstrated, one of the effects of residential school is what Simpson calls "cognitive imperialism" which imposes a lens of colonial thought through which Indigenous people are unable to see their ancestors' philosophies (*Dancing* 15-6). I argue that through the process of giving testimony, survivors counter cognitive imperialism and decolonize their life stories by re-situating themselves within a network of relationships and thereby affirming their

own position within this network. When giving testimony, survivors re-evaluate their own life experiences from the vantage point of the present moment. In *Indian Horse* and *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the protagonists fully understand their past experience only later in life, and based on this understanding, they can make sense of their life stories in a new way. This process is similar to the one that Sam McKegney identifies in Indigenous life-writings where, through the process of retelling one's story, one might creatively re-imagine one's own identity (*Magic* 46).

One example for how survivors re-evaluate and decolonize their life stories is the testimony of Charlie Snowshoe at the Aklavik hearing. His testimony compares two different stories, one of "a person that stayed home" and one of a "person that was sent to residential school" (SP019 1:26:05 - 1:26:14). Snowshoe describes how he went to residential school while his cousin stayed home and how, after his return, they went out on the land together. Snowshoe remembers: "Fifteen years old, I didn't know how to make a fire" (1:09:54). He then goes on to describe how he had to learn how to hunt from his 13-year old cousin who had stayed home (1:11:24). Most of Snowshoe's testimony focuses on how he re-learned to be out on the land after residential school. Snowshoe skillfully contrasts the life story of his cousin, who did not go to residential school, with his own and emphasizes how his cousin stayed embedded in the interrelational network for all his life. Snowshoe uses his cousin's story as an example to demonstrate what his own life story should have looked like. While Snowshoe himself did not "lose" these relationships, he had to relearn how to engage with them after his time at the school. The way in which Snowshoe contrasts two life stories speaks to an awareness of the effects of residential school that was gained later in life—and his testimony not only speaks about Snowshoe's process of reconnecting, but it also enables him to affirm his position within a network of relationships. Another example of this process of decolonizing one's life story is that throughout the TRC testimonies, survivors state that it was

only later in life that they understood that their parents did not have a choice when they sent them away. With this understanding, survivors re-evaluate their life-stories and re-think relationships in a way that is reminiscent of a passage from *Porcupines and China Dolls* where the narrator offers two versions of the same moment: one where the child sees his parents' emotionless faces when they leave him at the school, and one where the parents cry as their hearts are literally ripped out.[104] Looking back with a new understanding, survivors see how residential school forcefully affected their relationships, and the trust between children and parents that was lost, might potentially be restored. Through the process of testimony, survivors restore their relationship to their own life story by decolonizing it from the impacts of cognitive imperialism and by resituating themselves in a network of interrelationality. Testimony here also serves as an opportunity to re-affirm one's position within this network. A lot of survivors make such identity affirmations with proud statements such as "I am a mother" (SP082 54:37) or "I'm an Anishinaabekwe" (SP086 3:10:47).

All the different processes of giving testimony that are described in the four novels emphasize that re-telling and decolonizing one's life story is a holistic process. This means that giving testimony is not only an intellectual act but also an act that involves emotions, the body, and spiritual elements. Once again, this differs from Western courtroom testimony, where giving testimony is supposed to be an act that is performed by engaging only the mind. As discussed in Chapter 2, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* suggests that this is not how Indigenous storytelling and by extension Indigenous testimony works. When Jeremiah creates an overly intellectual work with the first version of his testimonial play "Ulysses Thunderchild," Gabriel tells him that this play cannot be performed because "it's all head [...] and no gut" (280). At the TRC hearings I witnessed, testimonial performances certainly are not all "all head." Here, survivors perform embodied

[104] For a thorough discussion of this passage, see Chapter 2.

testimonies full of emotions which manifest themselves in tears, angry shouting, and at times in laughter. Cultural practices (such as for example smudging at the Thompson hearing), add a spiritual component to the testimonies. This holistic way of giving testimony, however, has been criticized by scholars for being too emotional. David Garneau, for example, writes that "the TRC's emotionalist structure negates resistance, reason, and discourse" (Garneau & Yeh 75). In this argument, Garneau seems to distinguish between emotion and reason, suggesting an either/or-relationship between the two of them. My own interpretation of the testimonies disagrees with this argument because it is incompatible with the holistic lens that I adopt—and it is important to recall Dian Million's argument that emotions are yet another way of conveying information as Million suggests in her "felt theory" (Million, "Felt Theory" 61). Garneau's criticism is motivated by his worry that, because of their emotional nature, the TRC testimonies run the risk of being "consumed as emotional spectacle and may not engender political results" (Garneau & Yeh 77). While I agree with Garneau's general worry, I am convinced that in order to avoid the apolitical emotional spectacle, the act of testimony does not need to change—the audience does. If the audience is unable to understand emotions as political expressions of holistic testimonies, the audience needs to be educated in Indigenous storytelling and Indigenous approaches to residential school testimony in order to be able to engage with the TRC testimonies in a respectful and appropriate manner.

After having looked at how testimony may restore one's relationship to one's story, I will now look at how it may restore relationships to one's family, one's kin. It is important to acknowledge that in Indigenous contexts, kinship is understood much more broadly than in Western contexts where kinship mostly refers to biological kinship. In Indigenous cultures, relationships with human members of a community, relationships with the land, and relationships

with the other-than-human are also often expressed in terms of kinship (see Justice, "Go Away Water"). In this section, I will first focus on kinship relations between parents and their children, between grandparents and their grandchildren, and the relationships between siblings. My reason is that these were relationships that the residential school system purposefully targeted and impacted. The short historic overview in Alexie's novel emphasizes this intergenerational impact and the loss of trust that resulted from it. As discussed earlier, *Indian Horse* opens with Saul introducing himself by acknowledging kinship relations. This practice of situating oneself within family relations, and thereby affirming these relations, is visible in many of the TRC testimonies. One example is the testimony of Caroline Ouskun in Thompson. When introducing herself, Ouskun states her mother's name and her father's name and then adds that both of them were residential school survivors. Ouskun emphasizes: "I name them in the present tense because I still have them in my memory. I still respect them as former residential school survivors […]. I am a great-grandmother to three little boys and one little girl. I'm a grandmother to nine grandchildren and I'm a mother of five […]" (SP082 54:00-54:44). Not only does Ouskun situate herself within family relations and thereby affirms these relationships as well as her own identity, but she also reflects on the act of introducing one's relatives and the way in which it strengthens the relationships.

As Naomi Angel observes at the TRC National Event in Winnipeg, "in many cases, non-Indigenous Canadians were not the intended audience for these testimonies. Indigenous family members and communities were often the direct audience" (209). Telling their story in the presence of other family members is another way in which survivors restore kinship relationships. As the third principle of residential school testimony states: testimony is an intergenerational process—and this process has been specifically theorized through the characters of Martha and

Raven in Bartleman's novel. An example of testimony as an intergenerational act of storytelling is Rose Mary Andrew's statement in Tulita. As she testifies, her two daughters are sitting to her left and to her right because Andrew asked them "to come and listen today because I feel this is very important for me. My girls don't really understand where I came from" (SP018 01:34:18-01:34:43). When Andrew talks about her experiences and how she felt when she was left in a residential school, one of her daughters takes her mother's hand and all of them are crying (SP018 01:37:55). In her testimony, Andrew speaks about her complicated relationship to her parents and to her own children, and the most important audience for her is not the commissioners or the community behind her but her two daughters. Andrew's testimony is an act of restoring the relationship to her daughters whom, she feels, she did not love enough (SP018 1:36:38). In my discussion of Bartleman's theory of testimony as an intergenerational process, I emphasize how the novel conceives of this process as one that is reciprocal; that it is important for the children to know their parents' stories but that it is also important for the parents to know their children's stories. This kind of reciprocity is visible at TRC hearings as well when, for example, Caroline Ouskun in Thompson testifies in the presence of her daughter, and her daughter Loretta Ouskun later testifies in the presence of her mother. Loretta Ouskun speaks about the intergenerational effects of residential schools while her mother sits next to her. For both mother and daughter, the testimony offers an opportunity for better understanding their own life story, each other's story, and their relationship, which is thereby strengthened. Loretta Ouskun addresses the importance of these relationships and states that she is glad that "we started building up our family again. I give a lot of credit to my mum for keeping our family together" (SP082 04:05:00). This demonstrates how, at times, intergenerational testimony does not restore relationships in the first place but strengthens relationships that have already been restored. Other survivors similarly use their

testimony to strengthen relationships that had been harmed by the school system in the past. The siblings Larry Beardy and Elsie Morris in Thompson, for example, sit next to each other during Beardy's testimony, and Morris speaks about gender segregation in residential schools and being separated from her siblings (SP082 2:56:00). By being in each others presence when testifying, the siblings strengthen their relationships and once again resist the effects of the school system.

