

Imagining Adoption: Filiation and Affiliation in the Works
of Richard Wagamese

by

Jac-Lynn Wasyliv

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore the works of Richard Wagamese, focusing on his two novels Keeper'n Me and A Quality of Light as they pertain to the theme of the adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes with specific attention to the framework of colonialism and its relevance to the Sixties Scoop and how this has impacted the identity construction of those Aboriginal people affected. As the title suggests, how adoption is imagined in both novels explores the binaries of filial and affiliative relationships such as birth/adoptive and how this affects adoptees' sense of themselves as Aboriginal people in Canada. Through the figure of the intercultural Aboriginal adoptee ideas of what constitutes "Nativity" such as appearance, cultural affiliation, and relationship to the land are subjected to thorough examination of how identity is both given and chosen. The other aspect to the project involves the fictive Aboriginal adoptee's search for belonging and how this can be seen as a metaphor for the larger issue that many displaced Aboriginal people face finding place and belonging.

Introduction: Part I

Introduction to Scope of Thesis

...Canada is an evolving colonial entity created by colonial interests for the express purpose of extending and consolidating those interests at the expense of the indigenous peoples and their contemporary descendants. Canada has established racist, exploitative and coercive colonial relationships interpreted by the dominant, in which the dominated are styled as Other. These relationships are perpetrated by a mythologized history and by judicial and political institutions that proclaim and defend this mythology-cloaked, un-hyphenated colonialism....Canada cannot escape its colonial past through the passage of time. Only explicit acknowledgement of its origins and the constitutional and political consequences of acknowledging such responsibility can achieve a "détente with history" and a genuinely post-colonial future (Green 85-86).

In the above quote, Joyce A. Green eloquently describes both the history of colonialism in Canada and what she deems the only possible way to begin the process of decolonizing Canada. The history and culture of Aboriginal peoples has been distorted, ignored, subjugated, denounced, denied, disrespected, and unwritten from the history books to promote and further the goals and ideologies of mainstream Canadians. Although Green calls for the Canadian government to acknowledge responsibility, the responsibility belongs to everyone to familiarize themselves with those issues she discusses, especially the mythmaking that surrounds Aboriginal peoples and their struggles in Canada. Part of decolonization involves "telling the stories behind the myths" (85-86). Arguably all Aboriginal authors are actively seeking to tell these stories offering counter-culturally relevant histories that expose those myths and offer the other side of the stories represented in mainstream Canada. In his article "Why Native Literature?" Armand Garnet Ruffo offers a useful observation of how Aboriginal authors seek to overcome the impositions of colonization in their writing.

As an expression of voice, or more correctly, a community of voices, Native writers are attempting to find expression in a society that does not share their values and concerns. The form of these voices, like content itself, varies according to the individual author, but as a community, theirs is a collective voice that addresses the relationship between colonizer and colonized, the impact of colonialism, and, moreover, functions on a practical level by striving to bring about positive change. Thus my claim is that Native Literature, while grounded in a traditional spiritually based world-view, is no less a call for liberation, survival and beyond to affirmation (664).

Ruffo acknowledges culturally specific and individual differences within the writings by Aboriginal people while also noting that they are united by the goal of decolonizing virtually all aspects of their writing, from subject matter to the consideration of what constitutes Aboriginal literature. The discussion of Aboriginal literature and what this encompasses has been a source of much debate for many reasons, ranging from considerations of the blood quantum of Aboriginal authors to the accepted subject matter that Aboriginal authors write about to the impossibility of determining a common "racial denominator" by which to gauge Aboriginal literature (Damm 12-13). Damm notes that the most pervasive reason why many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors and scholars alike balk at the categorization of Aboriginal literature is not the categorization itself but who does the categorizing¹. While colonizing systems impose "misrepresentative, overly-broad or trivializing labels of identification," Aboriginal authors and scholars will continue to resist these forms of categorization (Damm 24). As Damm encourages:

By freeing ourselves of the constricting bounds of stereotypes and imposed labels of identity, we empower ourselves and our communities and break free of the yoke of colonial power that has not only controlled what we do and where we live but who we are (24).

Ultimately the unifying factor that Damm relies upon to discuss the body of Aboriginal literature is the common denominator of decolonization. In her article "What About

You?": Approaching the Study of 'Native Literature,'" Kristina Fagan "denounces[d] the very term 'Native Literature' arguing that it limits critical analysis by putting the focus on a homogenized and simplified 'Nativity'" (236). To add to the homogenizing of Aboriginal writers under the term Native Literature is the problem of critical and theoretical approaches applied to the literature which generalize that they are post-colonial or responding to colonialism (Fagan 240-241). Thomas King also recognizes the problems with such broad categorizations in his article "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial": "...the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism" (243). To remedy this, Fagan suggests five ways of moving to what she calls "greater specificity in the study of Native literature" (245).

The first of these five approaches that Fagan details is:

Critics need to extensively study individual Canadian Native writers, their styles, visions, and influences, recognizing that writers are unique and not only products of "groupness." Too often, we try to lump together extremely different Native writers (245).

While there are two other projects that focus on individual authors, Cheryl Suzak's critical edition of *In Search of April Raintree* and *Border Crossings: Thomas King's Cultural Inversions* co-authored by Percy Walton, Arnold E. Davidson and Jennifer Andrews (Fagan 245) this thesis works against the still prevailing trend of "groupness" in the academic field of Aboriginal Canadian literature by exploring the works of only one author, Richard Wagamese, who is of Anishinabe ancestry. Further it will focus specifically on his two novels *Keeper'n Me* and *A Quality of Light* as they pertain to the theme of the adoption of Aboriginal² children into non-Aboriginal homes within the framework of colonialism with special attention to the Sixties Scoop and how this has impacted the identity construction of those Aboriginal people affected. The history and

frame of colonialism sets Wagamese's work apart from other adoptee literature and indeed other inter-cultural³ adoptee literature in terms of identity formation. The power imbalances that privileged white Canadians and the colonial practices that have impacted the lives and identities of Aboriginal people, specifically through abuses within the child welfare system, directly set the context for both novels. There have been other novels and plays that examine many issues that pertain to what is commonly referred to as transracial adoption and fictional transracial adoptees, and some have focused on Aboriginal adoptees in Canada within the framework of colonialism, such as The Pale Indian by Robert Arthur Alexie, Inside Out: An Autobiography of a Native Canadian by James Tyman, In Search of April Raintree by Beatrice Culleton Mosionier, Someday: A Play by Drew Hayden Taylor and "Moonlodge", a play by Margo Kane.

During the Sixties Scoop and arguably today as well (Sinclair 67), startling numbers, approximately one third of all Aboriginal children, were adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. In many instances these adoptees grew up without any culturally relevant indicators as their adoptive parents had no relevant knowledge of their particular cultures and they faced harsh institutionalized racism in their predominantly white surroundings. Wagamese addresses the resultant confusion that cultural displacement, alienation and lack of positive role models can have on Aboriginal adoptees. His fiction is steeped in modern Aboriginal conflicts, such as the Oka crisis of 1990, that have historical relevance played out through the fictive inter-cultural adoptee characters. Their personal struggles to construct positive identity while submersed in white culture mirror the struggles that Aboriginal peoples face as a group to retain their cultural autonomy in the face of colonialist practices designed to deface, devalue and undermine their histories.

Wagamese conceptualizes the complicated race relations and frictions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people by imagining adoption in different ways to reflect points of interfacing cultural differences and similarities. He comments on the social status of Aboriginal peoples, specifically the Anishinabe of northern Ontario, and addresses issues of identity, of belonging, and cultural affiliation through the binaries of birth/adoptive and filial/affiliative relationships. Through the binary of filial and affiliative relationships Wagamese is able to demonstrate how ideas of biological essence and social constructivism play into identity construction. However, it would be inappropriate not to contextualize his novels within the framework of the colonization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and to recognize how this affects how these novels are read. To read the novels outside of the historical, political, and cultural context in which they are written would further compromise the process of decolonization that takes place when Aboriginal authors like Wagamese tell their stories that expose the myths of colonization. By writing his experience and the experience of many Aboriginal adoptees, Wagamese is helping to reshape and recontextualize how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike view the constructed nature of "Indian" identity and the effects of negative stereotyping. He also demonstrates how the lack of actual historical and contemporary documentation of Aboriginal people detracts from positive identity construction.

In Wagamese's novel Keeper'N Me, Keeper suggest that "if you listen hard, pay close attention, you'll see they're your stories too" (4); for myself this is particularly apt as I did find enough of my own story within these two novels as a female Gwich'in adoptee, raised in a white family in southern Ontario. My interest in this project started with a sense that as an adoptee, specifically an Aboriginal adoptee, my story was

somehow absent from the school books and literature that I had read both in and out of school. I had never been taught about the Sixties Scoop nor had any adequate knowledge about my own situation as an Aboriginal adoptee living in mainstream society. My adoptive parents, while loving, were completely ignorant of my cultural heritage. After being in university for several years, I finally worked up the courage to apply for a status card to see if I truly was Aboriginal because at the time I thought that was how you knew if you were Aboriginal or not. I wanted a definitive answer about my cultural identity, something that I thought was granted externally by other people, in this case the government. Up to that point I had looked Aboriginal; oddly, I am told I look less so as an adult. As a child I would have killed to blend in as I was under constant scrutiny for my appearance. Questions like "what are you?" plagued my childhood and adolescence, especially as they were generally followed by observations like "you're not white like your parents." My biggest problem with that question was that I never had an adequate answer; I really was unsure. That all changed when I got my status card; it was like a security blanket, something indisputable that I could produce at any time to verify my Aboriginal, or rather my Indian status. Before receiving my status card I was never sure if I was Aboriginal. My adoptive parents thought that my birth father may have been but did not know if he was "full" or "half," and for some reason I took this to mean that I may or may not be fully Aboriginal, if my birth father had not been fully Aboriginal. I was even more ignorant to the legal and cultural ramifications of the word "Indian," as up to that point I was one of two of the only Aboriginal people I had ever met. That changed the summer I got a job at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and met a lot of Aboriginal people. For the first time in my life I was Aboriginal and had to now proceed as such; for

a requirement of my getting this summer position was that I was a card carrying status Indian. The downside to this was that I was also under a different kind of scrutiny for the first time. Now that my racial identity was fixed, my cultural identity came under attack as some Aboriginal people, and white people as well, now accused me of not being “Indian” enough because I was adopted and therefore had no relevant cultural knowledge. Being someone who had only been able to prove my Indian status for about a year at that point, I felt relatively defenseless against these accusations, and I had to admit that other than the status card I really had no proof of cultural affiliation. At that point it was easier not to admit to being Aboriginal and therefore be less open to hostile criticism for my white mannerisms. Eventually this changed and I met Aboriginal people who were educated and knew about the Sixties Scoop and how Aboriginal children came to be adopted and did not fault me for being one of what Keeper describes as “*Apples on accounta they’re red on the outside and white on the inside*” (Wagamese Keeper 36). My eventual acceptance for being Aboriginal, regardless of being adopted and my first introduction to the back story of the adoption of Aboriginal children in Canada, paired with a lifetime love of literature, led me to this general topic of adoption in literature.

After reading Keeper’N Me and A Quality of Light and discovering elements of my own story within both novels, my interest solidified into this thesis about identity construction and the difficulties of navigating through issues of culture, race, politics and affiliation, and how colonialist policies and practices have affected Aboriginal people whether they feel implicated or not. It took a long time to realize that my lack of cultural awareness and knowledge was perhaps less a result of personal deficiency than a result of my upbringing in mainstream Canadian society. While it is possible for me to exist in

both Aboriginal and mainstream situations, I have never quite fit into either. This sentiment of Aboriginal adoptees' liminality seemingly occupying both Aboriginal and white spaces is described by Callahan as a way of exploring tensions within insider/outsider positions, in this instance the insider position being white and the outsider position being Aboriginal (4). This idea of insider/outsider tensions is also useful when exploring how I navigate this thesis as a female Aboriginal adoptee reading material written by a male Aboriginal adoptee whose two novels in question centre around boys' and men's experiences with notably few female characters. The use of feminist criticism to analyze Wagamese's work and to locate myself as a woman did not seem as relevant to me as locating myself as an Aboriginal adoptee. This initial and continued response and reaction I have to the texts added to my need to explore what Callahan would term my "marginalized position of 'in-betweenness' which can be socially alienating" (6). In spite of the gender difference I find an insider relationship to the texts alleviating this sense of alienation. In Jonathan Culler's chapter "Reading as a Woman" he details ways of reading that were also useful for me in analyzing Wagamese's texts if I replace woman with Aboriginal adoptee. Hence I adapt Culler's deconstructionist approach of "Reading as a Woman" to "Reading as an Aboriginal Adoptee:

...where woman's experience is treated as a firm ground for interpretation, one swiftly discovers that this experience is not the sequence of thoughts present to the reader's consciousness as she moves through the text but a reading or interpretation of "woman's experience" –her own and others'- which can be set in a vital and productive relation to the text (63).

Although this may be limiting when analyzing Aboriginal literature it becomes of use to critically discuss adoption within Keeper N Me and A Quality of Light. So in this way

the thesis becomes a direct representation of finding my way to an ideological sense of home through stories (McLeod 19). While these perceived insider responses I have to the literature are useful, it is also noteworthy to describe those instances where I occupy an outsider position to the texts, particularly in regards to actual homecomings or finding birth parents and families and becoming more culturally acclimated to language, histories and traditions. My own personal journey of reclamation is not as evolved as Wagamese's nor as some of his characters, so in this way I am still what Keeper would call a "tourist" (Wagamese *Keeper* 2). The gender differences and varied life experiences of the different adoptees represented by the characters in the novels, the author of the novels and myself become "potential sites of 'contest' and 'collaboration' for identity formation" (Callahan 4); hence, this thesis will explore Aboriginal identity formation with emphasis on the insider/outsider positioning of inter-cultural Aboriginal adoptees.

Chapter One briefly outlines the historical circumstances that led to the Sixties Scoop and the reasons why so many Aboriginal families were interfered with by the child welfare system in Canada. The Canadian government's role in instituting colonial practices was tantamount to cultural genocide by way of residential school systems, reserves and the widespread removal of Aboriginal children for the purposes of cultural re-education. It all resulted in a variety of social and emotional problems for the Aboriginal population. For many Aboriginal peoples this interference has had damaging effects and even mortal consequences as detailed in Fournier and Crey's Stolen From Our Embrace and Geoffrey York's The Dispossessed. Fournier is a journalist who worked on Aboriginal stories for twenty years and has some Aboriginal ancestry as well as a Cree niece. Ernie Crey is a Sto:lo man and former president of the United Native Nations.

Together they co-authored this book based on Ernie's family's tragic experiences and those of many other Aboriginal people. Raven Sinclair, a member of Saskatchewan's Gordon's First Nation, has an article on adoption practices in the time of the Sixties Scoop, a period of unregulated removal of Aboriginal children from their homes to white families, titled "Identity Lost and Found: Lessons from the Sixties Scoop." Strong-Boag's Finding Families Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990's has a chapter called "Native-Newcomer Contact" that details Canadian colonial practices in the child welfare agencies and how this affected Aboriginal families and social structures; however, because Strong-Boag tries to be politically neutral, she lacks culturally relevant critical perspectives.

Chapter Two details the critical methodologies used to examine the two novels Keeper N Me and A Quality of Light with particular reference to Callahan's idea about the intrinsic link between text and context and how this is useful for exploring novels with such contextual relevance (7). This chapter will also include a discussion of the guiding methodologies that inform the reading of these texts, such as McLeod's "Coming Home Through Stories," DePasquale's piece about Aboriginal conceptualizations of home, and Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands" as ways of reading the character's cultural re/claiming and re/establishing home after being lost. Also of critical importance is Said's introduction to The World, The Text, and The Critic as he discusses notions of filial and affiliative relationships which have clear implications when looking at the binary relationships of birth/adoptive parental relationships. In addition to establishing the methodological framework for the thesis, this chapter will also explore other existing critical scholarly work done on adoption in literature and how the methodological

concerns of this thesis differ from existing work. The differences between other critical work and this thesis are largely informed by the history of colonialism and the differing cultural specificity of the Aboriginal groups being discussed in Wagamese's novels.

Chapter Three is an in-depth analysis of both novels as they pertain to markers of "Nativity" and how these in turn affect identity construction. The markers themselves are subject to thorough scrutiny in terms of images of Nativity as outlined by Francis in The Imaginary Indian. This chapter also analyses the non-Aboriginal constructions of Nativity that are in opposition or "other" as Said notes in Orientalism, which the characters in both novels must circumnavigate. In addition to the discussion of falsely constructed images of "Indians," it is also necessary to comment on how the literary Indian has been represented as accurate and how Wagamese works to dispel these constructs and replace them with culturally accurate portrayals of characters. He explores the problems that arise when one replaces an inaccurate literary interpretation with another textual representation.