A way in which survivors restore or strengthen relationships with family members who are not physically present at the time of the testimony is by putting themselves in relation to their kin by sharing their relatives' stories together with their own story. This is a process of witnessing similar to the one I identified as being performed by both Wagamese and Bartelman when they wrote their novels, shared others' stories, and braided them with their own experiences. At the TRC events, survivors perform this kind of witnessing when sharing the stories of family members, often parents or grandparents, who went to residential school. Peggy Simon at the Manitoulin Island hearing, for example, states that she "decided to speak today on behalf of [her] grandma who is 87" (SP086 04:01:10-04:01:17). Simon relates stories her grandmother told her about her experience at Spanish Residential School. When re-telling her grandmother's stories, Simon puts her own story in relation to these stories by remembering how old she was when she first heard the stories and what her reactions were (SP086 04:02:00). Simon performs an act of witnessing her grandmother's story by sharing it with others and by putting it in relation to her own story. Through this process of relating, testimony strengthens the relationship between Simon and her grandmother, and Simon adopts and acts upon the responsibility of sharing these stories. In a way, Simon performs what McLeod calls aniskwâcimopicikêwin, "the process of connecting stories together" (*Indigenous Poetics* 8), a central element of Indigenous poetics. As discussed in Chapter 2, meaning lies not only within each story but in the relationship between the stories. In Simon's

testimony, the relationships between the stories testify to the relationship between her and her grandmother and to the way in which Simon carries these relationships, just as Saul Indian Horse carries his relationships at the end of *Indian Horse*. These aspects of relationality may only be perceived by the audience if they know how to listen. Herein, Indigenous testimony differs greatly from Western courtroom testimony where a witness is supposed to be testifying in a rather straightforward manner, leaving no room for interpretation. Room for interpretation is, however, key to Indigenous storytelling, and in Chapter 1, I discussed how Indigenous storytelling requires active listening and participation on the side of the listener because the teller "does not spell out everything a listener needs to know, but rather makes the listener think about ordinary experiences in new ways" (Cruikshank, "Claiming Legitimacy" 7). Similarly, survivors' testimonies engage the listener by inviting them to draw their own connections, allowing them to come to their own understandings of the residential school experience and the colonial context.

A similar form of witnessing is visible when Patricia McGuire at the Thunder Bay event testifies for her parents, who were both residential school survivors. McGuire states: "I felt it necessary to get up and speak today because they're not here. My father has been gone for 25 years, and my mom is in the hospital right now" (SP093 44:38-44:50). In her testimony, she then shares stories of residential school that her parents had shared with her. As she says at the end: "Somebody had to get up and offer their story and be their witness" (SP093 1:00:55-1:01:00). After McGuire's testimony, commissioner Sinclair emphasizes the importance of sharing family members' stories: "It is so important for us to understand that if they were here, they would want their story told. If they could speak it, they would do it, but they can't. So it is up to you" (SP093 1:01:15-1:01:28). This act of witnessing and sharing family members' stories is reminiscent of the "moral responsibility to remember" which McLeod finds in Cree traditions around family stories

(*Cree Narrative* 15) as discussed in Chapter 2. Testimony thereby becomes an opportunity to adopt the responsibility to remember and to pass on a story, to adopt the responsibility to engage with a story in a respectful manner, and potentially to adopt the responsibility for further action.

As stated at the beginning of this section, in most Indigenous communities, kinship relationships go beyond biological connections. During the TRC hearings, there are numerous instances in which survivors strengthen the bonds of enhanced kinship. At the Aklavik event, Phillip Ross gives testimony while sitting next to Annie B. Gordon. Throughout his testimony, Ross speaks about the important role two women named Annie A. and Annie B. (referring to Gordon who sits next to him) had in his life: "They are the ones who showed me how to live off the land" (SP019 1:55:40-1:55:44). Ross emphasizes that "they are just like parents to me" (SP019 1-:57: 28-1:57:31). His testimony is a strong example for how survivors took the opportunity to appreciate and to take care of kinship relationships. During his testimony, Ross turns to Gordon and says: "I never really got a chance to say thank you very much. I'd like to say thank you very much, Annie B, for everything that you taught me," then he gives her a hug (SP019 1:58:49-1:59:02). Kinship relationships that are reaffirmed during testimony are not always biological. In fact, as my discussions of the novels have shown, often the relationship to the land is conceived of in terms of kinship as well—and I will address this form of relationship further below.

First, however, I will take a closer look at how survivors' testimonies affect their relationship to their community. This relationship is addressed by the second principle of residential school testimony, which states that testimony is a highly relational process that emerges between a teller and a listener. In Indigenous storytelling, the audience as collaborator is a crucial part of the process, and I argue that this is also true for the audience of TRC community hearings, which consisted of actual community members. Ronald Niezen acknowledges the influence of

audience members at TRC hearings. However, from his point of view, the audience acts as a constraint that potentially distorts the historical truth contained in survivors' testimonies. Niezen argues that "participants in the hearings speak in order to win some kind of approval from their listeners" (102) and that "under these circumstances, the rhetorical value of what they say takes precedence over truth value" (102). My own interpretation of the audience's role differs from Niezen's because of the way in which Niezen's argument assumes an inherently asymmetrical relationship between speaker and audience. For Niezen, the relationship between speaker and listener is characterized by *dependence* when he argues that the speaker seeks approval from their audience. In my own interpretation, the relationship between speaker and listener is characterized by *interdependence*. Speaking from the perspective of Indigenous storytelling, I argue that the audience adopts the role of a collaborator, helping to facilitate a process that is only possible if there is one who speaks and one who listens. Survivors' testimonies are highly aware of the importance of the audience in that particular regard—this awareness of collaboration, however, does impose any limits on the truth of the testimonies. I do acknowledge that there are situations in which the audience can be a constraint for the story that survivors want to tell—communities of listening are not always only benevolent, as discussed later on in this chapter.

How survivors seek to establish relationships to the community members in the audience is strongly visible in the recording of the Manitoulin Island hearing. Saul Day, the second speaker at the event, sits down at the "wrong" side of the survivor table, so that he can face the audience. The commissioner table is therefore behind him, and commissioner Wilson has to move her own seat (SP086 1:15:12). Without waiting for Wilson to find another seat, Day begins speaking, asking whether the audience members can hear him "ok" (SP086 1:15:25). His refusal to conform to the TRC's seating arrangement inspires a change in the arrangement later announced by commissioner

Wilson, and then survivors at the Manitoulin Island hearing have the choice of either sitting at the survivor's table facing the commissioner, or sitting at the commissioner's table facing the community. Most of the survivors testifying that day choose to face the community. By speaking to the community, engaging with the community, and reacting to their reactions, survivors turn the act of testimony into an act of storytelling, which, as Leanne Simpson emphasizes "places dynamic relationships at its core" and thereby not only "reinforces the web of relationships that stitch our communities together" but also influences the story itself as "[t]he storyteller then has to work with emergence and flux, developing a unique relationship with the audience based entirely on context and relationships" (*Dancing* 34).

As mentioned above, Schedule N conceives of community events as a way to "develop[…] collective community narratives about the impact of the IRS system on former students, families and communities" (*Honouring* 348). The idea of collective narratives resonates with a notion of truth put forward in the AFN's study *Breaking the Silence*, which I discussed in Chapter 1. According to the study, truth is knowledge that "is built and rebuilt over time through the stories we tell, individually and together in community" (AFN 5). When survivors react to the audience and to other testimonies that they have heard, this is not the process of constraint and conformity that Niezen identifies. Instead, survivors who are attentive to audience members and other survivors' stories start to discover collective threads and connect their stories to those to create a collective truth *in addition* to their own personal truth. One example of this process is Paul Andrew's testimony in Tulita. Andrew thanks the previous speakers and picks up thematic threads and questions that were raised by earlier speakers (SP018 1:57:45-1:59:00). Ronald Niezen argues that the TRC was "trying to establish thematic and behavioural patterns" to such an extent that a testimonial template was established which survivors tended to follow (67). Niezen argues that at

national events, the TRC invited speakers who provided "preliminary, vetted, rehearsed statements" to speak first (71). These speakers, according to Niezen, set the tone for the rest of the speakers and their testimonies (71). While I cannot speak to national events because of the fact that my analysis focuses on community events, I do not find Niezen's argument to be true for the testimonies given at the five community hearings I listened too. Each testimony given at the hearings I witnessed through the recordings is as distinct and individual as the person who is testifying. I argue that instances in which survivors connect their stories to other survivors' stories or in which they reinforce points that were raised earlier are acts of contributing to a collective truth. Survivors recognize strands in a collective story, but this does not by necessity entail that the rest of their testimony merely follows a preset pattern. Niezen's insinuation that survivors' statements conform to a template that was set out for them by the TRC and by earlier speakers runs the risk of underestimating the ways in which survivors claimed agency through the act of giving testimony.

Another way in which survivors establish relationships with audience members and (re)create community during the act of giving testimony is through humour. Labrador Inuk scholar Kristina Fagan (now Kristina Bidwell) identifies Indigenous humour as a strategy for fostering "communal unity" and for "witnessing trauma" (Fagan, "Weesageechak" 10). As Fagan points out, in Indigenous cultures humour can be a strategy for addressing traumatic topics such as sexual abuse when "in many Native cultures, it is considered unethical to speak directly or accusingly about bad experiences" ("Weesageechak" 18). While Fagan cautions against any romanticized notion of 'community' (an aspect I discuss further below), she argues that Indigenous people "laughing together shows their social harmony and their shared norms, attitudes and assumptions" ("Weesageechak" 18). Sto:Lo author Lee Maracle makes a similar observation when she reflects

on the behavior of babies and their interactions with grown-ups. Maracle argues that when it comes to babies, “laughter is conjured from relationship. Crying is natural” (*Memory Serves* 6). I think Maracle’s observation is just as true for grown-ups. In order to use humour in the right way and to make others laugh, there needs to be a relationship. Furthermore, humour is also a strategy for taking care of the audience and thereby strengthening relationships. I discuss this aspect in Chapter 1 when pointing out how Dovie Thomason uses humour and not only makes telling her story easier for herself but also lifts the audience’s burden of listening—at least for a few short but nourishing moments. The role of humour during TRC hearings is conspicuously absent from work on the TRC done by academic scholars. The TRC’s final report also does not mention how survivors employed humour during the process of giving testimony. This absence can certainly be explained by the fact that in Western cultures, humour and laughter are predominantly associated with light-heartedness and fun—and therefore humour seems inappropriate for a severe and traumatic context such as the residential school system. However, as pointed out above, Indigenous cultures define the role of humour differently, and therefore, a lot of survivors forged community by using humour in their testimonies. For example, Leo Bebonung at the Manitoulin Island hearing emphasizes that tears and laughter are both important: “Now that we had the tears, I’m gonna make everybody laugh because laughter is very important. Because all gifts are equal” (SP086 2:24:20-2:24:30). So Bebonung proceeds to tell a funny story that makes himself laugh—and the audience’s laughter can be heard as well (SP086 2:25:20). Jimmy Omilgouituk in Aklavik also tells a funny story. As he states at the beginning of his testimony: “I’m a little nervous, so I think I’m gonna start off with a joke, and I’ll tell you what it means to me” (SP019 2:15:30-2:15:45). Omilgouituk’s joke is a story about a white boy who dressed up as “an Indian” during his parents’ garden party. His uncle, his father, and his grandfather find the boy’s behaviour inappropriate and each slap him to punish

him. When his grandfather asks the boy whether he learned anything from that, the boy answers: "I have only been an Indian for ten minutes, and I hate all of you white men already" (2:16:20-2:18:40). The joke causes roaring laughter and spontaneous clapping among the audience members at the hearing. Omilgouituk keeps returning to his joke during his testimony and in fact uses the boy's experience of being slapped for being "an Indian" to speak about his own experiences in residential school and later in life. This is reminiscent of the way in which Indigenous people at times use other stories as frames of references for their own life stories, as I discussed in relation to *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and *Porcupines and China Dolls*.

Yet another instance where humour creates specific kinds of community is visible when survivors testify in their respective languages. Mary Lou Debassige points out in the Odawa language that "if we were to speak in my language, there is lots of laughter" (SP086 59:37-59:43). When Mary Lou Debassige testifies in Odawa, a simultaneous interpreter is audible for the viewers of the recording. Headphones were available for audience members who were present at the hearing. When Debassige makes a joke about how uncomfortable non-Indigenous audiences are with silence, the translator laughs, and a part of what Debassige says is lost for the non-Indigenous audience and also for those who do not speak the Odawa language (SP086 1:12:20). This demonstrates how humour is at times specific to certain communities and can reinforce the bonds among their members while it can simultaneously exclude those who are not part of this community. The role of language will be discussed in more detail below.

Finally, it is important to recognize that reconnection with a community does not necessarily have to mean the community which one was born into. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Jeremiah reconnects with a self-chosen community of artists rather than return to the northern Manitoban community he grew up in, as discussed in Chapter 2. Cases like this are also visible at

the TRC hearings, for example with Clint Saulteaux who lives in Thompson. In his testimony, he talks about how he left his former community and how "this is my community now" (SP083 1:36:35-1:36:38). Saulteaux then speaks about his love for the community in Thompson, which helped him raise his children (SP083 1:36:40). As Fagan cautions, one should, however, not automatically assume that communities always offer nourishing relationships. Some survivors speak about instances in which relationships within their community turned toxic. Margaret Trudeau, for example, left her community for a job, and when she returned, she says, she was punished and judged for having left (SP086 3:10:10). As discussed in my analysis of *Porcupines and China Dolls*, one cannot simply romanticize the notion of community and we need to keep in mind that a community's relationships—just as all relationships—can be nourishing but also, at times, harmful.

As principle number three suggests, testimony is a process during which the speaker embodies relationships to the land and the other-than-human. This is visible in Wagamese's *Indian Horse*, and it is also visible in some of the testimonies that were given at TRC hearings. The way in which speakers embody relationships to the land and the other-than-human during TRC hearings differs from what Saul Indian Horse does when he goes out on the land to reconnect. While Saul touches plants, hears birds, and looks at the land, survivors who testified at the hearings did so inside buildings, not in direct contact with the land. At the TRC hearings, survivors maintain and affirm relationships to the land and the other-than-human by mentioning them, describing and reflecting on them, and by specifically evoking places and place-related events. Most survivors describe their relationships to the land from the time before they went to residential school, and many also speak about their experience of coming back and having been robbed of the knowledge of how to live in a reciprocal relationship with the land. They usually then focus on their journey

of re-establishing this relationship (as discussed in relation to Charlie Snowshoe's testimony). Norman Yakeleya at the community hearing in Tulita makes his relationship with the land central to his testimony. He describes how he just got back from seven days of spring hunting in the bush, and how he spent the morning of the hearing out on the land, watching a squirrel gather its food, thinking about what to say to the commission (SP018 44:00-45:27). Yakeleya lists all family members who were out for the spring hunt with him by name, and right after this, he states that the land "was alive," and "so beautiful," and "so powerful" (45:30-46:29). Thereby, he connects family relationships to the experience of being out on the land, and he connects both the land and his kin to the process of giving testimony. Yakeleya describes the land as a nourishing and beautiful place where relationships flourish. On the land, he can have a discussion with his wife and go hunting with his boy and tell him about "where grandma set her snares and where we hunted" (52:35-52:39). Yakeleya here describes how he passes on knowledge about the land to his son through story. His description resembles the description of how Saul's grandmother teaches Saul about the family's interactions with the land in *Indian Horse*. Yakeleya also speaks about how the land teaches people to work together and to maintain good relationships. He jokes about how out on the land, "I can't argue with her [his wife] or there is nothing to eat. Gotta keep her happy" (52:58-53:06), which causes his wife, who is sitting next him, to grin broadly. The way in which Yakeleya speaks about how the land teaches about relationships resonates with Dene scholar Glen Coulthard's theoretical concept of "grounded normativity," which refers to "what the land as system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to another and the natural world" (*Red Skin* 13). A central moment in Yakeleya's testimony is when he says: "You know, commissioners, this land really takes care of us" (53:47-53:56). Despite conveying information on how important the land is for the Dene people, this statement has several

other functions. It is directly addressed toward the commissioners and Yakeleya therefore emphasizes that the importance of the land needs to be noted by the commission. Implicitly, this statement thereby raises the issue of Indigenous land rights. Yakeleya then contrasts this statement with his experiences in residential school, which he describes as a place where the children were supposed to be taken care of but where they were actually "tortured" (54:14-55:30). Yakeleya establishes living on the land as the opposite of this when he points out that "when you go in the bush, everything is in its place. And there is only love out there" (1:14:37-1:14:48).

Yakeleya's testimony champions the resurgence of relationships with the land when he states: "The old people were right when they told us to go out in the bush. They were right to live out there" (57:11-57:22). His testimony does more than just mention his relationship with the land. In fact, his testimony seems to emerge from this relationship just as it emerges from his process of reflecting on his testimony out on the land before he testified at the commission's hearing. At the same time, Yakeleya reinforces his relationship to the land, and he inspires others to do the same. All this is possible through his testimony, even though the testimony itself is not taking place out on the land. It is also conspicuous that Yakeleya describes the relationship with the land as a mutual process because according to him, not only do the people benefit from the land, but the land also benefits from the people. Yakeleya emphasizes that the land is "just wanting you to come out. You make a fire out there, it is happy. It is happy you're using it" (1:18:17-1:18:35). Despite this emphasis on the reciprocal nature of the relationship, Yakeleya also reminds his audience that the land is more powerful than humans and that its rules must be followed. As Yakeleya puts it, the land, "it is the boss" (1:18:36-1:18:38). Yakeleya's testimony is once again an example of how Indigenous testimony differs from Western understandings of courtroom testimony. Western courtroom testimony with its principles of relevance encourages speakers to take a certain event

in their lives and to, figuratively, put it under a microscope. While this form of testimony might offer a detailed description of an event, it can also be decontextualizing. Yakeleya's testimony is an example of how Indigenous testimony refuses to decontextualize and how the account of an experience is deeply situated in context and culture.

Admittedly, Yakeleya's testimony is rather exceptional in how it emerges from his relationship with the land. However, many other testimonies that I listened to also mention relationships with the land, and they reinforce these relationships, even though to a smaller extent. Many of the survivors describe what specific places look like, tell stories that are related to certain places, and speak about teachings of the land. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Leanne Simpson describes how hearing or reading *Otonabee*, the Anishinaabemowin word for a river in her home territory, immediately reconnects her to that place (95); what happens in survivors' testimonies is somewhat similar. By evoking these places and by describing them to their audiences, survivors reconnect and thereby reaffirm and strengthen relationships. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Jeremiah and Gabriel bring places from their home community in northern Manitoba to Toronto by evoking them in their plays. As discussed in Chapter 2, the brothers thereby remember and strengthen their relationships with these places—even in a new environment. In a way, this is also what many survivors at TRC hearings do when they evoke certain places in their testimonies. This is, for example, visible in the testimony of Juda Keeper in Thompson. Keeper introduces himself in close relation to the place and community he is from and mentions the history of both place and community: "I was born in Spirit Lake, the son of a union of two original Spirit Lake families […]. The place where I was born is part of the Nelson River system, which was so important in the Northern Manitoba Fur trade in those days" (54:00 -54:42). This referencing of specific places occurs often in survivors' introductions when they begin their testimonies. At the TRC hearing on

Manitoulin Island, Paul Wesley even more specifically remembers stories and songs that are related to places. In his language, Wesley speaks about how he remembers stories about the land that he heard in his childhood (1:54:30 - 1:55:00). Wesley then specifically remembers how his grandfather used to sing about "the rabbit" (1:55:32) as he was carrying his grandson on his shoulders. Wesley also remembers how his grandfather used to sing about "how he was walking and what he was hunting" (1:56:10). Wesley therefore remembers his relationship to his grandfather while he remembers his grandfather's relationship to the place and the other-than-human.