Chapter Four explores the search for belonging that the characters in both Wagamese novels experience. The ideas of finding what Callahan describes as "birthrights: genealogical kinship, national belonging, and cultural integrity and autonomy" (24) are further complicated in the Canadian context by the larger political issues that affect many Aboriginal groups today. They may not have what they consider cultural autonomy, and a complicated and colonial relationship with Canada seriously confuses notions of belonging nationally for any one Aboriginal group. For some Aboriginal adoptees there is a community and family waiting for their return; for others, there is no home to return to. Thus many of the methodological sources are sensitive to

these issues that surround the repatriation of Aboriginal children and place home in an ideological perspective, such as McLeod's "Coming Home Through Stories." In this way the possibility of finding belonging is not limited to immediate birth families or particular locations but rather to a decision to accept one's culture through indicators such as narratives. In one way Wagamese's texts become stories through which Aboriginal adoptees may find a sense of home; in another way they are the stories behind the myths of colonization.

Introduction: Part II

An Introduction to Richard Wagamese and the Novels

Richard Wagamese is an Anishinabe author. He started his writing career writing columns for the National Native newspaper Windspeaker in 1988 and then continued with the Calgary Herald in 1989 before beginning to write fiction. His books include Keeper'N Me (1994), A Quality of Light (1997) and most recently Dream Wheels (2006) which has won the 2007 Canadian Authors Association Award for adult literature. He has also written two works of non-fiction, a collection of his columns from the Calgary Herald entitled The Terrible Summer (1996) and For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son (2002), an autobiographical narrative intended for his son from whom he is estranged.

He currently lives a very private life and does not grant interviews often. I was fortunate to make his acquaintance briefly at the Winnipeg International Writers Festival after he had given a reading of his novel Dream Wheels. As well as producing fiction he is also writing regularly for Canadian Dimensions and Wawatay News.

His own life is thought to be the inspiration for his first novel Keeper'N Me. Wagamese was taken from the Wabaseemoong First Nation reserve he was born on in 1955 and moved around in the child welfare system before being adopted at the age of eight or nine by a white family with whom he lived with until he was sixteen (Kirman 2). Wagamese reconnected with his birth family but the reunion and subsequent relationship with his birth family remains strained. In an interview with Paula E. Kirman, Wagamese discusses his own family reunion in comparison to Keeper'N Me:

In my own family situation the reverse is true. After sixteen years, we are still trying to discover who we are as people and as a family. Just the skeleton of that

story is autobiographical, but the circumstances and the way that reunion happens are opposite to each other (4).

Wagamese describes both novels Keeper’N Me and A Quality of Light as more or less autobiographical, each containing elements of his own experience, what he described as “the skeleton” of the story, the body remaining fiction (Kirman 4).

This thesis will focus on Keeper’N Me and A Quality of Light and address the issues of adoption and identity that they explore. To that end I will provide a brief synopsis of each novel. Keeper’N Me tells the story of Garnet Raven, an Ojibway man who, after being “scooped” from his reserve, spends years in foster care before being adopted by a racist white family. The turmoil and resultant confusion of being constantly pitted against negative racist stereotyping leaves Garnet with no real sense of himself. The lack of positive role models makes Garnet open for discovering other identities, and a comedy of mis/taken identity is played out as Garnet tries on different nationalities before returning to his birth community. Like many real-life inter-culturally adopted Aboriginal children, he ends up in the justice system, a situation mirrored in James Tyman’s biography Inside Out. His incarceration provides the setting where Garnet’s birth family locates him and sends him a letter. Garnet is reunited with his birth family, and the mysteries of his origins and how he came to be in the foster system are revealed as they all get acquainted. The rest of the novel describes Garnet’s newly-found identity as an Ojibway man and the journey he must take to make that identity fit. His guide for this is Keeper, an Ojibway elder, who after having won his battle with alcoholism, rediscovers his talents as a story-teller and starts mentoring Garnet to take over after he is gone.

A Quality of Light is also a story about an adopted Aboriginal boy. In this novel the origins of the main protagonist Joshua Kane are unknown. What is known is that his mother was Aboriginal; nothing else is known about her or Joshua's cultural heritage. Unlike Garnet Raven, Joshua Kane has a near-perfect existence in his adopted white family and small community rural setting. Joshua's adopted white family love and shield him from the world outside their community so much that Joshua does not really know he is Indian or what that means for himself or the way he will be treated because of this. In his youth Joshua befriends Johnny Gebhardt, a confused and lonely boy raised in a dysfunctional family of German descent whose fascination with Indians and all things Indian leads both boys to pursue an Indian identity. The novel is narrated in both the past and present through the recollection of Joshua, whose first-person narration guides the reader, and Johnny's italicized thoughts about the boys' relationship and his journey of self-discovery. The two friends become estranged as adults as their two paths and philosophies lead them to very different lifestyles. Responding to the 1990 Oka Crisis, Johnny becomes involved in a highly politicized and dangerous hostage-taking at a government office and Joshua is called in to try to mediate a solution. The novel bounces from past to present as it describes the events which lead up to the final climax. Johnny loses his life in a tragic misunderstanding of intentions, and Joshua is left to reflect on his own life and identity as an Indian and what that means.

I elected to discuss the novels together because when read together they create a rich multidimensional dialogue about voice and how each voice provides useful insights to the problems of identity construction. Both novels centre on adopted Aboriginal boys who triumph over adversity and come to understand themselves and their place in the

world, despite having no tutelage as children or young adults in what it means to be Aboriginal. Both stories bear some resemblance to the author's own origins and manage to mend the fractured identities of the characters through a combination of story-telling and cultural affiliation. Each of the novels incorporates the literary device of two narrative voices. In Keeper'N Me the mainstream narrative style is expressed by the protagonist Garnet and the colloquial based narrative style is the voice of Keeper. In A Quality of Light the standard narrative voice of Joshua is offset by the thought-based diary-style letters from Johnny. Aside from their similarity on a discursive level, the novels approach the cultural reparation of identity in very different ways. To read either novel alone provides an interesting commentary on identity construction and modern dilemmas facing Aboriginal people; however, together they provide a much more compelling and complicated look at how identity is formed or chosen, the right of an individual to choose their identity, and the complexities that biological notions of race and culture add to the discussion of these ideas when adoption is the central issue. The novels shed light on each other. The notion that people are intrinsically or essentially one thing or another is pitted against their ability to re/invent themselves and that both of these ideas combine to form identity. Read together dialogically readers are drawn into a process of understanding rather than finding closure.

Chapter I

Adoption of Aboriginal Children into Non-Aboriginal Homes: Historical and Political Contexts

The adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes is a central theme in both of Wagamese's novels Keeper'N Me and A Quality of Light. There are different circumstances in each: Garnet is scooped by social workers and Joshua is legally adopted. However, both situations are implicated by the colonialist attitudes of Canada's child welfare system and informed by the Sixties Scoop, a period of unregulated removal of Aboriginal children from their homes for placement in non-Aboriginal homes. Understanding the framework of colonialism is essential to analyzing the two novels by Wagamese as they speak to those issues that are direct results of colonialism. While other transracial adoptee literature may use fictive adoptees to navigate issues of race, culture, nationality and affiliation with little regard to the reality of the transracial adoptee (Callahan 21), it is not possible to separate the national policies of Canada's colonialist agenda from their direct effects on Aboriginal peoples, especially in terms of adoption and fostering. The adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes in Canada is directly implicated and informed by the Canadian government's policies to eradicate the "Indian problem." Therefore colonialism must be discussed as the framework for this thesis. The Sixties Scoop itself is not isolated and is part of the larger scheme of Canada's colonialist practices that have been in place to assimilate its Aboriginal population into the mainstream society. The reasons for these assimilation tactics, while cloaked in the rhetoric of Canada's intentions of producing equality for all Canadians, are linked to the country's intention to be rid of its obligations to Aboriginal peoples. The

Sixties Scoop and the residential school system have both played a major role in the attempted destruction of Aboriginal peoples' social structures, values, languages, cultures and autonomy in a relatively short period of time. Both phenomena are not isolated incidents in their inception or how they were carried out. They are elements of the government of Canada's colonialist policies of cultural genocide aimed at its Aboriginal population so that issues of land and treaty rights would no longer be contested. The following discussion will focus on those colonial practices related to the child welfare system in Canada, specifically how they came to be created and how they fit into the larger scheme of Canada's role in the cultural displacement and disruption of the lives of Aboriginal peoples.

To understand the Sixties Scoop it is first necessary to look at recent past relations between the Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples. To that end Canada has always been actively involved in seeking to dominate Aboriginal peoples legally and socially to ensure that its imperialist economic interests such as land and resources remain uncontested. Paired with these colonialist goals was the myth-making behind Canada which asserted its right to the land by constructing the "Indian" which is, as Green notes, "part of the Othering in colonial arsenal; it bears no relation to what Aboriginal people called themselves, suggests a false unity" (89). In this constructed version of Canada's history, Aboriginal peoples were dehumanized and written out of history except as anecdotal elements to the country's settler mythology. Green asserts the process was "...the federal government adopted policy objectives of protection, civilization and assimilation, which it pursued in the containment fields of reserves and bureaucratized through churches and branches of the civil service" (88). Very specific

examples of these assimilation tactics used were the residential schools orchestrated in cooperation between state and churches, and the literal "scooping" of Aboriginal children by overzealous, well-intentioned if uninformed civil servants.

The link between these phenomena is their tragic effects on the kin structures of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Government officials were determined to save Aboriginal peoples from themselves by civilizing them and then integrating them into mainstream society. They decided the best way to deter Aboriginal people from practicing their culture was to remove their children from their homes and educate them in church-run residential schools. As York details in his book The Dispossessed:

Indian residential schools, founded and operated by Protestant and Catholic missionaries, were the dominant institution in Indian communities across Canada from the late nineteenth century until the 1960's....The government, like the churches, believed the Indian culture was "barbaric" and "savage." The federal authorities were determined to transform the Indian children into faithful Christians who would abandon their traditional native spiritual beliefs (22-23).

After the 1951 amendment to the Indian Act, attendance at these church run residential schools was no longer mandatory; however, they continued to run until the 1980's (McDonald 29-30). The belief that the Indian needed to be Christianized was reinforced in the minds of government officials, churches and the general populace as they were ignorant of child-rearing practices of many Aboriginal groups, who tended to view childcare as a collective responsibility as opposed to a nuclear family responsibility (York 216-217). This collective view of child-rearing paired with the relative freedom most young Aboriginal people had, made Indian agents and missionaries think the children were just running amok. The reality is they were learning about Aboriginal ways of life which were taught much differently than the skill set and knowledge

received at traditional white schools. So the government and churches teamed up and organized residential schools which were usually located away from reserves and made attendance mandatory under strict punishments (York 23-24). While under the guise of education these schools were mostly meant to make maids and laborers out of the Aboriginal children as they were not taught adequately or at the same level as schools for white children. York quotes a federal inspector who was offering to teach Grade 9: "If we let the Indian people go to Grade 9, then they'll want to go to Grade 10, and then they'll want to go to university. That's what we don't want" (24). It is obvious that the goal was not to truly educate Aboriginal children but to prevent them from being educated in Aboriginal culture, as York demonstrates:

When a language is lost, the culture is crippled. And so it was the language that was the first target of the residential schools. The school officials were determined to destroy the Indian languages, to ensure that the Indian children would be assimilated into the white culture. In many cases, they were successful (36).

To a large extent this worked creating a whole generation of Aboriginal peoples who lost their cultural identity. York notes that some Aboriginal people "survived the residential school through sheer determination and perseverance. But others became alcoholic or suicidal" (36). It was later learned that abuse was not restricted to harsh treatment and that a large number of Aboriginal children were sexually abused at these schools (York 27). York describes the tragedy of the residential school system:

To understand why the schools were the first battleground, one must understand the crucial importance of the education system in Canada's assault on Indian culture from the 1860's to the 1960's. The schools were the chief weapon of the missionaries and federal bureaucrats in their systematic campaign to destroy Indian culture. Today thousands of Indians still bear the scars of that war of attrition (27).

The results of this coordinated attack and their tragic consequences are a precursor to the Sixties Scoop. After the 1951 change to the Indian Act residential school attendance was not mandatory, but many remained open because even though students could attend provincial schools "...the threat of assimilation was much stronger there, where Indian students were overwhelmed by white teachers and white students" (York 25). As such, many Aboriginal students stayed at residential schools. However, by the 1970's many bands began fighting for control of their own schools and some succeeded, but an entire generation of Aboriginal peoples was suffering the after effects known as the

... "residential-school-syndrome"—a term coined by psychologists who are beginning to notice a distinctive set of symptoms in their Indian clients. They compare it to the grief cycle that a person undergoes after the loss of a close relative. But instead of losing a parent or spouse, the Indians have lost a culture. Something they were born with, a part of their soul, was wiped out by the missionaries and teachers (York 37).

There were subsidiary problems that accompanied residential-school-syndrome such as substance abuse, depression, and in some instances a continued cycle of physical and sexual abuse that were sometimes rampant in Aboriginal communities. Aside from not knowing their language, this generation of residential school survivors did not know other important aspects of their culture either, such as child rearing practices and kinship relationships. As Fournier and Crey notes, quoting Cinderina Williams:

"Perhaps the greatest tragedy was...[by] not being brought up in a loving caring, sharing, nurturing environment, they did not have these skills; as they are learned through observation, participation and interaction. Consequently when these children became parents, and most did at an early age, they had no parenting skills. They did not have the capability to show affection. They sired and bred children but were unable to relate to them on any level" (83).

This generation of people also had other problems with living on reserves after coming home. There was widespread poverty on the reserves as most were situated without any resources and offered few job opportunities, and given the government's ongoing mandate to eradicate its Indian problem, little assistance was offered to Aboriginal peoples facing poverty and living in sub par conditions. "Aboriginal peoples became the subject of 'equality talk'" as Canada's mainstream population sought to help Aboriginal people, rescuing them from their plight (Strong-Boag 154). To that end social workers began "rescuing" Aboriginal children to give them a better life, and so began the Sixties Scoop. Regardless of the intentions of the Scoop, the results were the same: continued cultural genocide not just through re-educating the Aboriginal youth, but this time taking them outright. As Sinclair quotes, "The white social worker, following on the heels of the missionaries, the priest, and the Indian agent, was convinced that the only hope for the salvation of the Indian people lay in the removal of their children"(67). There is a link between the Residential School system and how it impacted the communities of Aboriginal people and how this in turn informed the Sixties Scoop. The residential school system had a direct effect on the Sixties Scoop, as Wagamese describes in a short essay about his life:

I'm the second generation of residential school abuses. I was in that foster home because my parents went to residential school and never developed parenting skills and couldn't offer the nurturing and protection that I needed. I was in the foster home because someone had fractured the bonds that tied me to tradition and culture and language and spirituality. So I became one of the lost ones, one of the disappeared ones, vanished into the vortex of foster care and adoption (Wagamese *Kissing 1*)

The combined onslaught effectively severed connections between many Aboriginal families and communities.

The Sixties Scoop employed systematic, yet unsynchronized, radical adoption strategy which sought to fully assimilate Aboriginal children into white mainstream society by well-intentioned, but ill-informed social workers. Sinclair has noted that the term "Sixties Scoop," originally coined because of the large amount of Child and Family Services intervention and abduction of Aboriginal children during the 1960s, has broadened to "a descriptor that is now applied to the whole of the Aboriginal child welfare era, simplistically defined here as roughly the time from the waning of residential schools to the mid-1980s period of child welfare devolution" (67). Sinclair notes that the "'Sixties Scoop' was not a specific child welfare program or policy. It names a segment of a larger period in Aboriginal child welfare history where, because questionable apprehensions and adoptions figure prominently, a label was applied" (66). In Canada, the United States and Britain during the 1960s and 1970s, aggressive adoption campaigns were promoting interracial adoption of "less fortunate children" from Black and Aboriginal communities into white middle-class homes. Crude advertising campaigns were employed, such as featuring a child-of-the-week in newspapers, meant to encourage well-intentioned couples to provide homes for these "less fortunate children" (Ward 5-7). These campaigns were part of the larger initiative to assimilate the Indian population into mainstream Canada. But the Sixties Scoop was a disastrous attempt to relocate or "save" Aboriginal children from what social workers deemed to be hopeless tragic situations and give them a chance in what they felt were more advantageous and suitable homes or institutions (Strong-Boag 143). The Sixties Scoop has morphed into what Sinclair calls the "Millennium Scoop" as child welfare agencies continue to apprehend or place Aboriginal children into foster or adoptive placement at a much higher rate than non-

Aboriginal children (67). Although the Sixties Scoop resulted badly with broken-down adoptions in most cases, some individuals were able to overcome the pressures inherent in intercultural adoption and thrive (Sinclair 75). The resiliency of some adoptees was linked by Sinclair to those who were able to find “a level of truth and certainty within Aboriginal culture that provided a critical source of healing and renewal” (75). He also noted:

...many adoptees learned about their adoption experiences in the context of Canadian colonial history which, for many, was a powerful catalyst for reframing their personal experiences (Sinclair, nd). ...participants were, for the first time, able to perceive their experiences as a socio-political act rather than as a consequence of personal deficiency (75-76).