There are also survivors who emphasize that place matters for the commission hearing itself—even though the hearings that they attend do not take place on the land. Elsie Mary Kwandibens, for example, raises the audience's awareness of the place where they are at before she begins her testimony. After introducing herself in Anishinaabemowin, Kwandibens states: "First, I want to ask permission from the people that live here to allow me to speak in your territory. I ask this of you, miigwetch" (SP086 3:21:26-3:21:43). The way in which Kwandibens respectfully follows a protocol reminds the audience that many different kinds of relationships emerge from a place. By asking for permission, Kwandibens puts herself in relation to the place and to the people who call Manitoulin Island home. Leanne Simpson points out that "as someone moves away from the centre of their territory—the place they have the strongest and most familiar bonds and relationships—their knowledge and relationship to the land weakens. [...] This is a place where one needs to practice good relations" (*Dancing* 89). By asking for permission, Kwandibens demonstrates that she acknowledges this need for relationships, and she acknowledges that there are people who know more about this place and its practices than she does. Thereby, she reaches out and starts establishing her own relationship.

As I hope to have shown, relationships with the land and the other-than-human are prominent in quite a few of the survivors' testimonies. Survivors restore or take care of these relationships through their testimony by evoking them, reflecting on them, or even actively forging them such as Kwandibens does at the beginning of her testimony. As briefly mentioned above, scholars such as Jeff Corntassel and Glen Coulthard argue that because the IRSSA and the TRC "are designed to address the devastating legacies of residential schools, they run the risk of framing these questions in a narrow way" (Corntassel et al. "Indigenous Storytelling" 375). Glen Coulthard points out that since the IRRSA in 2007 and Stephen Harper's residential school apology in 2008, "the federal government has intensified its colonial approach to dealing with Indigenous peoples in practice" (*Red Skin* 127). Coulthard here specifically references Bill C-45, which made it easier to lease Indigenous lands and reduced the environmental protection of lakes and rivers (*Red Skin* 127). However, even though scholars claim that Indigenous land rights and protection of the land were not part of the truth and reconciliation process, I argue that survivors' testimonies still manage to address these issues (even though not always straightforwardly). By centring the land in their testimony, by evoking relationships and interactions with the land, and by referencing specific places, survivors make sure that the importance of the land is noted by their audiences—and, because of these references, the TRC's final report includes the importance of the land throughout its Volume 6, which addresses reconciliation. Arguing that the truth and reconciliation process did not raise the issue of the land at all runs the risk of disregarding the survivors' efforts to bring the land into the conversation.

As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, even though my discussion categorizes the effects of survivors' testimonies according to the relationships that they impact, it is usually the case that one particular element in a testimony addresses several relationships at once—which then

shows the interrelated nature of all relationships. One element that, when woven into residential school testimony, speaks to all relationships mentioned above is speaking one's Indigenous language. As countless survivors have emphasized, speaking their Indigenous languages was not only forbidden in residential school, it was often severely punished. For the survivor, speaking their language today is not only a triumphant act of resilience, it might also reaffirm relationships with their parents and with their community from whom they learned the language in the first place. At the same time, Indigenous languages, when spoken, forge community among those who listen and understand. Language also potentially strengthens relationships with the land because, as Jeanette Armstrong points out from an Okanagan-specific perspective, "language was given to us by the land we live in" ("Land Speaking" 175). Mary Lou Debassige addresses the role of language for testimony directly when she states:

> In order for me to be a survivor in this world, I have to be flexible and bend. Within the English language this is impossible. It is not my language. It is not my mother tongue. I cannot be like a tree and bend and be flexible. I cannot laugh and be humourous and laugh at myself in the English language. It's too stern. (SP086 58:48-59:23)

The statement shows the extent to which language influences testimony by influencing the person who gives testimony. Debassige describes how speaking a different language changes her personality, and how she cannot be her humourous self in English because the language does not allow for the same kind of humour. Her testimony is indeed rather stern when Debassige speaks in English, but the translator laughs about her jokes when she speaks in Odawa as discussed earlier.

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the importance of language for restoring relationships is also visible in the novels, for example, when Jeremiah includes Cree in his plays

and thereby reconnects to his home, since language "is related to place; it is our umbilical cord to our place of origin, literally and symbolically" (Favel, "Theatre of Orphans" n.p.). In *Porcupines and China Dolls*, Jake is only able to express his love for his brother James in the Gwich'in language, which gestures towards the way in which Indigenous languages encapsulate kinship relationships. Residential schools disrupted relationships between kin in an English-speaking environment. The understanding of kinship relations that resides in Indigenous languages itself was not harmed by the disruption that occurred in the English-speaking environment, and it can therefore be reconnected to if the language is spoken. At the TRC hearings I witnessed, many survivors can be heard speaking their languages, and many also emphasize that they still have their languages—for example Elsie Morris in Thompson who, at the end of her testimony, thanks everyone in Cree for listening and points out that she still has her Cree language (SP083 03:14:00). Numerous survivors who testify in English make a point of introducing themselves in their language.

Yet another practice that speaks to various relationships simultaneously is the performance of song. Lee Maracle points out that "[w]hen we sing, the bones of our ancestors hear our songs and they work their way to the surface of the land […]. Our youth […] hear these old songs and they sing it and we are reminded of the thousands of years of history that the bones of our ancestors hold for us" ("Indigenous Poetry" 305). Maracle here describes the way in which song forges and reinforces strands of relationships that go back thousands of years. In an Anishinaabe context, Niigaan Sinclair argues that song, like stories, encapsulates relationships to the land and other-than-human entities because that is where the first songs came from (*Nindoodemag* 8). At the Manitoulin Island hearing, Leo Bebonung, who is a traditional dancer, ends his testimony by gifting the audience a song. Not having a drum with him, Bebonung simply pounds on the

microphone with a small stick (SP086 2:26:26). While singing a song during a testimony would certainly be in violation of Western courtroom testimony's principle of relevance, it strongly contributes to the creation and reinforcement of relationships in the context of Indigenous gatherings. By singing a song, Bebonung also connects different genres in a way that is encapsulated by Neal McLeod's aniskwâcimopicikêwin. However, since I do not know the meaning and context of Bebonung's song, I cannot give an interpretation of how it relates to his testimony and which additional meaning the braiding of genres generates. I do argue, however, that the way in which Bebonung re-purposes the microphone once again demonstrates that survivors did not allow themselves to be constrained by the setting and format of the commission, and they told their stories in they way they thought they needed to be told.

All the ways in which the relationships discussed above are (re)created and strengthened contribute to Indigenous resurgence. However, the testimonies also establish certain relationships that are not crucial for Indigenous resurgence: relationships to non-Indigenous audience members (those who are present, those who watch the live-stream, and those who watch the recordings) and the commissioners themselves. I argue that these broader audience members, through the process of witnessing, do become part of a particular community that is established during the act of testimony—and potentially beyond. The extent to which these relationships are kept alive after the testimony is contingent on the further action of the audience members themselves. The following section discusses relationships with non-Indigenous audience members, the political implications of the TRC testimonies, and how these testimonies contribute to reconciliation. At the time of the TRC, *reconciliation* had already become a dominating buzzword evoked in rhetoric by politicians without concomitant action to address ongoing systemic colonial oppression. Indigenous communities, scholars, and their allies lambasted these statements as hollow and dangerous. Glen

Coulthard points out that government-evoked reconciliation discourse often locates residential schools and colonialism firmly in the past (*Red Skin* 22). Keavy Martin exposes the "amnesia" of reconciliation discourse, especially in phrases like "moving on" and "putting the past behind us" ("Truth, Reconciliation" 57). Pauline Wakeham similarly sees the danger of discourses around reconciliation (and state apologies that come with them) in them being an "effort to evade recognition of the systemic and ongoing racism and colonial genocide" ("Rendition" 279). In its final report, the TRC indirectly speaks to some of this criticism by, for example, emphasizing the necessity of concrete actions and reparations. It defines reconciliation as "an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships" (*Honouring* 16). According to the TRC, this process involves reparations, the revitalization of Indigenous legal traditions, and "concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change" (*Honouring* 16).

I argue that by encouraging a specific form of witnessing which invited the audience to not only listen to a story but to act and to share it further with their own communities, the TRC supported the creation of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. If actively adopting the role of the witness, non-Indigenous audience members who listen to the testimonies are invited to be educated, to adopt responsibilities, and to be committed to these responsibilities through further action. In terms of education, the TRC hearings and the survivors' testimonies "politicized many non-Indigenous Canadians, teaching them about an important and devastating aspect of colonization in Canada" (Simpson qtd. in McCall and Hill 7). When listening to the testimonies, non-Indigenous audience members are educated about the effects of residential schools in Canada. However, as pointed out above, critics of "reconciliation" worry that the focus on residential schools "is predominantly attached to the state's historical wrongdoing, thus perpetuating fantasies of innocence for both non-Indigenous Canadians and the contemporary

Canadian government" (Decter and Isaac 108). After watching many hours of TRC testimonies, I argue that survivors work against this danger by connecting residential school experiences to ongoing systemic issues in Canada. Quite a few survivors point out how colonialism is still ongoing, how the government is "still fighting with us, still trying to change us" (SP018 1:19:29-1:19:36). Survivors also address treaty and land rights—for example Hazel Recollet who states that "we Anishinaabe have to take back what rightfully belongs to us because we never gave any of it away. All we agreed to was to share some of this land […], but we're not sharing it in the proper way" (SP086 3:56:12-3:56:34). Others criticize how survivors were treated by the IAP process and how they are treated by Canadian law more generally (SP093 2:29:30). Survivors are clearly educating their non-Indigenous audience about the broader contexts and the ongoing nature of colonialism. However, the work that the survivors do in these moments has yet again been misread by critics who look at the TRC testimonies from the perspective of Western courtroom testimony. Ronald Niezen observes that survivors raised issues other than residential school experiences. For Niezen, this seems to go against the courtroom principle of relevance since he dismissively calls these parts of survivors' testimonies the "while I have the microphone phenomena" (99). Audience members who expect linear testimonies from the perspective of courtroom testimony's principles of relevance are unable to understand how residential school testimony, just like Indigenous storytelling, circles; how it braids, contrasts, and connects experiences in order to speak about larger contexts.

Another potential danger that scholars identify in relation to non-Indigenous audience members is that even though they might become educated in the process, they might listen with what Paulette Regan calls "colonial empathy" (*Unsettling* 45). Regan worries that even "well-intentioned attempts" to listen to the TRC testimonies "can easily become mere observations or,

worse, degenerate into public spectacle" (45). Therefore, Regan argues, a way must be found to "avoid appropriating survivors' pain in voyeuristic ways that enable non-Indigenous people to feel good about feeling bad" (47). I argue that an understanding of Indigenous storytelling principles as a basis for testimony can help because Indigenous storytelling teaches that stories are gifts, but that they also come with responsibilities. To re-iterate Thomas King's famous quote about receiving a story: "It's yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (King 29). Paulette Regan, who is herself a non-Indigenous scholar engaging with residential school survivors' stories, also recognizes the way in which these stories establish responsibilities. This is visible when she states: "The Gift Is Given, the Responsibility to Reciprocate Is Ours" (Regan in Asch, Borrows, and Tully 223). The responsibility to reciprocate a gift is one of the most important ways in which residential school testimony establishes relationships with a non-Indigenous audience. As my discussion of Dovie Thomason's story in Chapter 1 has demonstrated, there are a lot of ways to reciprocate this gift that offer the basis for nourishment and for healthy relationships in the future. Residential school stories must also be kept alive by non-Indigenous audiences who need to live by the teachings that these testimonies contain for non-Indigenous people.

Accepting and reciprocating a gift means entering a relationship whose maintenance requires commitment. Printed on one of the walls at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg, there is a quotation from Edmund Metatawabin's autobiography *Up Ghost River*:

> There is no concept of justice in Cree culture. The nearest word is *kintohpatatin*, which loosely translates to 'you've been listened to.' But kintohpatatin is richer than

> justice—really it means you've been listened to by someone compassionate and fair, and your needs will be taken seriously. (285)

This quotation emphasizes that listening is important, but that it is also only a first step. The quotation suggests that for kintohpatatin, further action is required. The same is true in the context of the TRC testimonies. Witnessing these testimonies means receiving a gift and reciprocating this gift through further action—actions to which one needs to be committed. Over the course of the TRC, the commissioners usually emphasized this aspect in their own work. When Murray Sinclair adopted the role of chief commissioner after the resignation of the first set of commissioners, he sensed that the TRC had lost a lot of the survivors' trust, and when he presented the TRC's strategies to the AFN, he told them: "After you hear what I have to say, I invite you to hold me to what I tell you we're going to do" (Sinclair qtd. in Miller, *Residential Schools* 215). In the recordings, one can see how the commissioners act as an active audience, trying to establish relationships with the survivors, and trying to reciprocate survivors' gifts by giving them the feeling that their stories are valued. In the Thunder Bay recording, Gerald Wahpay struggles with his testimony and Murray Sinclair carefully turns the testimonial situation into a conversation and then explains: "Cause I don't want you leaving here, thinking that somehow you failed at doing something. I want you to feel like you've accomplished something by coming and talking to me. What did you want me to know?" (SP093 2:53:40-2:53:56). At the Thunder Bay event, Sinclair usually exchanges a few personal words with the survivors after they finish their statement. At the Thompson event, many survivors can be seen walking up to Marie Wilson after their testimony and giving her a hug. At all events, the commissioners offer summaries of what they have heard at the end of the day, in a way demonstrating to the survivors that they have been listened to.

In order to reciprocate survivors' testimonies in a respectful manner, non-Indigenous audience members need to first know how to listen to these testimonies. And as I hope to have demonstrated, the novels discussed in this thesis can potentially teach how to listen differently. For myself as a non-Indigenous scholar, reading the novels and thinking about them in terms of storytelling has changed the way in which I approached the TRC testimonies. I consider it important that now that the TRC's mandate has ended, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people engage with the recordings of the testimonies rather than only reading transcripts and summaries in the TRC's (impressive and comprehensive) final report. As *Porcupines and China Dolls* suggests, in order to experience all the effects of testimony, it is best to be present at the time of the telling. In Chapter 2, I discussed the discrepancy between what community members in Alexie's novel experience when they are present during the testimony and what they perceive when they later only hear a summary of what had happened. This emphasis on the importance of being present relates to Julie Cruikshank's argument that, because of their contingency in relation to time, contexts, and participants, the meanings of Indigenous storytelling "must be studied in practice. Oral traditions are texts to be heard. They can't be objectified and stored with the idea that their meanings can be determined retrospectively" ("Claiming Legitimacy" 14).

The question that remains, then, is what does it mean to engage as a listener with recordings that are stored in a virtual archive and that are, to a certain extent, decontextualized from the original event? In the Introduction, I reflected on the way in which the recordings of the TRC statements exist at the intersection between storytelling performance and written text because of the way in which it is possible to watch a performance while at the same time navigating it (forwarding, pausing, replaying) more like a book. Métis scholar Warren Cariou reflects on the differences between engaging as a literary scholar with a storytelling performance for which one

was present versus engaging with a written or recorded version of a story ("Who Is the Text"). Cariou's article poses important questions that challenge standard literary studies practices such as quotation and citation in the context of engaging with storytelling performances ("Who Is the Text" 470). As a literary scholar engaging with the TRC recordings, I have been confronted with the question of whether to engage with these recordings as storytelling performances (once experienced and then quoted from memory) or as texts (re-read several times and quoted word-for-word). While I treated the TRC recordings as performances the first time I listened to them by playing each video as a whole and trying to listen as if I was part of the hearing, I decided that it is crucial for my work to return to the statements and to treat them as recordings. Throughout the work on this dissertation, my engagement has been guided by storytelling principles. In a way, the TRC statements can be understood as personal stories and family stories—and by quoting them word-for-word, I tried to pass on these stories as accurately as possible because I remembered Cree-Métis storyteller Duncan Mercredi's description of how he learned family histories should be remembered and shared (see Chapter 1). This is certainly not the only way of engaging with residential school stories, and my discussion of *Indian Horse* and *As Long As the Rivers Flow* has demonstrated how survivors' stories can be creatively shared further in ways that do not involve re-stating them word-for-word. However, I do think that there is a difference between Indigenous writers retelling survivors' stories and non-Indigenous academics retelling survivors' stories. For my own process of witnessing, I found it important to be accurate—also because of the fact that these stories are also documenting crimes as Chrisjohn et al. remind us (34). [105]

[105] Since quoting from a story is a process of taking a part out of a larger whole, I need to acknowledge that the process of quotation is inherently decontextualizing. However, throughout this chapter I was careful to embed and plant these pieces into another appropriate larger whole by braiding them with other quotations and my own thoughts through a process of witnessing.

All listeners of the TRC recordings are furthermore confronted with the fact that the recordings' point of view is limited. It is important to acknowledge that the recordings entail certain constraints when it comes to establishing relationships with viewers who watch from a different place at a different point in time: while the recordings allow us to see the hearings, they simultaneously prevent us from seeing certain elements of those hearings. The viewer of the recordings cannot look beyond the scope of the camera lens. When the camera focuses on the survivor who is giving testimony, the viewer of the recording is not allowed to see the commissioners' reactions—or the reactions of all of the audience members. One major constraint of the recordings is that they do not allow the viewer to have eye contact with the survivors. As discussed in Chapter 1, Dovie Thomason prefaces the recording of her storytelling performance with a short clip in which she addresses the viewer directly while looking into the camera lens and therefore directly into the viewers eyes. Because of the fact that survivors were addressing the commissioners and audience members rather than looking directly into the camera lens, the viewer of the recordings does not experience this relationship-establishing interaction.

Philip Auslander argues that "the televisual image is not only a reproduction or repetition of a performance but a performance in itself" (Auslander 44). For me, his argument suggests that viewers of a TRC recording not only witness the testimony that is being given, they experience this testimony through someone else's act of witnessing—that of the camera person capturing the statement. The recordings of the community hearings usually feature a static camera angle, which evokes for the viewer the impression of being part of a live theatrical performance (Auslander 20). For the viewer, the perspective therefore creates the impression that she or he sits in the audience, watching the testimony—and the filter of the camera lens is glossed over. As soon as the camera person decides to pan across the room or zoom in on a survivor giving testimony, this effect is

disrupted, and the viewer is reminded that they are watching a recording. While watching the recordings of the TRC hearings is certainly not the same as having been in the room when they were recorded, I argue that it is still possible for the viewer to experience some of the relationship-establishing qualities of the testimonies—especially because of all the moments in which commissioners and survivors address future viewers of the recordings directly.