Here it is seen that cultural repatriation and education about the history of Canada’s colonial history becomes a vital aspect to achieving positive identities. Both Keeper’N Me and A Quality of Light explore different avenues of attaining this. Sinclair’s article reports that transracial Aboriginal adoptions have a higher than normal rate of breakdown that is where the placement of the child is unsuccessful and then he examines theories of identity conflicts to explain this (65). This article is particularly useful when looking at the works of Wagamese because it asserts “there is no single group identity label or theory that can be applied to the adoptees of the Sixties Scoop as a whole” (Sinclair 76). This statement is apt when reading the two novels together, as they have seemingly different outcomes and approaches to Aboriginal adoptee identity. Yet this is in keeping with the multifaceted and complicated issue that is intercultural adoption of Aboriginal children in Canada where no easy conclusions can be drawn.

Part of the mess of the Sixties Scoop and indeed the mindset behind this so called act of charity is a trope of adoption as discussed in Novy’s book, an article by Clark

called "From Charlotte to Outposts of Empire: Troping Adoption." Clark starts her essay with a discussion about the term adoption getting so misused in media and mainstream cultural institutions as individuals are urged to adopt everything from animals and trees to adopting less fortunate families by providing them with clothing (97). The danger that Clark stresses is:

All of these endeavors reinforce any tendencies of children who are still thinking concretely to consider adoption only second best, or a simple financial transaction, or merely temporary convenience—or at the very least confusing. All too often publicists trope adoption to evoke fuzzy feelings of family connections without serious obligations of literal adoption. All too often society trivializes adoption (97).

Of particular interest and relevance is the trope of the adoption of pets with campaigns that read "Adopt a Pet Today" which appear to have been copied in style and format for use to promote the adoption of Aboriginal children. In Ward's book The Adoption of Native Canadian Children she outlines the crude methods used to advertise the availability of Aboriginal children for adoption.

In 1967, Saskatchewan established its AIM (Adopt Indian Metis) program to advertise the availability of 150 Indian and Metis preschool children for adoption. The program involved multimedia advertising similar to that used in the United States, Montreal and Toronto to place black and Indian children. A child of the week was featured and speakers addressed organizations and groups in designated areas. Again, the appeal was directed primarily to white families (6).

This crude advertising is most clearly linked to the adoption of animals. The Humane Society still uses this tactic of highlighting a particular animal in the media in hopes that someone will want to adopt that pet. The parallels are obvious and unpalatable, linking Aboriginal children to animals, and are embedded in what LaRocque describes as the "civ/sav dichotomy" that permeates the discourse and history of Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal relations (*Métis* 85-94). This type of racism is sadly normative. The push to get white families to adopt Aboriginal children is linked to the lack of success that so many of these placements had. The families, although well-intentioned, were inadequately prepared to handle the systemic racism that constantly barraged these children and were not able to give them solace. This lack of ability on the part of white adoptive parents is explored in both of Wagamese's novels through adoptive and foster situations. The common element is that there were no actual representations of Aboriginal people anywhere from which the adoptee could draw positive associations. This added to the prevalent and acceptable racism towards Indians at the time which compounded the problems of these adoptions to the point of complete breakdown in some situations as well as hindering Aboriginal adoptees in developing positive identities.

The residential school experience and the Sixties Scoop were serious blows to the cultural integrity of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Many are still recovering and trying to heal from the pain and loss they feel at the loss of their (cultural) selves. Many have tried to heal under the shadow of colonialism. Education for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike is required for Aboriginal peoples to begin healing, as is seen in *A Quality of Light*. Everyone in Joshua's life must acknowledge him as Aboriginal and learn what that means before he is able to be himself. Native literature in general does this by bringing the varied experiences of Aboriginal peoples into mainstream and Aboriginal consciousness. People have to know the real stories of the Aboriginal people who suffered, persevered, flourished, or perished because of the residential school and Sixties Scoop experiences and Wagamese's fiction tells these stories. These two novels,

in their quest for showing positive identity formation through cultural reclamation, embody what Armstrong states of Aboriginal writers that "...sometimes irreparable damage has been wrought, healing can take place through cultural affirmation" (*Disempowerment* 241). Part of this cultural affirmation involves Aboriginal writers telling harsh truths about what it is to be Aboriginal in Canada, a highly unpalatable idea for many Canadians who view themselves as just peacekeepers and who are unwilling to see themselves as oppressors. In this way the role of Aboriginal authors becomes a critical balancing act, on the one hand needing to be politically blatant about the conditions that Aboriginal people live in while being pragmatic enough to market themselves to a white Canadian audience.

Chapter 2

Methodological and Theoretical Contexts

This thesis will focus primarily on the theme of fictive intercultural adoptive identity in two novels by Richard Wagamese, KeeperN Me and A Quality of Light. The liminality of the fictive adoptive identities in the texts provides a unique perspective from which to explore issues of identity construction for Aboriginal peoples in Canada who are under constant siege from false imagery identifying them as “other” to mainstream Canadian society. Given the complex social and historical realities that encompass the novels, the context of colonialism becomes an intrinsic element to analyzing the novel. The methodological link between literary texts and their contexts, is theorized by Callahan in her dissertation, Birth Writes: Transracial Adoptive Identities in American Literature:

The significance of literary devices in relation to what occurs “outside” the narrative structure is salient for this project because it emphasizes that these devices are historically specific and contingent. While focusing on the narrative implications of transracially adoptive figures, this project also examines the relationships between these literary texts and the cultural and historical contexts out of which each arises. Literature performs ideological work, and as a result, serves as a powerful lens allowing us to see how texts inhabit ideological and historical worlds (7).

To that end it is imperative to view the novels of Wagamese through the lens of colonial tactics of assimilation and cultural genocide used by the government of Canada against Aboriginal peoples with the silent complicit consent of the Canadian population. Authors like Wagamese use stories to break the silence of what has happened to them and make known how these assimilation practices have impacted the lives of Aboriginal peoples.

There is a long legacy of fictive adoptees and adoption scenarios in literature. Adoptees make an interesting topic or vehicle in fiction because they represent a blank slate as their origins tend to be unknown. Conversely, intercultural adoptees may come with too many assumptions about their origins based on racist stereotypes held by the dominant population. The adoptee is a useful vehicle for constructing an argument over the naturalness of filial relationships and the function of affiliative relationships. In Said's discussion in the introduction to The World, the Text and the Critic, "Affiliation becomes a form of representing the filiative processes to be found in nature although affiliation takes validated nonbiological social and cultural forms" (23). Thus even though he does not specifically discuss adoptees he highlights the privileging of the filial over the affiliative as it is described as a form that represents the filiative process and must go through a process of validation. A book called Adoption, Identity and Kinship: the Debate Over Birth Records by Wegar looks at the sealed birth record debate and focuses on issues pertaining to why records were sealed, which was largely due to the philosophy of the time. Though Wegar focuses on American adoption, Canada had similar policies on sealed records. The decision to seal records was made under an assumption that it would be better to "fake" real families by pretending the adoption did not take place again assuming that filial relationships are more desired than affiliative ones. During the early fifties there were not a lot of intercultural adoptions so white children were generally placed in white homes. It was assumed that a child born out of wedlock to a single woman would bear the brunt of illegitimacy and constantly be dealing with that shame. It was also assumed the birth mother would want to forget her ordeal and never revisit it. Hence adoption records were sealed and many adoptees had

no idea they had been adopted. Canada's policy of sealing birth records has been reversed in some provinces. The Adoption Disclosure Act of 2005 set to be implemented in September 2007 in Ontario recently made the decision to open sealed birth records, which is relevant as Wagamese and myself were adopted in Ontario. At the heart of the debate about sealed birth records is an ideology that positions real families against constructed families. This binary of "real" versus "fake" becomes an important theme for many aspects of both of Wagamese's novels specifically in relation to discussions in Francis' The Imaginary Indian and Said's Orientalism concerning the constructed nature of "Othering." Othering becomes critically important as notions of what constitutes "real" Indians provide crucial dialogue in both texts as does the notion of real families and adoptive families. For the fictive intercultural adoptees, they face both binaries on a personal front as they consider what aspects of themselves are authentically Indian or which family is their real one. These issues of authenticity are also connected to Deans' dissertation "Divide the Living Child in Two": Adoption and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy in Twentieth-Century American Literature. Deans uses the biblical parable about Solomon's decision to settle a dispute between two women, each claiming the child in question was her own, by declaring that the child would be cut in two equal parts and they would share the child. The so-called wisdom behind that declaration was the real mother would not bear harm to her child and back down, thus showing herself to be the true mother. This parable and the discussion provided in the thesis show how assumptions about filial connections can be inverted in the framework of colonialism where the opposite assumption was made about the ability of filial Aboriginal mothers to care for their children, and authorities demanded that adoptive white mothers could better

parent Aboriginal children. Similarly, Callahan's dissertation draws a particularly useful idea that biology" the intercultural family is under constant scrutiny, visible in its difference. The intercultural adoptee is particularly apt for pursuing discussions of race relations, and the idea that race is constructed, is explored in the aforementioned dissertation by Callahan. A recent book entitled Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture offers a comprehensive look at many facets of adoption in literature as well as insightful social commentary on how society at large views adoption. The book provided the inspiration for looking at how adoption is imagined to delve into societal questions about race relations and affiliations and how Wagamese imagines adoption in his novels to explore assumptions about race, culture and belonging.

In western literature there are well-known uses of adoption as literary devices, such as mistaken identity in Dickens and Shakespeare where the trope of adoption is used several times so the characters may overcome their meager beginnings and gain access to classes beyond their families' means. Within popular culture the adoptee is a mainstay as nearly all of our beloved superheroes are either orphaned or adopted. While both of these representations of adoptees are in the consciousness of our society, it is interesting to note that neither Dickens nor Stan Lee of Marvel comics were adopted or orphaned. These representations of adoptees tend to be based more in the fantasy aspect of adoption, where people who have birth families but do not like them fantasize about being adopted.

Conversely, there is a specific type of fantasy writing by adoptees that I will term an "adoption origin fantasy." This is where the adoptee imagines their birth mothers and families in such a way that they are beloved and missed and their families eagerly await their return. In most cases this fantasy is far from reality although there have been

numerous happy reunions as well as unhappy findings as detailed in Sinclair's article (75-76). The recovered relationships between birth families and adoptees vary from none at all to starting fresh and discovering each other for the first time. Common to almost all literature by adoptees is some form of this fantasy that is usually enacted when the adoptee feels inadequate, threatened or just unable to deal with the constant difference of being adopted. Jackie Kay, an African- American writer who was adopted in Scotland, documents what she calls an imaginary mother who is always there watching her triumphs, picking her up when she falls down and always waiting to be reunited (Gish 171-172). Kay imagines everything about her origins, from what it was like at her birth to the circumstances surrounding her adoption. She admits that all these stories and imaginings about her birth mother were cathartic and enabled her to find some peace about her adoption without ever having to meet her birth mother. She jokingly admits she grew up where there were no other black children, and so when she saw the Supremes on television one night she thought one of those women must be her mother. Kay was alienated in her new culture because of her skin colour much in the same way that Aboriginal adoptees are alienated in their white placements, although they need not go all the way to Scotland to experience alienation. Given this shared sense of alienation, the writings produced by these intercultural adoptees tend to have similarities as they face the added pressures of being so dissimilar to the birth family that there is never a question as to whether the child in question is adopted. The white adoptee adopted into another white family can ultimately elect to tell someone if they are adopted when they are comfortable enough to do so. The intercultural adoptee does not share that luxury. Every time they go out with their adopted families, the fact that they are adopted is evident to

everyone and they are almost open to public scrutiny. Of course not all intercultural adoptees stand out from their families some may try to blend in as a white person. In *April Raintree*, April does attempt to pass herself off as white out of a desperate need to be accepted (Masionier 100). The idea of appearance necessarily reflecting racial affiliation is represented in other ways within the Wagamese texts although they focus more on garb being "Indian" than on skin colour being brown as both main adoptee characters Garnet Raven and Joshua Kane do have the appearance of being Indian, especially in the eyes of others.

One point of diversion from the adoption origin fantasy is the effect of the Sixties Scoop on the adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes. During this time many children were simply lured with candy into waiting cars and taken from their communities to be integrated into mainstream Canadian society. The parents and communities still grieve this loss and so the fantasy that somewhere a family awaits the adoptee's return is more realistic. Again, the framework of colonialism becomes an integral context to the study of fictive adoption in Aboriginal literature, as in most cases children were not willingly surrendered to be adopted. They were forcibly taken and sometimes in the most duplicitous fashion.

Another common element to literature concerning adoption is connected to the adoption origin fantasy in the exploration of the constructed reality of the adoptee's origins as represented in the literature. Some authors whose literature in part examines characters coming to terms with their origins delves into the fantastic as in Carol Shields' vivid description of a birth recounted by the child being born in *The Stone Diaries*. The character could not possibly be familiar with the circumstances of her birth, and so it is

reconstructed based on the character's needs much in the way that the fictive adoptee relies upon this sort of reconstruction to imagine their origins. In this way the fictive adoptee's origins are like a mystery to be uncovered. The adoptee authors who write about adoption work through this process creatively, writing different scenarios about how they came into this world and under what circumstances. Sherman Alexie, a Native American adoptee author, begins Indian Killer with an imagined birth and subsequent theft of that child from a reserve. For some fictive adoptees the process of adoption is completely known to them, as in the case of John Daniel in Robert Arthur Alexie's The Pale Indian who is adopted at the age of eleven along with his six-year-old sister. This fictive example is stark as the main character is aware of his birth parents' inability to parent him and his sister, or to stay sober. In this instance the fantasy is to find a safe haven away from his birth family. Wagamese's adoption origin fantasy is complicated especially when read against the two novels Keeper'N Me and A Quality of Light that have a very different origin fantasy. However, the texts are connected by the introduction of his memoir For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son. The beginning of the memoir starts off with the simplest yet poignant adoption origin fantasy.

Once there was a lonely little boy. He had no idea where he belonged in the world. The boy had no knowledge about where his family was or where he'd come from. So he began to dream. He imagined a glorious life with a mother and father, sisters and brothers, grandfathers and grandmothers. He put his dreams down on paper and 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 into the night (1).

The most telling line is "he imagined a glorious life" as it explains what is at the heart of all adoption origin fantasies regardless of how they differ in circumstance. For although

Keeper'N Me and A Quality of Light explore different avenues for this happiness, each fantasy eventually results in a “glorious life” for the main protagonists.

Leading a glorious life is difficult for many fictive adoptees. One reason is the issues of shame that may surround the adoptee over their assumed illegitimacy. Shame of birth as something to overcome is another popular adoption plot. The ability to blend into the adoptive family and society is, as Deans posits, dependant on “their ability or willingness to perform the rhetoric of legitimacy” (iv). Deans states that “adoption in literature works to expose rents in the social fabric, places where issues of belonging are in dispute” (vii). This is especially true when looking at literature that deals exclusively with intercultural adoption where it is impossible for the blended family to perform legitimacy. The sealed records of adoption is in the same time line as Wagamese’s characters and certainly affects A Quality of Light where the birth mother is unknown and the explanation for this is never disclosed. The sealed birth records can promote a certain romanticizing of biological connections in same-culture adoption narratives.

Although Carp contends that the privacy of birth parents was (and still is) a factor in the sealing of otherwise public documents, he emphasizes that the stigma attributed to the out-of-wedlock parent conflicts with a general romanticizing of biological ties in our society. Given the privileging of the biological as model for relatedness, some birth and adoptive parents and individuals are now questioning the logic behind the secrecy of adoption. How, they ask have their identities as parents and individuals been violated by such practices? After all closed adoptions rely on the fiction that birth parents for all intents and purposes do not exist. This fiction enables adoptive families to operate “as-if-genealogical,” as anthropologist Judith Modell puts it, discrediting nontraditional families that appear other than nuclear (Novy 234).

Conversely, in intercultural adoptive fiction, the birth parents are always visible next to the Aboriginal adoptee. It is not an out-of-wedlock stigma that so affects the Aboriginal

adoptee so much as their "Aboriginality." The underlying fiction behind the adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes is a systemic racist belief that Aboriginal people are unable to parent their own children. It is this fiction and excuse behind the Sixties Scoop and all child protection models used by the Canadian government to integrate Aboriginal people into mainstream Canadian society. However, there is a different shame in the unknown or sealed aspect of adoption for Aboriginal children in Canada that range from assumptions about Aboriginal parents' inability to parent for a variety of unseemly reasons, to Child and Family Services intervening and thus saving the Aboriginal children from their defunct culture. The fictive adopted Aboriginal child must contend with more than just the concept that their mother or father is promiscuous; they must wear the biological features of a second-class citizen in the midst of the first-class citizens who adopted them. As well, cultural concepts of adoption are starkly different; the formality and finality of adoption in Canada is quite different from how many Aboriginal communities view adoption and child care. Many Aboriginal groups see adoption as a natural phenomenon, a function of extended family (Fournier and Crey 82). In this way an Aboriginal sense of community sets fictive adoption written by Aboriginal adoptees apart from mainstream conceptualizations about how adoption is approached.