Stories and an understanding of storytelling are important for both understanding and telling one's life story. The novels reflect on the influence of story on life stories (and hence on testimony), and some survivors at the TRC do the same. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and *As Long As the Rivers Flow*, the survivor characters use traditional stories as frames of reference for their own life stories. As can be seen in the recordings, survivors at the TRC hearings do the same, for example when Sandra Wolf at the hearing in Thunder Bay makes a short reference the figure of the trickster to explain the effects of intergenerational trauma (SP093 1:17:00). Judi Kochon in her testimony at the Tulita hearing speaks about the importance of stories, and she remembers the stories she heard from her great-grandfather "who was a very good storyteller" (SP018 3:55:38). She also remembers how she used to act out the stories she heard when she was very young (3:56:00). In particular, Kochon remembers how her great-grandfather told her a story about a raven and that if she would stand under a raven, she would receive her bundle, which would contain anything she could want in life—which is exactly what Kochon did as a child when she saw a raven (3:56:08-3:56:28). Reflecting back on her life, Kochon recognizes: "I think I survived because of my great-grandfather's teachings" (4:08:27-4:08:38). Kochon then contrasts her great-grandfather's way of indirectly teaching her right from wrong through stories with the way she was taught "right" from "wrong" through punishment in residential school (4:08:50). Highway's and Alexie's novels suggest that braiding one's own life stories with other stories enhances the

meaning of one's story and helps to showcase certain points. This is what Kochon is doing when she tells the audience some of the stories her great-grandfather told her in order to explain her own experiences.

Alexie's novel addresses the importance of using Indigenous stories as a frame of reference—and "Indigenous" here literally refers to stories that originate from one's place and community. Paul Andrew's testimony at the Tulita hearing reflects on the same argument. In his testimony, Andrew points out that Hollywood stereotypes are dangerous, and that Indigenous communities need their own stories as frames of reference. Growing up, Andrew remembers, "John Wayne was our hero. John Wayne once shot three Indians […]. Wow, that's amazing. That's the kind of people that we began to admire" (SP018 2:04:46-2:04:57). Andrew then points out that the residential school system specifically prevented them from knowing their own stories "because part of the plan was to eliminate that whole thing" (2:05:08-2:08:15). Andrew's testimony ends with a powerful statement on what he calls "the resiliency of the human spirit" (2:24:54) and he announces: "We will recover. It might take a long, long time, but we will recover. […] And maybe one day, somebody will make a movie of Yamoria [one of the heroes in Dene stories] and what it means. Somebody will write a story of Yamoria. So that 500 years from now, the story of Yamoria is still alive and well" (2:25:05- 2:25:35). Like Alexie's novel, Andrew's testimony acknowledges the importance of Indigenous stories as frames of reference for people to live by.

Andrew's testimony also ends on a strong, hopeful note; it is conspicuous how many survivors close their testimonies with messages of hope. In Chapter 2, I discussed how important hope is for residential school novels because of the ways in which these novels also constitute frames of reference for survivors, intergenerational survivors, and their families. I argue that the same is true for residential school testimonies, and that survivors were aware that their testimonies

would offer messages of hope for future audiences. Ronald Niezen, in his argument that the TRC established a kind of template that most testimonies followed, states that "the most consistent, and possibly most necessary theme in survivor testimony is a concluding account of healing and redemption" (98). Niezen claims that this "account of redemption" at the end of testimony "puts a cap on the witnesses' suffering and by extension on the audiences' need for sympathy" (99). I disagree with Niezen's analysis of what he calls "redemption" (which evokes the discourse of Christianity) because I argue that hope does not preclude political struggles and further action but rather supports them. As Paulette Regan points out, "educator and activist Paulo Freire identifies the importance of linking struggle with hope in spite of the apparent hopelessness of our situation" (*Unsettling* 22). In my understanding of residential school testimony, this is exactly what survivors do at the TRC hearings. There are numerous examples to be found, such as Lillian Saunders's testimony in Thompson. Saunders has worked with numerous survivors and states that she wants to honour their stories using her testimony not to look at the past but to "look ahead to provide some words of hope" (SP082 1:36:55). As discussed in Chapter 1, Julie Cruikshank was taught by Elders that "[o]ral tradition does not simply tell us about the past, […] it continues to provide guidelines for the present and it lays a foundation for thinking about the future" ("Claiming Legitimacy" 2). The survivors recognize the importance of hope for providing guidelines, and on Manitoulin Island, Margaret Trudeau offers a message for all the young people who might be listening to her testimony in the future: "I want to tell all the young people: Be proud of who you are […] Fight. Fight hard" (SP086 3:11:30-3:11:40). Also at the Manitoulin Island hearing, Cherilyn Panamick, whose grandmother went to Spanish Residential School, addresses the survivors in the room directly at the end of her testimony: "I thank you for having the courage to share with us to help give us clarity and understanding. Your stories of healing, sobriety, and

moving forward give me hope for my own future" (SP086 1:59:09-1:59:25). In Chapter 3, I suggested that testimonies offer guidance just as dibaajimowinan do—and through this act of offering guidance, survivors and intergenerational survivors once again establish reciprocal relationships that contribute to resurgence.

As I hope to have demonstrated throughout this chapter, survivors perform the storytelling principles of residential school testimony that I identified in the beginning of this chapter, and thereby, they restore relationships. I also hope to have demonstrated and reflected some of the enormous richness and variety of the stories that can be found in the recordings of the TRC hearings. This variety proves that survivors were able to mitigate the TRC's constraints in many different ways. The question of agency is important—especially in a context where survivors had been robbed of a lot of agency in the past. Arguing, as some scholars do, that the TRC format fully determines the stories that these survivors share does not advocate for the survivors but obfuscates the numerous ways in which the survivors claimed agency and skillfully created testimonies that performed numerous important functions. Similarly, only focusing on the fact that the TRC did not have judicial powers and looking at these testimonies only through the lens of courtroom testimony or trauma theory runs the risk of misreading how these stories work—which then yet again robs survivors of their voices. While it is important to be aware of the TRC's flaws and the constraints under which it operated (and the constraints it sometimes produced), it is also important to look at it through alternative lenses. In order to do justice to survivors' testimonies, it is crucial to listen differently—and as I hope to have demonstrated, residential school novels and Indigenous storytelling principles offer ways for learning how to listen and to engage in a decolonial manner.

Conclusion: Getting Ready to Listen

As we near the end of this dissertation, I would like to invite the reader to think about beginnings. I carefully chose the phrase "Getting Ready to Listen" as a title for this conclusion—even though it might seem to be more appropriate for an introduction. However, after listening to all the stories and voices that this dissertation engages with, my sense is that this work is only the beginning, since there are numerous stories out there that still need to be listened to. Working on this dissertation has also made me aware of how listening to residential school stories is in fact a starting point from which to move forward with further actions as one adopts the responsibilities of testimony. In order to reflect on the findings of this dissertation, I want to think more literally about the process of getting ready to listen to residential school stories, and I want to think about the ways in which the ideas developed in this dissertation might help audiences to prepare themselves to listen to survivors' voices in a respectful and decolonial manner.

David Alexander Robertson and Scott B. Henderson's residential school graphic novel *Sugar Falls* emphasizes the importance of getting ready to listen to survivors' testimonies. The graphic novel is based on the residential school experiences of Betty Ross, an Elder and residential school survivor from Cross Lake First Nation. Ross shared her life story with the two artists—one Cree and one non-Indigenous—and together they expressed Ross's testimony creatively. In a way, the composition process of *Sugar Falls* as a creative testimony that is told collectively displays certain parallels to Jeremiah's process of creating a testimonial play that is told collectively by actors on a stage in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Creating *Sugar Falls* was a reciprocal process that required Ross to tell her story and Robertson and Henderson to listen and to retell it.[106] This

[106] When he launched his children's book *When We Were Alone* at McNally Robinson in Winnipeg in January 2017, David Alexander Robertson spoke about the process of listening to Elder Betty Ross during the creation process of *Sugar Falls*. Robertson explained that Ross—just like the kokum character in the graphic novel—invited him to a

reciprocal storytelling process is reflected in the plot of the graphic novel itself. The story opens with Daniel, a non-Indigenous character, who is asked by his high school teacher to "seek out a personal account from a residential school survivor" and to "tell their story" (1). Daniel's friend April invites him to listen to her kokum Betty's story. Betty takes the two students to "the round room" in which she keeps "sacred medicines" and "the star blanket of the four directions," which make her feel "safe" (4). Before telling her story, Betty changes her clothes and explains: "I am wearing traditional attire—and always in bright colours, because of the bland clothing we were made to wear at the school" (5). She also holds an eagle feather "to honour the past and move forward with courage, honesty, and truth" (5). Then, all three of them smudge, and Betty starts telling her story. The graphic novel illustrates that both the telling of Betty's story and the act of listening involve ways of preparation that help speaker and listener to get ready.

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was gathering survivors' testimonies, it also included ceremonies in its events that were supposed to help both speakers and listeners to get ready for the stories that were being shared. For example, one can see and hear women playing hand drums and singing songs when watching the recording of the Manitoulin Island hearing. At the hearing in Thompson, survivors and audience members smudged in order to prepare for the stories ahead. Furthermore, TRC hearings often involved lighting a sacred fire at the beginning of an event. Ronald Niezen is critical of the fact that the TRC "did not just import ritual and spiritual meaning from existing traditions […]; it also creatively adapted and invented them" (64). For me, the fact that the TRC was trying to offer ceremonies to survivors and audiences reveals a felt need

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round room to tell her story. That she chose to wear brightly coloured clothes when telling her story also inspired Robertson to have the grandmother character in *When We Were Alone* wear especially colourful clothes.

to prepare speakers and listeners for the stories that were shared—which, in turn, speaks to the weight that residential school testimonies carry.

Sto:Lo scholar Jo-ann Archibald speaks about the idea of becoming "story-ready" in the context of education and that one "question to keep in mind is, *What do I need to do first to get story-ready*?" ("On Becoming Story-Ready"). While her ideas mostly refer to educators who would like to teach Indigenous stories in the classroom, I think that her concept of becoming "story-ready" can also productively be applied to the context of residential school stories. Archibald speaks about how, in order to become story-ready, educators need to get comfortable with Indigenous stories. She emphasizes that they need to inform themselves about the contexts and traditions from which a story emerges, and that they then need to spend some time with the story itself ("On Indigenous Stories" 00:00 – 1:00). I am bringing Archibald's idea of becoming story-ready to the context of residential school stories because I think that those who engage with survivors' testimonies need to think about how to become story-ready. The majority of those who encounter residential school stories will do so either through books or through the TRC recordings on the website of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Therefore, most of these audience members are not likely to become story-ready through accompanying ceremonies. I think that the work undertaken in this dissertation offers a few suggestions for the process of getting ready to listen to residential school stories. These ideas are, however, in no way meant to be prescriptive since the process of becoming story-ready is a personal process that is to a great extent dependent on an individual's own life story and background.

As pointed out in Chapter 1, the framework through which we choose to engage with residential school stories matters. The knowledge and the theories that we bring and apply to residential school literature and residential school testimonies alike determine the knowledge that

we gain from these stories, and they determine the way in which we understand our own position as listeners. As demonstrated in my analysis of the principles of courtroom testimony and testimonial theories from the context of Holocaust studies, these ideas involve certain assumptions about the ways in which testimonies convey information and the kind of information that is conveyed. As pointed out, according to these theories, the relationship between listener and speaker is often one that is characterized by asymmetry and dependence. This example demonstrates how theories and pre-existing knowledge impact the relationships created by testimony—it also demonstrates how theories influence the ways in which we understand our own role in this relationship and how we then approach the process of listening. One argument at the heart of this dissertation has been that Indigenous storytelling principles can offer us an alternative methodology through which one might listen to and learn from Indigenous testimonies. Indigenous storytelling principles can also help audiences to get ready to listen to residential school stories.

The other central argument of this dissertation has been that residential school novels can help us to understand the ways in which residential school testimony is grounded in Indigenous storytelling principles. If we read those novels as theories of testimony, they teach us about the many ways in which Indigenous testimony as a storytelling practice (re)establishes relationships and works towards resurgence. Each of the novels discussed in this dissertation emphasizes different aspects of Indigenous testimony: Highway's novel highlights the potential for creative collaboration, Alexie's novel showcases how testimony might strengthen relationships through interpersonal support, Wagamese's novel raises questions about the ways in which the body and the land impact testimony, and Bartleman's novel invites us to ponder the extent to which testimony might be able to strengthen intergenerational relationships through acts of witnessing. All of the novels' approaches are deeply grounded in Indigenous storytelling principles.

One of the most important lessons that Indigenous storytelling and residential school novels teach is that any listener needs to be aware that residential school testimonies are sites of relationships and that the process of giving testimony is a process of (re)establishing relationships. By acknowledging the relational nature of Indigenous testimony that is grounded in Indigenous storytelling, a listener is enabled to recognize how these testimonies not only testify to a traumatic past (although that is one important function that they fulfill) but also impart important knowledge about resiliency and thereby lay the foundation for Indigenous resurgence in the present and future. However, while it is important for listeners to recognize the knowledge that is shared in residential school testimony and to be cognizant of the relationship-establishing function that it has, it is also crucial for any listener to be aware that not all of the knowledge is necessarily meant for them, and that they are not automatically implicated in all of the relationships that a testimony might address. As demonstrated, in my discussion of James Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow*, residential school testimony often addresses intergenerational kinship (and extended kinship) relationships. For many survivors and intergenerational survivors, residential school testimony can contribute to reconnection. For audiences, it is important to listen with empathy in order to recognize which parts of testimony are meant for them to engage with and which parts are directed at kinship relations. Survivors spoke at TRC hearings or write residential school literature because they want to share their stories—and many of them emphasize that they want to pass on knowledge to their own children and future generations. While the TRC recordings and residential school literature offer survivors the opportunity to have their stories listened to widely, this form of dissemination also means that survivors do not have control over who listens to their stories and how. It is

therefore incumbent on the listener to recognize which elements of a story might be directed at family and community members and might therefore not be meant for any listener to pass on.[107]

Indigenous storytelling principles emphasize that story emerges out of the interaction between teller and listener, and listeners who seek to become story-ready should be aware that active listening and participation is crucial for audiences of residential school testimony. And as I have pointed out in the Introduction, readers of novels are also, in many ways, listeners. The way in which listeners can contribute to testimony is particularly emphasized in Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*, which illustrates how it is the audience that can transform testimony into a victorious battle by supporting the survivors. Alexie's novel renders visible the ways in which listeners' collaboration is crucial for relationships to be established or strengthened. As discussed before, when engaging with TRC recordings or residential school literature, a listener cannot actively influence the story—but if they listen collaboratively, they can shape their own experience of the story and thereby become part of imagined relationships which are, as Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice reminds us, a foundation for all relationships (*Why Indigenous* 74).

When listening to residential school testimony that was given to the TRC, audiences need to be aware that the process of sharing story is holistic. As storytelling principles teach us, storytellers do not only speak from their mind to the mind of their listener. Instead, storytelling and Indigenous testimony are holistic processes that involve emotions, the body, and the spiritual just as much as they involve the mind. This awareness of the holistic nature of the storytelling process is important for listeners, so that they can recognize survivors' emotions as important elements of their

[107] When engaging with the TRC recordings, for example, a listener will notice moments when survivors turn to present family or community members during their testimony and address them directly. Often, these moments include apologies for occurrences in the past. That the survivor is speaking directly to an audience member is often an indicator that this part of the testimony is not primarily meant for all listeners—even though it is recorded.

testimony rather than, as TRC critics in the past have done, diminishing these emotions as markers of distress that distract from a form of rational testimony that is often expected in Western courtroom contexts. Equally important is the listeners' awareness that survivors do not share their stories in a vacuum. Indigenous storytelling principles teach us that the process of giving testimony is embedded in a web of relationships—one of those relationships is between teller and listener and another one is the participants' relationship to their environment, the land in particular. As demonstrated in my discussion of Elsie Mary Kwandibens's testimony at the TRC's Manitoulin Island hearing, survivors' testimonies emerge from relationships to place. For listeners who seek to become story-ready, an awareness of place might involve asking themselves the questions of *where* they are listening, whose territory they are on, and what their own relationship is to the place that they are listening from.

As pointed out throughout this thesis, the very pervasive ideas of Western courtroom testimony deeply influence many listeners as soon as they hear the word "testimony." It is because of courtroom testimony's principles of linearity and relevance that many listeners misunderstand certain elements of Indigenous testimony. Therefore, they are unable to perceive the knowledge that is imparted, and they might remain untouched by the effects that these elements are supposed to have on them. One example is the use of humour in residential school testimony. While humorous anecdotes and jokes might be perceived to be off-topic, irrelevant, or even inappropriate in the context of Western legal testimony, they fulfill important functions in Indigenous testimony. As discussed in Chapter 4, humour is one technique through which survivors establish relationships, and it can be a means through which survivors take care of themselves and of their audience by lifting the burden of the heavy residential school story for a few moments. It is therefore important for listeners to recognize these humorous moments for what they are and to

accept the invitation to laugh and participate in the relationship that is being built. This also applies to readers of residential school literature—especially to those who are listening to Highway's and Alexie's stories, which are full of humorous instances which often confront audiences (especially non-Indigenous readers) with the question of whether it is appropriate to laugh. Other elements of Indigenous testimony, such as, for example, the use of song, might pose similar puzzles to listeners who are not familiar with Indigenous storytelling traditions. For listeners who do not listen with a knowledge of how song works in Indigenous contexts, the song might appear as off-topic, not conveying relevant information on the subject matter of residential schools. Listeners who do know who to listen, however, will recognize how song functions to reinforce relationships that were targeted by the residential school system.

Finally, it is important for listeners to keep in mind that the structure of Indigenous testimony that adopts Indigenous storytelling principles is different from that of Western autobiographies which are still mostly told chronologically with each life event being re-visited once. Indigenous testimony, however, is often circular, and in the passage with which I opened this dissertation, Cree author Darrel McLeod describes the movements of testimony as spirals in which certain elements of a story are visited and revisited time and again with each visit adding another layer of meaning and understanding. In this dissertation, I have discussed this process of layering meaning through the idea of braiding stories. As pointed out, Jeremiah's process of telling his life story through his plays in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* involves a braiding of personal story (âcimisowin) and traditional Cree stories (âtayohkewin). Neal McLeod captures this kind of braiding with the Cree concept of aniskwâcimopicikêwin, which means "the process of connecting stories together" (*Indigenous Poetics* 8). Aniskwâcimopicikêwin reminds us that meaning resides not only in a story itself but also in the relationships that a story has to other stories. As discussed in Chapter 4,

residential school survivors are aware of this relational form of meaning when they braid their own life stories with other stories that testify to the impacts of colonialism on the one hand and to Indigenous resilience on the other hand.