An Aboriginal sense of community and the setting of the Sixties Scoop distinguish Wagamese's fiction in terms of the portrayal of fictive birth mothers. Most adoptive fiction that deals with birth mothers tends to only focus on the birth mother whereas Wagamese deals more with the community that was lost, and when the fictive Aboriginal adoptee seeks the birth mother, they are really seeking community. To this end the use of

McLeod's "Coming Home Through Stories" and DePasquale's "Home and Native Land (Claims): Politicizing *Home* in Canadian Aboriginal Picture Books for Children" are particularly apt methodological sources as the literal search for home becomes a metaphor for the search for identity. In both of Wagamese's novels the main protagonists Josh and Garnet find more than families; they find belonging in their respective communities. McLeod posits that "To be home in an ideological sense, means to dwell in the landscape of the familiar, collective memories, as opposed to being in exile" (19). His essay is a methodological approach to calling those Aboriginal people who are disconnected from their cultures, such as Aboriginal adoptees, home through the use of narrative and language to create an ideological space in place of an actual place. McLeod's use of the term exile also opens the discussion to incorporating Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands" as a way of negotiating Wagamese's approach to fictive Aboriginal adoptees being in exile in mainstream Canada and the ways that home for these adoptees may exist only in the constructions of home that they imagine or write creatively about. McLeod, DePasquale and Rushdie will be used to explore the exile of fictive Aboriginal adoptees and the ways that they negotiate family, place, community and home in the narratives of Wagamese.

The notion of home in the novels of Wagamese is complicated by issues of what Callahan notes as "[T]ransracial adoptees occupy a paradoxical insider-outsider position in terms of both kinship and race" (5). This paradoxical relationship is explored most thoroughly in *A Quality of Light* where Joshua is able to move fluidly in both Aboriginal and mainstream cultures. This fluidity is not found in *Keeper'N Me* where Garnet at first has no affiliation with his Anishinabe culture and was also rejected by white culture.

This idea that intercultural adoptees can, in their liminal spaces, be cultural bridges based on their “double consciousness,” a state described by DuBois and discussed by Callahan in terms of transracial adoption narratives, is both accepted and challenged by Wagamese. The problematic and overriding issues become more associated with the process of decolonization and identifying who will cross this bridge as Damm questions:

In her preface to *Writing the Circle*, Emma LaRocque asks “These are our voices – who will hear?” Perhaps the time has come when non-Natives will stop negating our identities and silencing our voices (Damm 24).

The question posed by Damm relates to intercultural adoption in that the process of adopting Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes was one of the ways that non-Natives used to negate Aboriginal identity and silence their voices. That some of these Aboriginal adoptees would eventually voice their stories of cultural loss and reclamation to mainstream society through popular mediums such as novels is ironic. The message and stories of Aboriginal adoptees must be repeated and repeated and told in slight variations and repeated some more so they become as solid and as present in the minds of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike as the myths they deconstruct.

Intercultural adoptees able to flourish in mainstream society and having overcome the sense of isolation and dislocation they feel credit their success to positive representations and the participation of their adopted family in Aboriginal culture (Sinclair 75-77). Sinclair notes that adult Aboriginal adoptees had successful adoptions if they were able to use their liminal space to their advantage by accessing the privileges of white mainstream culture and then reclaiming cultural connections thus enabling them to bridge certain perceived cultural differences in the manner that Joshua was able to (75). Therefore reading the novels Keeper’N Me and A Quality of Light together and in

response to one another sheds light on how culture reclamation assists the two main adopted Aboriginal characters discover positive identities in distinctly different ways. There are many similarities between the identity construction of the fictive adoptee and the actual Aboriginal intercultural adoptee especially in the context of colonialism and its effect on the adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes in Canada. This project uses contemporary mainstream sources to draw comparisons and contrasts with Aboriginal theorists dealing with concepts of home, identity loss and reclamation. This combination of theorizing is troped by the fictive adopted identities of both Garnet and Joshua who are able to utilize elements of both culture groups to shape their identities.

Chapter III

Literary Analysis: Markers of "Nativeness"

Markers of "Nativeness" refer to the issues surrounding those attributes which distinguish a person's cultural, political and personal identity as an Aboriginal person in Canada. Many Aboriginal people are still caught in the wake of the continued colonial attack of their culture by the Canadian government. These attacks take many forms and are felt on many fronts- everything from the theft of language and stories to the theft of future generations in the Sixties Scoop. However, far more insidious than the outright attacks on culture have been the subtle long-standing myths that veil Aboriginal peoples and prevent true understanding of the plights of Aboriginal people. This is in the guise of misinformation and the creation of what Francis calls "The Imaginary Indian," a product of the settler imagination that has morphed into an absurd caricature of Aboriginal people while taking on airs of authenticity. The construct of what Said refers to as the "Other" is a tool of the colonizer meant to destabilize the colonized by constantly subordinating them to the colonizing powers within a collection of myths that support the colonizers' right to land and resource acquisition. As Said describes in the discourse about Orientalism, which also applies when thinking about Canada's colonial position, "[O]ne ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or myths that which, were the truth about them be told, would simply blow away (6). Because othering is a facet of the entrenched power dynamic on which many political realities are hinged, it is necessary to do more than identify the lies; the power dynamic must be changed. A feat requiring action and acceptance on many fronts to make sense of this truly tangled web, where the constructed "Other" in the guise of the

“Imaginary Indian” and carrying the pretense of authenticity, is pitted against subjugated Aboriginal peoples seeking to decolonize themselves by exposing this image for the poseur that it is can be daunting. The struggle for Aboriginal people is not only to define themselves autonomously from imposed Canadian definitions, but to deconstruct these powerful yet false representations of “Imaginary Indians” that permeate virtually all levels of education, media, literature, policy making and image making. Therefore the process of defining markers of “Nativity” becomes an exercise in sifting through shifting ideas of what constitutes an Aboriginal identity, and then to further break that down into categories like what makes an Anishinabe identity or Okanagan identity. The Wagamese texts Keeper’N Me and A Quality of Light explore these issues with specific reference to the added complication of the Aboriginal characters being interculturally adopted into white homes.

i) Appearance

“Looking Jake” is the heading taken from Book Four in Keeper’N Me and refers to Garnet Raven’s final transformation into what Keeper muses to be a “*real Indyan, not that Hollywood kind*” (Wagamese *Keeper* 4). The musings of Keeper season the novel with many insights about what it means to be Aboriginal in the modern world, including dichotomous concepts about identity such as when Keeper compares the adoption of Aboriginal children into white families to beavers attempting to raise bears. Keeper also makes observations about the missing generations of Aboriginal children bringing up the residential school survivors, of whom he is one, and the children taken in the Sixties Scoop. Keeper starts the novel with a discussion of Ojibway or Anishinabe people and

contrasts these with the American tourists that he initially makes fun of for wanting to pay so much money to hear “*a real Indyun talk ‘bout the old days*” (2). Keeper makes fun of the American tourists, but upon thinking about it a little longer he describes all people as tourists needing a guide to show them the way. He reiterates Garnet’s need for a guide because “*...he was a real tourist that one. Coulda got lost in a bathtub then. Heh heh heh*” (3). Keeper then repeats the need for guides, especially for the stories they tell us. Thus the novel introduces and sets its own position as story-teller/guide. The novel then unfolds in the polyphonic voices of Keeper and Garnet. Keeper’s next point of narration explains his story which is implicated in the residential school experience: “*Them schools were the beginning of how we started losin’ our way as a people*” (37). This statement locates Garnet’s community in the larger framework of colonialism and its impact on Aboriginal communities.

Keeper notes that after the residential school system the Children’s Aid Society came and took away more children. Most never returned and it is at this point that Keeper introduces a rigid idea of the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, going so far as to state they are like different species:

Then they came with their Children’s Aid Society. Said our way was wrong and the kids weren’t gettin’ what they needed, so they took ‘em away. Put ‘em in homes that weren’t Indyun. Some got shipped off long ways. Never made it back yet. Disappeared. Got raised all white but still carryin’ brown skin. Hmmpfh. See, us we know you can’t make a beaver from a bear. Nature don’t work that way. Always gotta be what the Creator made you to be” (Wagamese Keeper 37).

An initial assumption about the novel’s premise can be made that a person must be one thing or another, in this case a beaver or a bear. This statement has roots in what Linda Tuhiwai Smith would describe as *strategic* essentialism of Aboriginal identity, or

'authentic' identity. In the colonized world, outlines Smith, the term 'authentic' was used in at least two different ways: "First, it was used as a form of articulating what it meant to be dehumanized by colonization; and, second, for reorganizing 'national consciousness' in struggles for decolonization (Smith 73). Or, otherwise stated, the very same qualities that are used by the West to dehumanize and colonize aboriginal people are, in turn, used strategically by Aboriginal people to empower themselves. *Strategic* essentialism, as opposed to essentialism has an element of empowerment that may be used towards political mobility, whereas essentialism can pertain to negative *or* positive attributes of what it means to be authentic.

Given the above definition, Wagamese's use of strategic essentialism is predominant throughout the novel in the serene details of the near-perfect community of White Dog, idealized almost to the point of fantasy. White Dog is depicted as community set away from the world, recovering on its own through traditional values and a return to a traditional life with a few modern twists. Wagamese locates an authentic "Indian" identity on a reserve setting with appropriately "Indian" guides, learning typically "Indian" things reminiscent of an idealized past. Keeper's intentions are to guide Garnet back to his community as smoothly as possible. Therefore, through the character Keeper, Wagamese is utilizing strategic essentialism to reach Garnet by showing him he is intrinsically part of something larger and more beautiful.

As well as showing elements of strategic essentialism, Keeper's aforementioned passage about beaver's and bears introduces the binary of natural and unnatural when Keeper makes the comment about Nature not making one thing from another. The comment about what is natural is fraught with potentially problematic stereotyping that

has been directed at Aboriginal people, assuming they must have links or affiliations with the natural world taking the focus from strategic essentialism to plain essentialism. However, if this passage is again revisited through the lens of colonialism, then perhaps it is not white people and Aboriginal people being compared and the intercultural adoption that is unnatural, but the impositions of colonialism that are unnatural. Keeper is speaking about the intent to dominate a child for the express purpose of changing their cultural orientation as an unnatural act and probably the method of taking the children. The key word in this passage becomes “make” which takes on a forceful connotation of how colonialism seeks *to make* the Aboriginal population into its own image for its own purposes and against the will of those being colonized.

Strategic essentialism works well at the beginning of the novel. Garnet has incurred many blows to his self-esteem and sense of self from his fractured identity of living in a white suburban family and neighborhood while being Indian and facing all of the systemic and overt racism that made him ashamed to be Indian, though he really had no idea what Indians are. He only had the negative stereotypes of the media and racist foster families to educate him about Indians.

I remember one time after doing something against the rules in one home I was in, the man of the house drove me into the Indian section of town. He drove real slow, pointing out drunks and dirty-looking people reeling around on the sidewalks or sleeping crumpled up in alleys.

Then he said, “See. Those are Indians. Look at them. If you don’t start shaping up and doing what your told around here, that’s what you’re going to become” (Wagamese *Keeper* 13)!

Garnet constantly reiterates how alone he felt as “the only Indian” (12) and how confusing this was as he figured he was just a “brown white guy” (12) and was upset to discover he was an Indian as he didn’t “know how to be an Indian” (13)! Every

experience he has growing up in the foster system perpetuates the racist mythology of the colonizer country Canada against its Aboriginal people, constantly pitting them as lazy, drunk, unable to care for their children, absent in the history books, cowboy fodder, degenerate and reliant on the goodwill of white people for their continued existence (12-13). Garnet is unable to pinpoint the source of his unease, and his own limited knowledge of Indian culture is of no use. He therefore invents other identities based on what he feels he can pass for, becoming a range of nationalities from Chinese to Hawaiian. He is unable to be white although he has grown up in white suburban culture, so he manufactures these identities to mask his Indian self, thus becoming neither bear nor beaver. His appearance is at once a cruel identifier that signals his otherness, and at the same time becomes a refuge for him to disguise his Indian self by selecting his degree of otherness instead of just being victim to it. For Garnet certain noble types of Indians are okay to be, such as Cherokee or Apache and certain other brown nationalities are acceptable as he tries to be Hawaiian, Chinese and Mexican. After finally finding acceptance with his true identity with Lonnie Flowers, he wants to be black too. "It didn't seem to matter to Lonnie that I was Indian and it sure didn't matter to me that he was black. If anything I was starting to wish that I was too" (*Wagamese Keeper* 19). Although Lonnie makes it clear that the only person Garnet was fooling was himself with his adopted identities, they were based on what he thought could pass, given his appearance. Lonnie and his family, the Flowers, also adopt Garnet as their own and soon he looks, dresses and talks like the Flowers, even down to his permed Afro and satin pants. And this is just as he appears the first time he returns to White Dog.

I had my Afro all picked out to about three feet around my head, mirrored shades, a balloon-sleeved yellow silk shirt with the long tapered collar, lime green baggy

pants with the little cuffs and my hippest pair of platform shoes, all brown with silver spangles, and three gold chains around my neck. I was giving off the odor of fifty-dollar perfume and bopping up and down like there was a Chicago blues band in my head (*Wagamese Keeper* 31).

When he gets to White Dog the people are not nearly as impressed with his appearance in the way he thinks they are. It is not his James Brown appearance that impresses them. It is the fact that he looks just like his brother, and they all immediately know who he is and whom he is related to. In the beginning of the novel Garnet's appearance as an Indian is a mark of shame for him as his adoptive family and white community are constantly presenting negative images of Indians to him and admonishing him or blaming him for his race. When he meets the Flowers, he is accepted as an Indian though he adopts the cultural attributes of the Flowers who are black. Finally he meets his family and his appearance directly links him to his family and to the larger community of White Dog.

The roles that Garnet plays in order to escape being stereotyped as Indian are based on stereotypical representations of other minority people, such as Hawaiians wearing Hawaiian shirts, or Chinese martial artists, which speaks volumes about the level of misinformation that Garnet was victim to living in mainstream society. Garnet assumes a black identity after meeting Lonnie, and the shallowness that plagued Garnet before disappears and is replaced with a genuine taste for Lonnie's lifestyle, dress and mannerisms. This genuine aspect of his personality is reiterated in the survival of his initial clothing choices at White Dog being sewn into his "Jake" looking Indian outfit at the end of the novel. The person that Garnet was when he came to the White Dog Reserve is symbolized by his clothing. That same clothing is reworked and sewn to make the lining of his new coat and ribbons on his ribbon shirt, thus incorporating elements of his old appearance with his new one. The role of appearance is highlighted as "Looking

Jake,” the last title of books within Keeper’N Me, and it stands for Garnet finally looking the part of a “*real Indyun*” as he fits into the community in every sense of the word.

Conversely, in A Quality of Light it is Johnny Gebhardt, Joshua’s German-Caucasian friend, who would most aptly be described as “looking Jake” as he is decked out in stereotypically Indian warrior regalia:

A bold smear of red covered one half of his face, with two black wavy lines running from his hairline down beneath his chin. He wore a single eagle feather in his hair, which hung in two braids with a smaller, thinner braid on the left side. On his feet were a pair of fringed moccasins that reached just below his knees. He had a bone and leather choker around his neck, and a pale chambray shirt under a fringed and beaded hide vest. The beaded designs were pyramidal, one on each shoulder, front and back, green, yellow and white. The colors of growth, enlightenment and wisdom according to the teachings of the medicine wheel (Wagamese *Quality* 284).

This is very different from the only reference to Joshua’s appearance when he describes himself as “I’m, uh tall, black hair, dark skin, I’ll wear a blue suit” (Wagamese *Quality* 15). Nettles jokes that he sounds like an Injun, to which he responds “I am an Indian, Inspector. Ojibway” (15). Unlike Garnet, Joshua does not express his identity through his clothing. He may not “look Jake,” but he is an Indian. Throughout the rest of the novel Joshua’s clothing or appearance is hardly ever mentioned. Instead his identity markers have more to do with his spiritual beliefs and feelings than tangible markers such as clothing. There are only a few references to Joshua’s appearance and skin colour throughout the novel, and the only repeated affirmation that he is Indian comes from his stating so. His identification comes from his self-identifying as an Indian, thus changing the focus from “looking Jake” to “being Joshua.”