The ways in which Jeremiah braids his life story with traditional Cree stories, and the ways in which Robert Arthur Alexie braids the story of his protagonist James with the story of a lone wolf, prompted me to re-evaluate the Western idea of fiction in the context of residential school literature. The concept of fiction, because of the ways in which it connotes invention and the imaginary, does not usually capture the process of braiding one's own story with other stories. The process of braiding (which also applies to the ways in which Richard Wagamese and James Bartleman wrote their novels by witnessing and braiding others' stories) does not take away from the truth that is being conveyed—in fact, the authors are deepening their own truth by storying it and setting it in relation to other stories. If those novels are engaged with through the lens of the Western concept of fiction only, there is a danger that the novels' potential of bestowing the responsibilities of testimony on their audiences becomes diminished.

This leads me to the last, yet very important point of my considerations of how we might get ready to listen to residential school stories: the awareness that the relationships that Indigenous testimony develops entail certain responsibilities. As discussed in Chapter 4, Paulette Regan warns that non-Indigenous audiences should avoid listening with what she refers to as "colonial empathy," which would allow the audience to perceive the act of listening to these stories as being enough, so that no further responsibilities need to be adopted. To prevent this shallow colonial empathy, listeners need to be aware that when they are engaging with stories, they receive a gift and they should be committed to reciprocate this gift through further actions that work towards relationship-building and decolonization. There are numerous ways in which the responsibilities

that come with residential school stories might be honoured. One way, as discussed in the context of Anishinaabe storytelling in Chapter 3, is to embody the stories' teachings in one's everyday life. Another way in which audience members can adopt the responsibilities of residential school stories is by witnessing these stories in the manner that the TRC suggested: by listening and sharing survivors' truths further. When thinking about the responsibility of witnessing, it is helpful to return to Anishinaabe scholar Kimberley Blaeser's thoughts about storytelling, which were discussed in Chapter 3. Blaeser conceptualizes the act of storytelling as a process of both harvesting and re-seeding (Blaeser "Wild Rice" 253). Residential school survivors who tell their stories are simultaneously planting stories because of the ways in which their stories might be shared further, and because of the many ways in which actions might grow out of these stories—actions which then create further stories. As this dissertation has demonstrated, telling residential school stories is an act of resurgence—and at the same time, telling residential school stories encourages further acts of resurgence in the present and future. However, this cycle of planting and re-seeding can only continue if the audience listens and knows how to listen. As listeners, we harvest a story while, at the same time, the potential for future stories is planted within us. Blaeser's imagery of seeds and growth leads me back to Dovie Thomason's thoughts on witnessing residential school stories. In "The Spirit Survives," Thomason reflects on how residential school stories can function like a brightly burning fire that brings light into darkness and that offers enough heat for listeners to cook a meal on it. Similar to Blaeser's thoughts about harvesting and planting, Thomason's images of food and fire speak to the ways in which listening to testimony can be a nourishing and sustaining experience.

One last aspect I would like to consider in this conclusion is the process of engaging with recorded (either written or video recorded) residential school stories as opposed to engaging in

storytelling situations in which one shares the same time and place as the survivor telling the story. As pointed out early in this dissertation, in certain contexts of Indigenous storytelling, stories are thought of as living beings. Living beings, by nature, change. As soon as a story is recorded in writing or on film, however, it becomes frozen. Since human beings are also living beings, we change, and our understanding of our past from the point of view of the present is also characterized by change. In Indigenous storytelling traditions, storytellers are highly aware of the fact that living beings are constantly changing, and they purposefully adapt the stories that they tell in the current contexts. Indigenous storytellers might change the plot of a certain story slightly, or they might combine one story with a different one, thereby grouping certain events or teachings together in order to invite their audiences to gain knowledge that is most meaningful for them in their present situation. I think that the ways in which human beings tell life stories are similar, and that the structure of one's story or the events that are highlighted changes with the understanding that one has of one's life in the present moment. This is also true for residential school survivors and the life stories that they share. Over the course of their lives, survivors might change the ways in which they tell their life stories—they might circle in different directions, pair certain events with other events, and draw new connections to come to new conclusions. Just like the stories in Indigenous storytelling traditions, residential school testimonies are living beings.

When conceiving of residential school stories in this manner, one comes to see that the TRC created a certain storytelling dilemma for survivors because it asked them to share one version of their life story—and residential school survivors were told that this would be the one version that would be recorded, frozen in time, and shared for future audiences to engage with. In my opinion, survivors were aware of the implications of the recording process, and although there were survivors who testified spontaneously, the majority of those whose recorded stories I listened to

related their stories very carefully. Many survivors used written notes or talked about the amount of time that they spent crafting their testimony before the hearings in an attempt to find the best way to share their truth. These instances speak to the survivors' awareness of having one chance to preserve their story and share it in a wider context, and they also speak to the challenges that come with this one chance. As listeners, we need to be aware of the fact that the TRC recordings are one particular manifestation of the survivors' stories in one particular moment in time. The same is true for residential school literature, as Tomson Highway demonstrates with the many different installments of his *Kiss of the Fur Queen* story—and with his problematic more recent interpretation of his own life story that has been picked up by the press as discussed in Chapter 2. Even though the authors of residential school literature spent much thought on finding the most meaningful way to tell their stories, anyone engaging with these stories needs to be aware that they emerge from a particular point in time and place, and that even though they may seem permanent because of their written and recorded nature, the actual stories are subject to change in the life they take on outside of their recorded form. It is therefore crucial for any listener to be aware that all stories are manifestations in a particular moment and context and not permanent, absolute versions.

One of the main motivations of this dissertation has been to demonstrate the ways in which residential school stories contribute to Indigenous resurgence in the present and future. As a scholar, I am convinced that residential school stories and testimonies have a lot to teach us, and, as pointed out throughout this thesis, this is why they need to be listened to again and again. When thinking about suggestions for further study as it is customary for scholars to do in conclusions, the main endeavor that I would propose is further engagement with residential school stories. Further engagement certainly entails listening to more residential school stories and reading more residential school literature. However, any process of listening should be followed by concrete

actions. Further engagement might therefore also entail thinking about how to embody the teachings of residential school stories in one's everyday life and thinking about how those testimonies might compel their audiences to concrete acts of decolonization. Further engagement is also related to witnessing, and it might therefore entail thinking about ways in which one can bring residential school stories out of the archives for others to engage with. For scholars who seek to engage further with residential school testimonies, and specifically the TRC recordings, many research questions remain. Further research might be focusing on the differences between the TRC community hearings and its much bigger national events where audiences were larger and no longer part of one specific community. Another field of study is certainly the comparison of different forms of residential school testimony. For example, it would be worthwhile to compare the TRC recordings to the testimonies that survivors gave to the Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF). The LHF received testimonies long before the TRC did (and in the form of structured interviews). It would be interesting to see how and to what extent survivors employed Indigenous storytelling techniques in this different situation. While this dissertation has offered glimpses of how Cree, Anishinaabe, and Dene storytelling traditions might inform our understanding of residential school testimonies, more work needs to be done in the context of other Indigenous storytelling traditions. Further studies also potentially involve applying Indigenous storytelling principles to media other than written literature or video recorded TRC testimonies. Residential school experiences are shared in numerous other forms, such as for example film and theatre. Neal McLeod's concept of aniskwâcimopicikêwin, the process of braiding stories, is explicitly one that occurs across different media. It would therefore be worthwhile to bring TRC testimonies together with other forms of residential school narratives in order to see how each format might enhance the meaning we make of the other. Indigenous storytelling principles and the theories that are

developed in residential school novels teach us how to listen to TRC testimonies—but they might also help us to listen to residential school narratives in yet other forms.

Finally, I am convinced that what Indigenous storytelling principles and residential school novels teach us about listening can prove helpful when engaging with Indigenous literatures more generally. Residential school testimonies establish relationships and invite the listener to learn from the stories that are shared, to keep them in their memory, and to share them with others. This process of listening and witnessing is similar to the process of analyzing literature: like the witness, the scholar engages with stories, makes meaning, and eventually shares what they have learned. The principles of listening, as they have surfaced over the course of this dissertation, therefore offer suggestions on how to engage ethically and responsibly with Indigenous literatures. For a scholar, listening to Indigenous literatures means to not only engage with the mind, but also to be aware of one's body and emotions in relation to the text that one is analyzing, and to thereby adopt ways of listening that are more holistic. As pointed out, when listening, one engages in a relationship—and in a relationship one adopts responsibilities for the other. A scholar's responsibilities for a text include criticism that is true to the text's nature and that does not impose meaning that might distort the text. An ethical engagement with residential school testimonies should be, as suggested throughout this dissertation, committed to further action and decolonization. The same is true for an analysis of Indigenous literary texts. The scholar's intention should be to learn from the texts and to offer an analysis that, like the text under analysis, can change beliefs, attitudes, and actions. When confronted with the question of how to ethically approach residential school survivors' testimonies in an academic context, Mi'kmaq poet and residential school survivor Rita Joe said: "Analyze if you wish, but listen" (Joe qtd. in McKegney, *Magic* 135). This dissertation is my attempt to analyze and to listen. It constitutes my engagement

with residential school survivors' testimonies as a literary scholar. And it constitutes my own act of listening and witnessing. As this dissertation ends, I do hope that the reader recognizes that we are truly at the beginning and seeks out the many stories that are out there in order to listen to them, to learn from them, and to engage in the opportunities for relationship that they offer.

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