Through Johnny’s character, appearance also links itself to political identity as opposed to just racial identity in A Quality of Light. Although it is possible to argue that

Johnny appropriates an Aboriginal identity for his own gains in the fashion of Grey Owl, Wagamese does not set up his character in that light. Johnny does make many mistakes during his path to becoming Indian but so do Garnet Raven and Joshua Kane as the journey of self-discovery is rarely well-marked or simple to follow. Johnny's dedication to Aboriginal causes is presented as the only true thing he has in his life. A testimony to this is that he loses his very life to the causes of Aboriginal peoples. It is possible to assume that Johnny's character dies at the end of the novel because he is an imposter, and to balance the novel out only Joshua, the actual Indian, should survive. However, throughout the novel there is constant affirmation of Johnny's right to be politically, spiritually and culturally affiliated to Aboriginal people as he experiences first-hand virtually every major contemporary Aboriginal political and cultural event. Also, at the end of the novel, in the same manner that Garnet's voice becomes Keeper's voice, Joshua "disappeared into the words" of Johnny when he reads the terms of his surrender (Wagamese *Quality* 317). This symmetry in the novels would suggest that Johnny is as much an Indian as Joshua. Ironically, although Johnny is dressed in full Indian regalia at the end of the novel, he discloses that it is not the clothes or taking on the persona of a warrior that matters, but one's actions that defines him as Indian.

While this revelation is cathartic for both Joshua and Johnny, the rest of Canada, or at least the armed police in the novel, are not privy to nor is it likely they share that attitude. Johnny's letter is read to the public but unfortunately the novel does not disclose its effect on the general populace. It is hard to discern the impact of Johnny's sacrifice though Wagamese still makes a strong point about the need to educate the entire population if anyone is going to benefit long term, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Both

novels seek to deconstruct Hollywood images or falsified images and representations of Indians and replace that with a sense of positive identity markers that Indians themselves sanctify. Unless the population at large is also in agreement with this, the old stereotyped images of Indians continue to pose a real and in this case mortal threat. Johnny's appearance in Indian regalia identifies him as Indian to the white police force surrounding the building. The appearance of Johnny's own force, the plastic guns, is also seen as real to the white police force. And the appearance is enough to get Johnny killed. What is interesting about this conclusion is that while Joshua is able to traverse both Aboriginal and mainstream culture because of his adoption into white culture, Johnny is unable to do the same. The message is that the dominant culture in Canada will accept partial assimilation of Aboriginal peoples but it will not abide white citizens assimilating into Aboriginal culture and "going Native" as it were.

The role of appearance in the construction of identity is a complicated matter. While both texts make several points about the positive and negative aspects of using appearance to denote cultural affiliation, neither is conclusive. Both novels share main protagonists who are adopted into white families. Therefore it is likely they have no sense of what actual Aboriginal people are like, because they are only bombarded with the falsely constructed "imaginary Indians" sourced to them through media, books, their education, and the racist rants of foster parents and white community members. What is interesting is how Wagamese parodies the construct of the Indian when Johnny asserts he has seen real Indians in books, and because Joshua does not appear like them he cannot be a "real" Indian (*Quality* 56). In another example Garnet is applauded for his appearance and told that once he was in his traditional Indian dress, he looked "Jake," a

euphemism for “real” Indian. It might also be fair to suggest that Joshua looks Indian but does not actually have the experiences of Aboriginal people, and as such is open to criticism about his life experience as Eigenbrod points out:

The fact that Josh, the adopted Ojibway, *looks* Indian does not necessarily make him a *real* Indian—not just in Johnny’s eyes but also within the larger socio-cultural context of the novel. Some Aboriginal readers will indeed question the reality of his “Indian” identity because he grows up in a non-Native home without knowing his Native language and culture (99).

This is a problem many Aboriginal adoptees face: a sort of dual-edged sword where on the one side they are immediately identifiable as Indian, but on the other side lack a supposed “Indian” life experience to back it up. Other Aboriginal people may view Aboriginal adoptees as un-Aboriginal which is systemic of larger issues of colonialism whereby Aboriginals are themselves placing parameters on what constitutes Aboriginal identity in the same fashion of the colonizer. Métis author Dumont comments on this when she states, “[T]hese colonial images we have of ourselves informs me that internalized colonialism is still alive and well in the art we generate” (48). This internalized colonialism is not restricted to the characters in the novel as readers may also question Wagamese’s authenticity as an Aboriginal author given that he is adopted as well. In the larger sociopolitical scheme of Aboriginal adoption in Canada, it is clear that Aboriginal adoptees are implicated in a defunct system and are not themselves inadequate or less Indian because of it. Given that “[B]y the 1970’s, one in three Aboriginal children were separated from their families by adoption or fostering” (Sinclair 66), it would seem *not* being adopted would be un-Indian. What Wagamese presents in his novels are those ways that his characters find the language and experiences to self-identify and “the question of who is a *real Indian* cannot be answered simply by referring to physical

appearance or blood quantum” (Eigenbrod 98). Wagamese makes the point that there is no one definitive style or appearance that fits all Aboriginal people, forcing his audience to look a little deeper or in a multitude of ways to find Aboriginal identity.

ii) Culture

A constant throughout both novels and for the three main characters - Joshua Kane, Garnet Raven and Johnny Gebhardt - is their ability to self-identify as Indians, although in Johnny's case he is actually of Canadian-German ancestry. In the work force self-identifying is simply the practice of allowing potential employees the chance to access equal opportunity programs based on their cultural group. For many Aboriginal people who were disenfranchised and lost their status, there was no way of proving their Indian background. The solution was to give potential employees or students a space to volunteer information about themselves so the employer could then utilize that information to assist the employee. Many positions are advertised to be filled by an Aboriginal person only, and if you were not a status Indian but were still Aboriginal, where would the burden of proof lie in deciding who was Aboriginal? Given the problematic nature of proving one's heritage on paper, the government had to accept at face value when a person chose to self-identify as Aboriginal. The issues self-identifying raises, although not a topic in the Wagamese novels, affect the fictive adopted Aboriginal characters' sense of self and identity.

In Keeper'N Me Garnet self-identifies as many different nationalities before discovering his true identity and then coming to terms with that identity. His first association is as a “brown white guy” (Wagamese Keeper 13). Growing up in an all-

white family, going to school with and playing with all-white children, he has no point of reference for himself as “other;” he just thinks of himself as white but slightly different. He is taught his “otherness” by the school kids, the television and his family though this education is really just a perpetuation of fear-based racist stereotypes that his white suburban family and Westerns think are true. So Garnet grows up wanting to be white but understanding that his appearance readily identifies him as Indian.

And that’s how it was for me growing up. I was embarrassed about being an Indian and I was afraid that if I ever met a real one I wouldn’t know what to do or say. So I started trying to fit into that white world as best I could. I decided that I would try to learn to be anything other than what I was. I didn’t want to be compared to any of the images I had of my own people, of myself. But this brown skin of mine was always a pretty good clue to most people that there must have been a redskin or two creeping around my mama’s woodpile (*Wagamese Keeper* 13-14).

This woodpile reference is also picked up in Cariou’s article “Epistemology of the Woodpile” where he explores the ramifications of what his uncle jokingly referred to as the Indian lurking in their woodpile. This idea that there was potentially some Indian ancestry in what he thought was his predominantly French background was the catalyst “...by which he [I] came to recognize at least the potential of his [my] own racial hybridity” (2). Racial hybridity is also explored in *Keeper’N Me* as Garnet experiments with his own identity. After Garnet leaves his adopted family and starts to live on his own, he is even more at odds with being white as the world definitely does not treat him as white. As he is ashamed of the thought of being recognized as an Indian, he begins to self-identify as other nationalities that he feels are more respectable brown identities. If he does admit to being Indian, he will admit to being part-Indian only, and then only

those nations he feels are particularly acceptable because the general populace is familiar with them.

So at various times I was Hawaiian, Polynesian, Mexican, or Chinese. Anything but Indian. Those people on the street that day still haunted me. Of course, if I got cornered on evidence then I'd become one of four famous kinds of Indian. I was either Apache, Sioux, Cherokee or Comanche. Everyone had heard of those Indians. I mean, if you absolutely had to be an Indian, at least be the ones that everyone had heard of. Embarrassed as I was at the time I sure didn't want to be no Passamaquoddy, Flathead, Dogrib or Ojibway (*Wagamese Keeper* 14).

Garnet assumes these various identities to maintain his comfort level. He feels no affiliation to his own cultural background and is unable to come to terms with his own identity as he has no real sense of this identity, only hints and images that are not based on actual Indian people but on the perception of Indians through the media and white middle-class racism. Garnet has only been taught about negative imagery like when "the man of the house" shows him what Indians are like and basically takes him to a ghetto to see how Indians live. In his experience that is all there was to an Indian and Garnet is not even told what kind of Indian he is. So Garnet clings desperately to the identities he creates for himself where he can find some solace or place to fit in as a brown person, but not as an Indian person because everything he has been shown about Indian people makes him feel ashamed and he does not want to live with that shame. So his reasons for self-identifying are for his own survival as he is unable to reconcile his own shame in being Indian with being Indian so he pretends to be someone else. This idea of passing is reminiscent of April Raintree thinking that if she could pass as white her problems would be solved when she states, "It just reinforced my belief that if I could assimilate myself into white society, I wouldn't have to live like this for the rest of my life" (*Mosionier* 78).

This desire for assimilation speaks to her internalized hatred of herself as “Indian” and the shame that she too feels about her own identity.

Garnet’s shame-driven need to assume fake identities is mirrored by Johnny Gebhardt’s character in A Quality of Light. Although, Johnny’s character is German-Canadian and white his troubled home life with a drunken and abusive father and a passive mother makes him loathe his own identity. The constant strife and moving from one place to another leaves Johnny desperate for solace which he finds in the books and ideas he discovers at the library:

So, needless to say, I was glad to get out of Toronto. Not that coming to a place called Mildmay was my idea of a good move, but any place was going to be better than those sorry streets. And actually it’s not the streets themselves that I hated. It was the me that walked them. And my life. I lived all my life learning how to shift gears. I’d be coming home from school or the library (where I did my living) and I’d be feeling pretty good. I’d just spent a few quality hours in a book and I’d be on fire with new ideas, information or some story. I’d feel like a real kid, motoring in the passing lane of life. Then I’d get to the door of wherever it was we were living at the time (Wagamese Quality 30).

Johnny’s strife is not visible for others to see. His shame is not visible to others in the way that Garnet’s skin colour and the source of his shame is visible to others, but it marks his character in many of the same ways. Johnny is constantly aware of his home life and how this identifies him. When his father moves them back to Mildmay, a small farming community, it is widely known he is the prodigal son returning and his troubles with alcohol are known to everyone even before he relocates. Johnny may not be aware of this, but he is aware he will not be able to mask his home life in such a small town. When Johnny meets Joshua and his parents, he sees for the first time what a happy home life is like. The Kanes have genuine love and affection for one another and their life is moderate and calm everything Johnny’s life lacks. Even though Johnny has a problem

with Joshua being Indian and living with a white family, he recognizes that Joshua's family life is something that he needs:

Whenever I go back there in my mind, I always remember the night more than I remember the day. You and your dad dropping me off at the house and my dad coming out to the porch all sloshed and angry. I hated that son-of-a-bitch right then. Not that his drunkenness or his anger was foreign to me. I'd been through that inning lots. But that night man, I was filled with light for the first time. Light Josh. Your parents, that day, the way I felt around you and the way we both latched onto the idea of the game. And secrets. When you live the way my mom and I had to live, you get used to having secrets. You just can't share them with anybody. Not even each other, even though it's the same life. They become evil somehow. Like you're trapped by them but at the same time, you know that letting them out will trap you even more (Wagamese Quality 59).

The light that Johnny describes is a constant metaphor throughout the novel and refers to many things, feelings of happiness and belonging being one of them. Wagamese uses light as a metaphor in both the introduction and then explains the use of it with an Aboriginal story about how light came into the world which exposed differences among the animals i.e. cultures and people. In this instance Johnny is referring to the light as a source of comfort and belonging and feeling safe, before being returned to his family life which he feels is darkness or despair, full of treachery and secrets, a place where he was not at home. This sense of alienation and discomfiture are mirrored by Garnet's home life in Keeper'N Me with his adopted white family and the secret of his Indian identity. However, where Garnet tries to rid himself of his Indian identity to gain comfort, Johnny adopts an Indian identity to find comfort.

When looking at these two novels, there is a nice sense of symmetry in the adoption of, and discarding of identities that cause shame and despair with those that empower or merely disguise one's true self. A mirroring takes place between Garnet in

Keeper and Me and Johnny in A Quality of Light; however it is the latter novel that is further complicated by the framework of colonialism in the form of the adoption of Aboriginal identity by non-Aboriginal people. Here, the character of Johnny Gebhardt, a German-Canadian Caucasian is depicted as appropriating an Aboriginal identity as a way of escaping his tragic home life. It expresses another way in which the image of "Nativeness" may be appropriated.

This particular notion of appropriation is explored in Emma Lee Warrior's short story "Compatriots" where she sets up a narrative centered on a German man who adopts the name Helmut Walking Eagle and "who turned Indian" (182). The Aboriginal characters in the story discuss Walking Eagle and one of them states:

Shit that guy's just a phony. How could anybody else turn into something else? Huh? I don't think I could turn into a white man if I tried all my life. They wouldn't let me, so how does that German think he can be an Indian. White people think they can do anything- turn into Chinese or Indian- they're crazy (Warrior 182)!

The question becomes: Can a non-Aboriginal person appropriate an Aboriginal identity? There is a fine line between appropriating and adopting an identity and determining the difference is a difficult issue, and is not black and white. This paper argues that there is not one decisive element, it is a combination of several interplaying ones: political motivation, personal motivation, and community acceptance. For instance, we may argue that Helmut Walking Eagle *appropriates* a Native identity because he does it for financial gain and intellectual status. In a similar vein, Johnny initially *appropriates* a Native identity purely as a need to escape who he is. However, after learning about Aboriginal culture and being accepted by the culture Johnny arguably *adopts* the image of Nativeness because he uses this identity to promote Aboriginal political causes. With this

said, Johnny's new found political consciousness must also be tied to the Aboriginal communities' acceptance. For instance, at the end of the novel A Quality of Light, whereupon Johnny is mistakenly shot to death, we may argue that, on the one hand, Johnny is killed as a statement by the Aboriginal community that his appropriation of their culture was not accepted. At the same time, however, after Johnny's death, Joshua, the Aboriginal character "disappears" into Johnny's words when he reads Johnny's final letter, thus suggesting that Johnny is just as Aboriginal as Joshua, and that his appropriation of Aboriginal culture was accepted (Wagamese *Quality* 317). This is also supported by Wagamese's initial mention of Johnny where he describes the novel as a story "...about Johnny and me becoming Indians together, one because he wanted to, and the other because he had to. It's only now I understand that those parts are interchangeable" (9).

Warrior's discussion in "Compatriots" regarding appropriation moves onto other white people becoming shamans and other iconic Aboriginal figures and then selling their stories marketing themselves as Aboriginal. This form of appropriation not only steals the images and the culturally and spiritually significant aspects of Aboriginal cultures but perpetuates falsely constructed images of "Nativity" in their place for mainstream consumption. So in this way the mirror has two images but like a mirror the image only goes one way, while white people may become "Indians" or at least reasonable facsimiles, Aboriginal may not become white. This may be seen when Joshua is beaten-up by his classmates for being Native despite being raised within a white community.

iii) Land

“The land is a feeling” is a sentiment repeated in all of Wagamese’s work with some regularity and offers more than just a statement about his characters’ relationship to a specific piece of land. The phrase conjures up past reflections of Canadian writers and critics alike who, as Ruffo notes, constructed images of the wild or noble savage in relation to the land where “the land is considered terrifying, the embodiment of a denial of Western cultural values, so too do Native people symbolize this perception” (*Why* 665). In this instance the Indian is constructed in relation to nature but is no less a construct of the dominant culture and is more telling of the fears and racism of that culture than about Aboriginal people. There is a tradition of the image of the Indian in relation to the land which is “conceived as historical and static” (Ruffo *Why* 665). Conversely, Ruffo notes in his own writing, “when we speak of the land, it is not any land but a specific piece of Mother Earth that is much spiritual as it is a physical entity” (670). He discusses a passage concerning land in Keeper’N Me, when Garnet returns to White Dog:

...he discovers that it is just as much inside his people as it is under their feet. While his return to the community signals a movement toward spiritual enlightenment, particularly the knowledge of who he is and what it means to be Anishnabe, it also finally gives him a role and identity within the community, that of storyteller: the book we are reading is his contribution to community life (671).

This passage offers a look at how the relationship to the land is not static but ever evolving as are the roles and identities of Aboriginal people, in this instance the Anishnabe people. The role which is particularly fluid is that of story-teller, which

moves from the oral to the written, and from being on the land to writing books, responding to the changing needs of the community.

This written representation of the relationship between Aboriginal people and the land is offset, however, by the novel A Quality of Light in which the main Aboriginal character Joshua is introduced to the spiritual connection to the land through his adopted white father, a protestant farmer named Ezra Kane. Joshua explains:

It was my father who brought me to the spirit of the land. He'd sink his furrowed fingers deep into it, roll its grit and promise around his palms, smell it and then rub it over his chest and overalls like he wanted it to seep through into his heart. It did and it seeped into mine too (Wagamese *Quality* 7).

Garnet has a similar reaction to the land of his birth when he is on the bus heading back to White Dog.

...I remember looking out that window of that bus, watching the landscape flow by and feeling somehow like I knew this country. I'd been raised in southern Ontario around farmland and skyscrapers, but something inside me told me that I knew, really knew this country outside the window. It was spooky and the more I watched it roll by the more that feeling settled into my belly (Wagamese *Keeper* 30).

These two excerpts convey similar sentiments about both an Anishinabe person's and a white farmer's relationships to the land as encompassing a spiritual belonging to it. The question about feelings towards land becomes less a dichotomy between Aboriginal and settler and has more to do with the political positioning of people and the land. Wagamese does not question that people of many different cultural backgrounds may also have affinity for the land, but he continually reminds the reader that the land that the settler is on is stolen land. This is exemplified when he describes Wounded Knee, stating "...the blood of the people seeped through ice and snow, sealing itself forever in the

articulate bosom of the earth. The land is a palimpsest, but it requires the eyes and ears of the enlightened to hear its songs and see its scars” (Wagamese *Qulaity* 246). As Joshua describes in *A Quality of Light* about his adoptive father teaching him the connection of spirit and land, “[H]e taught me to approach the land like a hymn. Reverently, joyfully, gratefully” (Wagamese 8). His Aboriginal characters love the land; why should others not feel the same? Regardless of how Joshua comes to love the land his relationship to it does not evolve until, like Garnet, he returns to the Aboriginal community. Ruffo writes of Garnet returning to his community as finding “strength and well being” (670) and “Community is necessarily linked to identity, the return to community signifying the protagonist’s recognition of himself as a Native person who has survived the colonizing and assimilating forces of the dominant society” (670). In this way land is intrinsically linked to community which becomes a political affiliation to culture, as a means of decolonizing or resisting the forces of assimilation that intercultural adoption has foisted on the characters within both texts.

The cultural displacement of the two main characters in the novels is articulated in one of Wagamese’s earlier articles. In the article in *The Terrible Summer* “There Are Three Kinds of Indians,” he states that there are the traditional, the transitional and the non-practicing. These definitions of Indians or degrees of Indianness provide an interesting point of departure for examining the cultural dis/location and re/location that takes place in both novels. Wagamese is an interculturally adopted Aboriginal person himself, and he locates Aboriginal adoptees by default or their circumstances as either transitional or non-practicing Indians in the article. Transitional Indians are described as:

These are the Indians who balance modern ways with any number of elements of their cultural tradition. They are the nurses, lawyers,

journalists and bureaucrats who leave their offices to pow-wow on weekends. Those who are working their way back from cultural alienation because of foster care or adoption. Those who left it all behind because of alcohol and drug abuse. Those who seek a return to themselves. Those who are actively rebuilding the fabric of tribal societies (Wagamese *Summer* 18).

Wagamese describes non-practicing Indians as those who have completely lost all cultural ties and are not seeking to reconnect. Some Aboriginal adoptees would also fit into this category as he describes non-practicing Indians as “Those who have grown up in an all-white world. Those who have the looks of the Indians but no working knowledge of what it means to be an actual Indian. Victims of displacement” (18). In his fiction Wagamese plays with the movement and fluidity of his own definition of Indianness in the characters’ development throughout both novels. Both main characters Joshua and Garnet live life as non-practicing Indians because of their adoption into non-Aboriginal homes. The novels depict Garnet’s transition into a traditional Indian, Joshua’s into a transitional Indian maintaining his profession as a minister and practicing Ojibway traditions. The definitions of the three types of Indians that Wagamese brings up in his article are reinforced in the Aboriginal characters in the novels Keeper’N Me and A Quality of Light, but come into question when Johnny’s character, a self-proclaimed “Warrior of Conscience,” is considered. Wagamese utilizes Johnny Gebhardt, this Canadian of Germanic descent character, to represent the constructed quality of identity and to question perceptions of race and its relationship to identity. Although Wagamese himself came up with this notion of three types of Indians, he breaks down his own definitions questioning whether a non-Aboriginal person can become a traditional Indian. Whether the characters have lived on a reservation or experience an urban nomadic

lifestyle with no connection to the land, Wagamese explores ideas of what it means to be Indian and who has the right to claim that title and who has it thrust upon them. These questions fit logically with concerns that Aboriginal adoptees would have concerning their own status as Aboriginal people. Certainly the idea of predestined biological attributes determining one's cultural affiliations and connections becomes a paramount concern. On the one hand this idea that one can have absorbed cultural affiliations by being born into something gives hope that Aboriginal adoptees can be re/integrated back into their Aboriginal communities. But it does limit the scope of acceptable experience that would ensure the non-practicing Aboriginal adoptee the proper avenue to accomplish this. On the other hand, it also limits the very real connection they may have with their adopted white families, placing them forever on the periphery of the newly-constructed familial bonds if their race determines their cultural affiliations. For the Aboriginal adoptee there are many impediments to successful identity construction when they are raised in an all-white environment, as both Joshua and Garnet were. These problems include finding a sense of belonging with either the Aboriginal community or mainstream society without concrete links to something that can bind them to a positive sense of self.

A positive sense of self starts with knowing who you are. As Wagamese states in The Terrible Summer, "[T]he most basic human right in the world is the right to know yourself" (60). For Aboriginal people knowing who they are is intrinsically linked to the land as Ruffo states, "[F]rom the earliest prayers and songs, the land and all the forms of life upon it have always been regarded as sacred by the people" (670). By removing Aboriginal people from the land, colonialist policies and those who enforce them have cut Aboriginal people off from knowing a vital part of who they are and this is no less

true for the Aboriginal adoptee. This basic human right is hard to attain for most Aboriginal adoptees as highlighted by Wagamese's two novels and the struggles that their main characters overcome to discover who they are. Sinclair writes, "Many adoptees are facing identity issues because of being socialized and acculturated into a middle-class 'white' society" (69). For Joshua and Garnet, knowing themselves involves navigating in mainstream society with differing degrees of success and savvy as each character's level of acculturation and acceptance is different. Garnet is older when he is adopted and has limited memories of his early childhood in the bush, although he quickly becomes acclimated to life in the white suburbs save for the constant embarrassment at being the "only ichthyum" (*Wagamese Keeper* 13). Conversely, Joshua is able to traverse mainstream circles much easier, probably because of his positive adoption at birth to a family that truly wanted him. Garnet was not happily adopted but was shuffled through foster homes that were not characteristically charitable in how they treated him. Garnet writes, "I was in and out of more homes than your average cat burglar" (*Wagamese Keeper* 12). Although both characters have radically different levels of acceptance in mainstream society - Joshua becomes a married minister and Garnet spends time in prison - they must both deal with how they are perceived by mainstream society. For them the issue of finding their birth parents and community is also linked with "...being reacquainted with the most marginalized and oppressed group within Canadian society" (Sinclair 69). Regardless of their success or failure within mainstream society, both Garnet and Josh must "enter a room skin first" (*Wagamese Quality* 114). Neither is able to blend into white society and nor prepared for the racism they encounter.

In *Keeper'N Me* the idea that an intercultural adoptee could be accepted or live a life uncomplicated by race is completely broken down to the point where Keeper compares Indians living as white people to bears becoming beavers. The novel concludes with Garnet completely rejecting mainstream society and embracing life on the reserve, becoming a traditional Indian as it were. He rejects mainstream society because he was rejected by it and made to feel ashamed of being Indian. The result of this shame is his self-destructive behavior that eventually lands him in prison. Not only is Garnet a victim of the systemic racism that took him from his family, he is also constantly surrounded by negative images of Indians, stereotypes, racism perpetuated by some of his foster parents, and the constant questioning of who he is by his peers to which he must tearfully reply "...I don't know how to be an Indian!" (*Wagamese Keeper* 13). As Sinclair notes:

If reflection, according to Symbolic interactionists, is the means by which we come to our self-concept and self-conceptions, the implications for Aboriginal adoptees are quite frightening. If we create meanings and symbols in our interactions with other people, what happens when those meanings and symbols are constantly changing, or worse primarily negative? For Aboriginal people in Canada, social interaction is at times a guessing game (74).

These changing and primarily negative symbols of Indians that surround Garnet propel him to react by disguising his Indianess, becoming whatever identity that is the least threatening and least likely to invite negative attention. The downside is that he is never able to truly investigate who he is because he is constantly creating identities to protect himself from potential hostility directed at his race and therefore himself. The first acceptance he finds is with Lonnie Flowers and his family who encourage him to find his roots to get to know who he is as an Indian. As Lonnie puts it "...only dude you gotta meet is yourself" (*Wagamese Keeper* 18). The Flowers offer him a haven against racism

and a place where he truly fits in and is accepted, but the crux is that it is still another disguise. In this way he is still unable to get acquainted with himself. For Garnet he finds no acceptance in mainstream white society, but he does find acceptance with another minority group. In Keeper'N Me there are no Indian characters that traverse both worlds because for Keeper, the only true Indians are traditional (tra-dish-yun-al) Indians. When Keeper'N Me is read in isolation it would be an acceptable conclusion. However, Wagamese complicates this essentialist tactic with his other main character in another story. Joshua Kane moves effortlessly between white mainstream culture and Aboriginal culture, becoming more of a transitional rather than traditional Indian.

In A Quality of Light Joshua has more success in mainstream white society. To belong in both Aboriginal and mainstream/white society does not necessarily mean becoming a bridge between the two cultures, nor does membership in one group automatically exclude you from the other. There are issues with attaining acceptance in mainstream society for both Joshua and Garnet for different reasons. In navigating what Callahan describes as a liminal space between cultures given their unusual situation of being interculturally adopted, the primary reason for Joshua's apparent success over Garnet has to do with the quality of Joshua's adoptive situation. Wagamese's two characters exemplify and highlight what Callahan describes as the potential and benefits and dangers of occupying this liminal position.

...transracial adoptees are simultaneously insiders and outsiders when it comes to kinship and race. Their paradoxical social position can be viewed as a "gift," providing a certain freedom from the restrictions of social boundaries, yet they invite the same risk of being torn asunder by the strength of the social codes which they subvert. A dialectic of subversion and potential reconstruction of societal norms remains in tension within adoptive kinship dramas (9).

What Callahan is describing are the tension between the intercultural adoptees' assumed societal standing based on their racial traits and the elevated social status that they are placed in through adoption. While the adoptee's family situation may diminish this tension in the private home setting, society at large is very aware of the social hierarchical codes that this type of adoption disrupts. However, while Joshua's character enjoys the relative freedom of his youth being accepted regardless of his outsider racial status, he is nearly literally torn asunder when he is beaten up at his high school by the kids who do not accept his status as their equals and seek to revert the social codes back to the status quo of white being superior to Indian. To add to the cruelty of this attack is Joshua's complete sense of surprise. Up to that point he was unaware that his adoptive status was somehow subverting cultural norms where his racial status is not equal to his adopted white status. Joshua is able to recover from the attack. More importantly the attack provides the instigating force, along with Johnny's insistence, that he become a "real Indian," to find out more about his cultural identity as an Anishinabe person. The love, support and understanding that Joshua receives from his adoptive family appears to be the catalyst he requires in order to maintain a sense of cultural affinity for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. On the other hand, Garnet was never shown love, support, and understanding from his white foster and adoptive parents. His only significant memories of his childhood involve feelings of alienation and loneliness, and he is encouraged to disassociate from his Indianness. When Garnet first encounters love and acceptance with the Flowers and then with his birth family and community at White Dog, his inclination is to continue becoming Indian as this identity is positively reinforced. As Sinclair notes, love and security within the immediate family situation do

not adequately prepare the intercultural Aboriginal adoptee for the racism they experience outside the confines of home, nor can these adoptees relate these experiences to white family members who do not share these experiences (71-72). Sinclair did find, however, that “a positive [adoptive] parental attitude towards the child’s ethnic group, as well as some form of social involvement with that group in the family’s life, is significantly correlated with a child’s positive sense of ethnic identity” (70). This is exactly the situation that Wagamese writes about Joshua’s adoptive family. The Kanes and his religious leader volunteer to experience Anishinabe culture with Joshua; therefore, Joshua is comfortable enough to accept living in both Anishinabe and white culture. While land is actually a literal place for both main characters in the novels Keeper’N Me and A Quality of Light, it is stated over and over again that “the land is a feeling,” in this way making its representation of home more of an ideological space rather than any fixed place within the realm of the texts.

Chapter IV

Literary Analysis: The Search for Belonging

The search for belonging for the fictive adoptee characters in both Wagamese's novels Keeper'N Me and A Quality of Light mirrors the search for belonging that many contemporary Aboriginal peoples face as they begin the process of decolonizing themselves. At issue is the construction of positive identity in the face of the prevalent mythology behind the formation of Canada which positions the construct "Indian" as a static, stoic, savage counterpart to the European, leaving little room for the inclusion of the actual Aboriginal people. As Francis puts it:

The Indian is the invention of the European...The Indian began as a White Man's mistake, and became a White Man's fantasy. Through the prism of White hopes, fears and prejudices, indigenous Americans would be seen to have lost contact with reality and to have become "Indians"; that is, anything non-Natives wanted them to be (5).

The term "Indian" therefore relates not only to the legal definition of a status Indian in Canada but also to this constructed idea of "Indian" pervasive in the Canadian consciousness. The term "Indian," another version of Said's "Other" in the Orientalist discourse, is meant to weaken the position of the non-European in the face of colonial oppression while simultaneously justifying the European right to conquest. The "Other," or in this case the "Indian," becomes part of the constructed basis for many of the fallacies necessary to justify Canada's land and resource theft and promotes a racist dehumanization of Indians, where they may be savage, noble or dead. This presents a problem for the Aboriginal people of today who have to tell the truth behind the myths in order break free of the term "Indian." The scope and power of this term is pervasive in mainstream Canadian consciousness, though the real difficulty in dislodging it lies in its

reflexive political power in its use by the dominant culture. The term "Indian" is more than an idea as Said states about the term Orientalism:

...what we must respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and its redoubtable durability. After all, any system of ideas that can remain unchanged as teachable as wisdom (in academies, books, congresses, universities, foreign-service institutes) from the period of ...the 1840's until the present...must be something more formidable than a collection of lies (6).

Given that the government of Canada has not fulfilled many promises made to Aboriginal peoples across the country and still controls much of the land and resources without Aboriginal peoples' consent, it still relies upon the mythology behind the formation of Canada and the destabilizing effects of the blanket term "Indian" and the racism it continues to inspire. As Francis notes about the continued usefulness of the term:

...the national dream has always been about not being Indian. Since the days of the earliest colonists, non-Natives have struggled to impose their culture on the continent. Indians were always thought of as the Other, threatening to overwhelm this enterprise. Noble or ignoble, it didn't really matter. There was no place for the "savage" in the world the newcomers were building. Canadian history...was the struggle of civilization against savagery. There was never any question on which side the Indians stood (223).

So the feat of dismantling the term "Indian" and all the lies it enables and embodies requires more than just their exposition. Francis notes, "Non-Native Canadians can hardly hope to work out a successful relationship with Native people who exist largely in fantasy" (224). In A Quality of Light, even when Johnny, the German-Caucasian character, comes face to face with a "real Indian" (Wagamese 56), he is unable to let go of the image he has of all Indians being warriors because he read it in a book. The power and privileging of the written word is shown throughout both Wagamese's novels where

written knowledge about Indians is irrefutable. However, Wagamese also shows how the written word can work for Aboriginal peoples when Keeper describes how he has prepared Garnet to be a story-teller:

But he learned and that's why I told him to write all of this down. Be a storyteller. Any damn fool can get people's attention but it takes a storyteller to get their attention and hold it. Lots of people out there gotta know what happened, how you found your way back and what it takes to be an Indyun these days. Real Indyun, not that Hollywood kind (Wagamese Keeper 3-4).

The method for exposing the myths behind the term "Indian" and changing people's minds is set out in Keeper's little rant. The line "*Any damn fool can get people's attention*" (Wagamese Keeper 3-4) is probably referring to the sensationalist tactics used by media, literature, news and any materials that propagate the myth of the Indian. Keeper suggests that to hold people's attention though, you have to have a story worth telling, and Aboriginal peoples in Canada do. That's what Aboriginal writers like Wagamese need to do, keep writing and stating the same things over and over again. Eventually white culture will believe it, as it has been demonstrated that they tend to believe the written word.

The term "Indian" must be dismantled if Aboriginal peoples are to attain any sort of autonomy within Canada or establish dialogue with non-Aboriginal Canadians. However, while the racism and dehumanizing of Indians continues in mainstream Canada's media, education and culture, it will be difficult to establish an equal relationship or even a clear relationship. Francis notes that North Americans must come to terms with the difference between the "Imaginary Indian" and the Aboriginal person before coming to terms with themselves. A more complicated understanding must arise

out of Aboriginal adoptees' understanding of this difference, specifically if, like Garnet and Joshua, they must live in mainstream society. Another problem with coming to terms with this scenario is if the Aboriginal adoptee is comfortable in both mainstream and Aboriginal cultures, as Joshua is presented. They must confront the racism they experience as an Indian with the perpetrators of such racism being the same social group who adopted them. For many this may be confusing as to what group they have an affiliation with, especially if they have no knowledge of themselves as Aboriginal people and do not know how to start. In some instances adoptees' adoptive situations may be with families who have no knowledge of Aboriginal people, or they may find that they are unable to discover anything about where they came from or to what cultural group they belong. In this way books such as Wagamese's play an important role in helping adoptees learn about their circumstances. In fact, all Aboriginal literature plays an important role for Aboriginal adoptees whose only source of knowledge may be what they can find in books.

i) Filiation/Affiliation

In the introduction to The World, the Text and the Critic, Said details illuminating aspects of what he terms "Relationships of filiation and affiliation" (16). In his discussion relating to literature and culture, he makes observations using Freud's psychoanalytic theory about the perceived naturalness and continuity of filiation. He notes "that few things are as problematic and universally fraught as what we might have supposed to be the mere natural continuity between one generation and the next" (16). Said is discussing the various ways in which men have become alienated from what they

produce and the ways in which they address this alienation, finding alternative affiliative relationships not hinged on biological connections (Said *The World* 16-17). Said describes this succinctly in terms of the scenarios in modern literature:

Childless couples, orphaned children, aborted childbirths, and unregenerately celibate men and women populate the world of high modernism with remarkable insistence, all of them suggesting the difficulties of filiation. But no less important in my opinion is the second part of the pattern, which is immediately consequent on the first, the pressure to produce new and different ways of conceiving human relationships. For if biological reproduction is wither too difficult or too unpleasant is there some other way by which men and woman can create social bonds between each other that would substitute for those ties that connect members of the same family across generations (17)?

In place of perceived natural filiative relationships or in some instances due to the failure of these relationships, people establish new affiliative connections to compensate and are responsible for the parameters of that new relationship or system (19). Said notes:

...if a filial relationship was held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority - involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict - the new affiliative relationship changes these bonds into what seems to be transpersonal forms- such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class and the hegemony of a dominant culture. The filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and of "life," whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society (20).

Although Said is discussing literature, he is doing so in the context of the culture producing that literature. Therefore it is interesting to note that in his discussion of filiation/affiliation, the artists in question have had trouble producing or are seeking to disassociate themselves from ideologies they feel associated with by birth and culture, and the best way of doing this is to create systems of affiliation based on commonality acceptable to them (16-21). None of the authors he discusses are themselves adopted.

This discussion, while useful for exploring many aspects of adoption in terms of its filial and affiliative qualities, is also indicative of the use of adoption as a literary device by non-adoptees to denote breaks from established, if unwanted filial connections. Because these authors have filial connections they want to break from, they undervalue and undermine the significance of those filial bonds on the formation of their identity. Once that identity is formed and they have no use for or are ashamed of those filial or cultural associations which created them, they discard them for constructed affiliative relationships based on their new beliefs or world view.

This reinvention of self is linked to what I term an "adoption origin fantasy," a term that conveys two separate but linked ideas about adoption. The first is the most prevalent as it is linked to the above-described acquisition of affiliative relationships and involves non-adoptees' use of adoption in literature to live out the fantasy of a totally affiliative existence. Here the adoptee becomes a vehicle for the author to imagine what life would have been like if the fulfilling affiliative relationships they have found as adults could have begun as children with their adoptive parents who share their ideology. Therefore typical use of the adoption fantasy in literature has been about reconfiguring life to improve estate.

There is also another form of the adoption origin fantasy less prevalent in literature where the adoptee author writes about reunions with their birth mothers, family and culture. In these fantasies the tension that needs to be resolved is an unhappy adoptive situation that gets corrected with the reunion of birth mother and child. It is an inversion of the previous fantasy where one person unhappy with their filial circumstances wishes they were adopted to escape their circumstances, except in this

instance the unhappily adopted person longs to be reunited with their birth family who must surely be more like them. Each fantasy ultimately is the quest for a home as described by McLeod: "'To be home' means to dwell in the familiar, a landscape of collective memories; it is an oppositional concept to being in exile" (17). Both adoption fantasies describe a need to fit into a home situation regardless if it is filial or affiliative. The quest for home for Aboriginal adoptees is upset in the context of colonialism, which adds certain dimensions to the adoption origin fantasy.

The adoption origin fantasy for Aboriginal adoptees concerns the necessary fictions needed to find their home cultures and to be strong enough to look, no matter what they find, to help rebuild or add to the community in some way. Both novels contain elements of the adoption origin fantasy as they idealize and romanticize notions of finding a perfect family, both in their birth families as in Keeper'N Me or in their adoptive families in A Quality of Light. Looking for home for the Aboriginal adoptee is complicated by the need to be home in all regards with respect to the culture they were born into and the one they were raised in. As Sinclair suggests, "Adoptees do have a cultural identity; it is a unique mix of their birth heritage and the culture that they are raised in" (76).

The voices of Garnet and Keeper are both harmonious and at odds with one another. Keeper suggests that initially we are all tourists in need of a guide, but he then goes through the novel espousing very dogmatic approaches to becoming Indian, although it is Garnet's voice that talks about having a "brown heart" (Wagamese 89). The two voices coalesce as Garnet describes what Keeper has told him about being a good Indian.

Learning how to be what the Creator created you to be. Face your truth. Do that he says and three big things happen in your life. First, you learn how to be a good human being. Second you learn how to be a good person, and in the process of learning that you learn how to be a good Indian (90).

The main difference between the two voices is that Garnet is on a journey and unsure of himself or where he belongs. Keeper is more of an authoritative voice that has knowledge of himself, his community and his connections to everything that make him who he is. Where one identity is fragile and forming, the other is formed and strong. What emerges from the two voices is a road map that the reader follows along with Garnet to become a "real Indian" (13) with a "brown heart" (89) who ends up "lookin Jake" (155). This path is set and determined and there is no confusion about the process. This hard look at identity at first glance seems stark and very essentialist in its approach. However, this becomes understandable if the novel is seen as an adoption origin fantasy. In such a fantasy obscurity and the idea of multiple ways of achieving a strong identity with one's origins is the least appealing when one considers how much of adopted person's life is in flux. The idea of a set path to achieving a sense of home, family and culture must seem very appealing in light of how much is unknown or uncertain for the Aboriginal adoptee. When non-adopted people speak of their pasts and families, it is always in certain terms and most would complain about the rigidity of family traditions. For the adopted person it is necessary to fabricate something as solid and rigid in the fantasy of their origins.

At the beginning of the memoir For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son, Wagamese states, "He imagined a glorious life with a mother and father, sisters and brothers, grandfathers and grandmother" (1). This imaginative origin is at the heart of the

adoption origin fantasy and it concerns the adoptee's sense of self as a beloved member of a real family somewhere. In Keeper'N Me it was obvious that Garnet had no sense of belonging in his placements. When he is reunited with his family and community he is reintegrated as soon as possible. Most of the novel contains elements of fantasy in that the community is idyllic. Although there have been brushes with alcoholism and children being "scooped," the community has been able to rebuild itself and its people are able to help Garnet remember what was forgotten and assist him to become Indian. The bush is pristine, the houses are comfortable and warm, and there is always a pot of tea on and someone to share it with. The seemingly perfect conditions on this northern Ontario reserve are embellished, and the perfect reunion with his mother and family are offset by Wagamese's own problematic relationship with his birth family. If Keeper'N Me is read as an adoption origin fantasy, then the too-perfect quality makes sense. Who would have a mediocre fantasy?

This fantasy element is continued in A Quality of Light where, instead of the reunion being perfect, it is Joshua Kane's adopted family who are too perfect. The farm and community are perfect, no one is racist and no one treats him differently because he is Indian. Until he meets Johnny Gebhardt, Joshua's life is uncomplicated and untroubled by the issue of being Aboriginal in an all-white community. This is not to say Joshua's life remains that way or the novel is unrealistic. There are just certain elements of both novels that fit more into a scenario of an adoptee like Wagamese writing a utopian element into his novels, perhaps reminiscent of the opening dialogue where he imagines a glorious life. In this case he imagines life on the White Dog Reserve in Keeper'N Me and palling around with a white Laughing Dog in A Quality of Light.

Wagamese's own reserve is called Wabeseemoong First Nation, translated it means White Dog and is likely the reason for the name selections. A sort of comical note is that, although his relationship with white people seems okay, he does manage to associate "white" with dog in a deliberate manner.

Another element of the adoption origin fantasy has to do with language and the construct of the "Indian" as the Aboriginal adoptee situation in Canada offers a unique perspective on both. Language and the use of language is a common theme in Aboriginal literature because the attempted assimilation of Aboriginal peoples has resulted in the loss of many Aboriginal languages. Also, the repetition of words and images takes on the sheen of reality when seen and heard enough, as Francis and Said can attest to about the tenacity of the "Other" or the "Indian" in mainstream consciousness. There is a seemingly innocuous use of everyday language that I argue is just as persistent and damaging to Aboriginal adoptees as the loss of traditional language or racist terminology that the term "Indian" elicits. That language is the use of the terms "natural" and "unnatural" when discussing adoption. Callahan notes in the conclusion of her dissertation that adoptive families are under pressure to "perform biology" (280). She refers to a public opinion survey done (in the United States) that said "...half believed that adopting was better than being childless, but it is not quite as good as having one's own child" (283). To that end this idea of performing biology becomes impossible for the intercultural adoptive family, and in a culture that devalues adoption that family unit becomes conspicuous. As Callahan writes about people's perceptions of adoption:

Adoption, apparently, is bad news that must be broken gently. When adoptive kinship is urged to mimic biological kinship, the adoptive is devalued as a *mere* performance and the biological construed as innate,

even though that letter too depends upon language, iteration and performance for its expression and meaning in the social text (281-282).

The “real” family is always juxtaposed against the “adoptive,” family and biological or filial connections are viewed as natural.

This binary in language comes up repeatedly both in literature and in very real ways for interculturally adopted Aboriginal people. After gradual but continued use of the terms this binary has a detrimental effect. When an adoptee is constantly questioned as to whether they will find their “real” families or if they will one day have their own “natural” children, then it stands to reason that over time the adoptee will internalize this and come to question the validity of their adoptive kinship ties and their unnatural status as adopted children. The adoptee begins to reflect society’s use of the binary which often comes to translate into a dichotomous sense of self and a struggle to solidify an identity.

For example, James Tyman’s autobiography, Inside Out, he (an adoptee) must contend with what Cariou describes as “...a disjunction between his racial identity and his familial identity” (*Racialized* 70). In other words, Tyman finds it difficult to navigate a sense of identity that differs from society’s view of him as an “Indian.” The more he internalizes society’s view of himself, the more lost he becomes. It is not until later in his life that Tyman is able to construct an identity based in “... performance and action, rather than origin and essence” (81). Tyman comes to the realization that he can pick and chose what aspects of his identity he will keep, like his relationship to his adopted family and those he will discard, such as the internalized racism that he felt dictated his options in life. When he accepts responsibility for is own actions he is able to negotiate an identity

based on his choices rather than succumbing to the negative stereotypes that plagued his early life (*Cariou Racialized* 81).

In the case of Garnet Raven in KeeperN Me he must endure this sense of difference and alienation within his foster families and in society at large. In this instance his “real” family is his birth family. This binary of real and adoptive parents (or natural and unnatural families) is explored more thoroughly in A Quality of Light through the lens of colonialism as Joshua is forced to think of the Kanes as his adoptive family and his biological Indian family as his real one. Johnny is constantly urging or accusing Joshua of being ignorant to his Indian self, assuming that his cultural affiliations must be biologically determined and not culturally negotiated. Joshua describes his early life within the small rural community where everyone knew he was adopted as a place where his acceptance was unquestioned.

In that rich tradition of heredity farms, the idea of family was more important than its definition, and I was accepted, quite simply, as Joshua Kane because that’s all I had ever been. That I was the only brown face in Kane family pictures was never questioned. I was born and I lived as a Kane (*Wagamese Quality* 4).

While the Kanes do tell Joshua that he is Indian, they cannot tell him anymore than that so Joshua knew “...the Indian in him [me] lay somewhere underneath all of that, an anonymous subtext in the book of his [my] life” (5). Until being urged by Johnny and having his first almost deadly encounter with the racist attitudes of the dominant culture, Joshua has no inclination to search for his birth family. The beating makes Joshua instantly aware that society views him as different and that this difference is inherently negative, forcing him to think about his Aboriginal identity in a serious way for the first

time. The insistence in this instance is that one's biology informs one's cultural, social and political affiliations in a way that adoptive identities may not.

These above notions of binary language and its relationship with the adoptees' dichotomous sense of self, is not to suggest that the impacts of colonialism on the adoption of Aboriginal children in Canada are secondary. They are exacerbated by the initial destabilizing of the adopted persons' sense of themselves as legitimate and real when they are constantly signaled out as "unreal" and "unnatural" in the language used to describe them and when talking to them. The first thing that an interculturally adopted person becomes aware of, if they are adopted at an early age, is they are different and this is mirrored back to them in all facets of their lives (hopefully with the exception of their adoptive families).

ii) Community

A remarkable aspect of both Keeper'N Me and A Quality of Light is the absence of strong, memorable, and functional female characters in the presence of so many strong, memorable and highly functional pivotal male characters. Everyone of importance in both novels is male and the important relationships explored are friend to friend, father to son, and mentor to mentee, all of which take place between men. One reason for the absence of women and hence mothers is that adoption in fiction tends to be focused on the pivotal relationship and experience that adoptees lack, which is their relationship to their birth mother. Obviously the birth is like any other but to the adoptee that is not the case. Every mystery concerning their origins tends to become connected to the mysteries of their births and hence the missing mother becomes a key figure in many

novels about adoption. For instance, some authors like Jackie Kay have created an armada of imaginary mothers and scenarios on which to rely when she needs that connection, or to collect mother figures in hopes of attaining the mythical mother of her fantasies. In contrast, in both novels (Keeper'N Me, A Quality of Light) the central characters' search for identity is not intricately linked with finding the birth mother. Women are surprisingly unimportant in both Wagamese's novels about adoption. This is not, however, to say there are no women in the novels.

In Keeper'N Me, Wagamese constructs a mythical mother (Ma). The novel includes a powerful reunion scene between mother and son, and there is also mention of his sister Jane. On the surface one could argue, Ma and Jane seem to figure prominently in Keeper'N Me. It is Ma's song that calls Garnet home as she sings "come home or Bi'Kee-yam" until his return, thus signifying her belief that she would be reunited with her taken son. Jane offers most of the missing pieces of Garnet's early years, telling him about what happened and how she still knows his traits and habits he still has from childhood. However, aside from a very touching reunion with Ma, Garnet does not really spend much time with either his mother or Jane.

Garnet's reunion with Ma is touching and private and also an aspect of the adoption origin fantasy. Although Garnet was not adopted, but only in foster care, the reunion is still nestled in the origin fantasy that adoptees have about the overtly romanticized reunion to their birth mothers. On the other hand the character Garnet finds immediate equilibrium and solace upon seeing his mother again as she tells him over and over how she thought about and prayed for him everyday, and then gets lost in what he describes as a magical hug.

I don't know what it was but something somewhere deep inside me recognized that heartbeat. Recognized it from the days way before I ever slid out into this world. Recognized it from when her body kept me safe and sheltered and warm. Recognized it from when she was all vibration, fluid and movement. From when our souls shared the same space and time. My mother (*Wagamese Keeper* 53-54).

Ma in this instance fulfills Wagamese's origin fantasy by taking Garnet back to an in utero experience, one he could not possibly remember. This is an important part of the novel and it does bring Garnet back in a magical spiritual way that no other experience could to get him to feel home. What could possibly be homier than a uterus? At the same time, however, for all Ma's importance at this pivotal point she is really not present for the rest of the novel except to prattle on about his accomplishments and offer encouragement.

After she explains a lot of the missing pieces in Garnet's history, Jane also ceases to be an important character. Although both women figure prominently in Garnet's new life on the reserve, it is carefully plotted relationships to the men in his life that are the most thoroughly explored.

For instance, it is his grandfather and father who are absent in the way usually reserved for absent birth mothers. They represent his connection to the land. Like the recognition Garnet has for his mother's heartbeat, he finds he recognizes certain landscapes, and hidden in his memory are times spent with his father and grandfather telling him what all the plants and tracks are in the traditional Ojibway manner. The shift in focus from birth mothers to birth fathers in *KeeperN Me* is strengthened by the passages in the novel where Keeper explains to Garnet the importance of the male and female being in balance and harmony:

See when we get sent out into the world we come here carryin' two sets of gifts. The gifts of the father and gifts of the mother. The two human bein's that made our life. We come here carryin' those two sets of gifts, each equal to the other. But sometimes the world gets hold of us and makes us see diff'rent way. We get told as men that we gotta be strong, gotta be fearless. Lotta us kinda start ignorin' the gifts of our mother. Go through life just usin' gifts of the father. Bein' tough, makin' our own plans, livin' in the head. But if you do that you can't be whole on accounta you gotta use both of them equal setsa gifts to live right, to fill out the circle of your own life. Be complete. Gotta use the mother's gifts too (Wagamese 115).

This passage is a clear indication of how the colonial ideology of patriarchy has become an unwanted and disorienting aspect of Aboriginal culture. Throughout the various attempts at re-educating or culturally realigning Aboriginal peoples through assimilation tactics such as the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop, aspects such as patriarchy and paternalism have found their way into Aboriginal communities. Wagamese asserts the need for Aboriginal communities to reorientate themselves to cultural values which do not privilege either sex and instead focus on the unity of people through both their masculine and feminine attributes working together. That being said, both Wagamese novels focus on the relationships of men and pay only lip service to the notion of carrying the gifts of both the mother and father. So that they seem to depict a tension between ideal and reality, a phase in the struggle towards decolonization.

Another exclusively male relationship that shows how sometimes adoptees are not welcomed back into their communities without conflict is Garnet's initially troubled relationship with his brother Jackie. They eventually resolve their issues by beating each other up on the hockey rink and then wrestling. This rift between the brothers is one of two examples in Wagamese's novels where the fictive adoptive identity comes under attack for not being "Indian" enough. The other example is in A Quality of Light with

Johnny's insistence that Joshua is not like the Indians in his books and hence not a "real" Indian. What is important to note about both instances is that ideas of Indian identity and the relationships which explore this fluid concept all take place between men, concerning men, and in the absence of women. In this way ideas linked to identity construction in the novel also become linked to specifically male identity construction, though it is presented in the pretense of being about Aboriginal identity construction. There is little room in either text for exploring how the issues of identity construction might differ if the fictive adoptees were women.

The birth mother is an integral part of the adoption origin fantasy. In an interview with Jackie Kay, a black interracial adopted Scottish author, she describes identity in the following terms:

...tracing made me think about the whole business of identity, all the other selves I've been. During the process, I realized that I had in fact had an imaginary birth mother all my life in different ways; at various points in my life she had gone through many changes (Gish 173).

Keeper'N Me also has an element of this imaginary presence. Yet the characters are inverted, and in place of a maternal connection with identity, roots and culture, Garnet receives paternal guidance through Keeper. Wagamese does not seem to focus on the birth mother or adoptive mother and they are not integral to Garnet rediscovering his origins. Wagamese is not concerned with the birth mother fantasy so much as he is dealing with issues of cultural reconnections. All the voices in the novel, aside from the white foster family whose voice is reduced to racist stereotypical rambling, support and encourage Garnet's cultural emergence as an Indian through discovering his roots. This homecoming is vastly different from Wagamese's actual homecoming, and while the

outline of the novel is semi-autobiographical, the ease and warmth of the reunion to his birth family was nothing like Garnet's. As Wagamese explains about his own tenuous reunion:

Keeper 'N Me was about someone who comes back to his reserve as an adult, and that is what happened to me. But again, the scenario of that homecoming in the novel is completely different from what mine was. There he is welcomed with open arms and there is a whole lot of sense of family" (Kirman 4).

From the author's perspective this story is more of an imaginary reunion. The reason for this imaginary reunion is to allow different ideas about adoption and identity to surface. That is why the only two voices that have authenticity and depth are Keeper and Garnet. As they move throughout the novel they discuss various aspects of identity construction and cultural survival. Although they differ on some points their voices become almost one by the end of the novel.

In *A Quality of Light* there is Joshua's adoptive mother Martha Kane, his unidentified birth mother, his wife Shirley and Jacqueline, his Anishinabe guide. Martha Kane has almost no dialogue and no real impact on Joshua's life and struggles except as a backdrop, or more like a prop his father uses. All important dialogue and interaction comes from his father. Joshua's wife Shirley gets even less page time, and when mentioned manages to be seen and not heard. She is described as "...a woman. A very fine, a very loving, very beautiful--" (Wagamese *Quality* 265). Other than that Shirley does not function much in the novel except being able to sense and deliver exactly what Joshua needs at the time and be a mother to the son he does not discuss. So although Shirley and Martha occupy important roles in Joshua's life, they do not figure prominently in his story.

The two women who carry the most weight in A Quality of Light also carry the weightiest issues that concern women and Aboriginal cultures. Jacqueline is the Anishinabe woman who teaches Joshua about the Anishinabe way of life and helps him to figure out who he is as an adoptee and how he fits into his community with his varied experiences in mainstream culture. For Joshua this ends up being an easy fit. He is a minister in a church on the reserve while simultaneously learning about the sweat lodge and other Anishinabe traditions. While Jacqueline has an important role, she does not figure prominently in the novel. It could be said that she plays a Keeper-like character, being an Anishinabe elder who teaches Joshua about who he is although in a shallow and less in-depth fashion. Jacqueline and Keeper share the same job as Anishinabe elders in charge of educating both Joshua and Garnet, however, the true parallel lies between Keeper and Johnny Gebhardt as they share the italicized positions of the novel's narration. As well, in Joshua's portion of the narration it becomes clear that Joshua thanks Johnny above all else for his cultural education.

The most silent female character in A Quality of Light is Joshua Kane's Aboriginal birth mother. She has no name and there is no record of her. It is like she just disappeared. When Joshua and his family look into getting Joshua in touch with his Indian identity, they investigate his adoption and learn there is no record of his young mother. Some conclusions that can be drawn from this are that she, like many other young Aboriginal women who simply vanish, met with an unhappy ending. There is no voice advocating on her behalf. It is unknown if she was coerced into giving up her child or if she was just overwhelmed and wanted him to have a better life, or if he was taken in a brutal fashion on the advice of the child welfare system. Her silence speaks volumes

about the state of Aboriginal affairs in Canada, like Amnesty International's report on Stolen Sisters that a young Aboriginal woman can just vanish without a trace with no one looking for her.

Another interpretation of the underutilized women characters in both Wagamese's texts could also be construed as an artistic portrayal of Aboriginal communities in Canada still fractured and in need of repair. Keeper discusses receiving a gift of two eagle feathers and how they represent the female and male and how it is a vision of the future:

Told me them two eagles were signs to me about livin' in balance with them two sets of gifts. Mother's and father's. When I was prayin' I was in balance an' that's why they came. Both sides comin' together with my prayers. Man side and woman side. Sacred union comin' together when I pray. Sacred union inside me. That's what he told me. Said the reason they disappeared over at the end of the lake leadin' back towards home was to remind me that I gotta take that teachin' back to my life. Can't just use it when I'm out here. I gotta live it. It's gotta be part of my living all the time (Wagamese Keeper 165).

This passage highlights the importance of balance between the feminine and masculine, and yet this balance does not exist within the text, although it is suggested that it can be "taken back". Perhaps this is Wagamese's subtle way of commenting on the state of Aboriginal peoples' contemporary communities and with the absence of women being a commentary on the lack of balance.

iii) Home

The concept of home is very important for Aboriginal peoples in Canada and is related to the land theft which resulted in many Aboriginal groups being dispossessed and living in unfamiliar places in unfamiliar ways. The assimilation tactics which followed

the land theft and dispossession also sought to remove those ideological elements such as culture and language with the intention of leaving Aboriginal peoples no choice but to assimilate. This did not happen, but the attempts at cultural genocide left their mark on Aboriginal people. Neal McLeod describes home in the following manner:

I will use the term *ideological home* to refer to the interpretive location of a people. An ideological home provides people with an Indigenous location to begin discourse, to tell the stories and to live life on their own terms. An ideological home is a layering of generations of stories, and the culmination of storyteller after storyteller, in a long chain of transmission. To be home in an ideological sense, means to dwell in the landscape of the familiar, collective memories, as opposed to being in exile. "Being home" means to be part of a larger group, a collective consciousness; it involves having a personal sense of dignity. Furthermore, an ideological home, housed in collective memory, emerges from a specific location, spatially and temporally. An ideological home needs to have a spatial, temporal home as well (19).

This quote is an apt analogy for the two novels which focus on adoption, as intercultural adoptees are in biological exile, cut off from their cultural groups and forced to adapt to unfamiliar cultural landscapes where no one looks that same way they do or shares a similar conception and birth story. The process of how an Aboriginal adoptee becomes part of a white family is fraught with the colonial mechanisms for controlling Aboriginal people, though the politics of these adoptions tends to be overlooked by the people most involved, the adoptee and their families. The chain of generations are literally broken when the Aboriginal children are removed from their communities and adopted out and the repatriation of these children becomes imperative to continue the collective consciousness. Colonialism interrupts this chain of story-telling and hence transmission of culture as Balzer notes in her article "'Bring[ing] Them Back from the Inside Out: Coming Home Through Story in Richard Wagames's *Keeper 'N Me*". She posits that

Garnet's lack of past and Keeper's lack of future combine to complete the chain of cultural transmission as Keeper tells Garnet the stories of the past to tell in the future. According to McLeod's vision of an ideological home, the first step is to fix or mend the chain of story-telling that transmits culture, world view, history and future. The next step is to link this with a spatial and temporal location, and on this point many Aboriginal people may have a problem. Colonialism has resulted in a form of exile for many Aboriginal peoples and groups. Some have ended up on reserves far from their traditional lands, some reside in urban and rural locales in mainstream society, and others are unsure of their status as Aboriginal peoples. As Rushdie notes about his own exile from India:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must do so in the knowledge - which gives rise to profound uncertainties - that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (10).

This position of exile as described by Rushdie is one where he must construct the missing element of his past to function in the present and is useful when examining that of the Aboriginal adoptee. Whether home, as defined by McLeod, is reflective of a birth family or potential adoptive family, it exists in the mind of the adoptee. Keeper'N Me could be seen as an example of such an imaginary homeland, as it is loosely based on his memories of the reserve he grew up on briefly, but is presented more in the way he would want it to be than it actually is (Kirman 2-5). The road home for the exile and adoptee

involves coming to terms with the differences between what they create in their minds, these imaginary homelands, and the homelands they find.

The road home in an ideological sense as posed by McLeod is fraught with difficulty for the adoptee and many of these difficulties arise from the circumstances of their adoptions and the systemic racism of the mainstream society they were raised in. Even when an adoptee is able to negotiate these two worlds, the struggle to identify what is missing from their lives and then to act upon it is a central issue in both novels. The best-intentioned child care workers unfortunately produced some horrific results when they began removing children from Aboriginal communities. Many of the common themes that are present when looking at adoption in literature must be modified when dealing with Keeper'n Me and A Quality of Light because of the power imbalance that colonialism infuses into the intercultural adoption of Aboriginal children. While Garnet's adoption is an example of children being literally abducted without parental consent or knowledge, Joshua is legally adopted and it is believed his birth mother willingly placed him in adoptive care. However, both are intrinsically emblematic of the characteristics of the Sixties Scoop. Garnet is taken with his other siblings while his parents are away and he is being looked after by his grandparents.

According to my sister, Jane, who's the oldest of us and the one who remembers the most from those days, they showed up one afternoon, a young woman and an older white-haired man. They pulled up while the kids were playin' tag and swinging from an old tire hung from a tree in the front yard. My granny was out back doin' something or other. Anyway they called us over to this big green station wagon and handed out chocolates all around. Well, for some wild little bush Indians raised on bannock and beaver, chocolate was pretty close to heaven, so when they offered us more if we hopped into the car, well, we all piled in.

We wound up in a group home on a farm outside of Kenora, in the custody of Children's Aid (*Wagamese Keeper 10*).

This is clearly an example of the type of abduction that was taking place during the Sixties Scoop, and the example posed in A Quality of Light is a little more complicated although implicated in the same mess. Joshua is legally adopted, and yet there is no known information about his mother, the man who fathered him, his community, or where he was born. This could be indicative of the breakdown of Aboriginal communities after the strain of residential schools, the implication being that Joshua's birth mother, a young Aboriginal woman, was a person without agency. The mystery behind Joshua's birth and adoption in light of nefarious colonial practices regarding Children's Aid certainly suggest that his adoption is less than aboveboard.

Keeper'N Me is written in a polyphonic form effortlessly moving between the italicized, whimsical and colloquial voice of Keeper and the first-person narrative voice of Garnet. The book is prefaced by a rant by Keeper who encourages the reader to find their stories too as Garnet finds his story and the voice to tell it with. So too are readers encouraged to locate themselves within the story. This is reiterated at the end of the novel when Garnet's voice becomes italicized and as whimsical as Keeper's was, and he reminds the reader to "tell them stories because they need guides too" (Wagamese *Keeper* 214). The two voices of the novel complement one another as the voice of Keeper balances the voice of Garnet. On one level the novel explores the personal journey of Garnet finding his birth family and community, and with this a sense of belonging. On another level the issue of identity of Aboriginal people is discussed from Keeper's perspective: residential schools, loss of culture, and the road to cultural revival for his community and the larger Aboriginal community. Garnet's journey is reflective of the journey that Aboriginal people must make to reconnect to their past to form a

better future. The journey that Wagamese describes is both didactic and fantasy, as the literal rite of passage described is not available to everyone. But the fantasy still serves the purpose of connecting to what could be possible, at least through story.

The position of the Aboriginal adoptee is subject to many attacks on the legitimacy of their experience as Aboriginal people as they have grown up in white communities and enjoyed the privileges of that society. So the authenticity of the voice of the Aboriginal adoptee author is also considered suspect to some critics of Aboriginal literature. Coming from a place of authentic voice has entailed having many so-called Aboriginal prerogatives or signs that distinguish Aboriginal literature. These include the author having both the genetic background and the lived Aboriginal experience as described by Jackie Huggins in Anita Heiss's article, while speaking about Australian literature in "Aboriginal Identity and Its Effects on Writing" (207). Huggins suggests "that it is simply not sufficient to have Aboriginal bloodlines without the lived Aboriginal experience" (Heiss 207). For the adopted Aboriginal person, this way of categorizing Aboriginal experience is limiting and exclusive for those whose experiences are outside of some constructed idea about what it means to be Aboriginal. The view held by Huggins is one that strategically essentializes what it means to be Aboriginal. Although it may be intended to be empowering to Aboriginal peoples in a way that lets Aboriginal people decide what it is to be Aboriginal rather than that definition being thrust upon them by outsiders, such as the Canadian government's Indian Act which was set up to control who could and could not be legally considered an Indian, it can be as restrictive. Marilyn Dumont responds to questions of authentic Aboriginal experience and voice in her article "Positive Images of Nativeness" when she states "...that there is a continuum

of exposure to traditional experience in native culture, some of us have been exposed to it more than others, but this does not mean that those who have been more exposed to it are somehow more Indian” (47). Dumont argues for a broadened understanding of modern Aboriginal experiences that include urban experiences as well as rural experiences so as not to risk further internalized colonization of Aboriginal peoples’ own images of themselves (48-49). She further urges Aboriginal peoples to write down their varied experiences and,

...that there is a multiplicity of experiences out there that go on being ignored because they do not fit a popular understanding of culture, but which have to be expressed because their denial by the image making machine is another kind of colonialism (49).

To further the discussion of essentialism and strategic essentialism previously discussed is Sewell’s point about the convergence of essentializing characteristics being at once liberating and controlling. As Sewell states:

...if one is a Native and a writer, one is assumed to be under the heading “Native Literature” and then runs the risk of being herded into a reservation of ideas. I have heard Natives hold forth the opinion that the only authentically Native life there is the life On Reservation, as if reservations were our natural choice of design for sustainable, healthy communities, and not the result of a colonial policy aimed at solving Our Indian Problem via isolation, forced assimilation and/or genocide (20).

Sewell is writing against the idea of essentialist ideologies being used to define Aboriginal literature. It seems to her that in some cases there is not enough space between the essentializing characteristics used by the colonizer and the essentializing language used by the colonized to self-empower. She uses the idea of the reservation as an authentic medium of experience to highlight this point. Whereas some Aboriginal people extol that reservation life is the only authentic experience, Sewell argues this in

fact is the opposite of authentic experience as it is the colonizer's model and creation in an attempt to rid itself of what she terms "Our Indian Problem" (20). What she is suggesting is that those who extol this belief are not free from the colonizer's essentializing tactics and are still colonized in how they think of themselves. It is of interest that Wagamese himself uses this tactic as a means of authenticating Garnet Raven's Aboriginal identity. Garnet starts off the novel as a "wandering kind real early" (Wagamese *Keeper* 9) and goes on to say that the kind of wandering he did as a child was not the beneficial kind. It is not until Garnet returns to the reservation and becomes sedentary that he reconnects with who he is. It is on the White Dog Reserve where he discovers how to be an Indian under the tutelage of Keeper. This is interesting in light of Sewell's commentary about reservations. Garnet as a nomad is lost and does not know who he is. He wanders but is lost when he returns to the reservation and stays. There he learns about who he is and reconnects to "those old teachings" (214) that have been "not so much being taught to me as reawakened. Rekindled" (214). This plot line reaffirms what Sewell is concerned about in that the "life on the Reservation" (Sewell 20) becomes the naturalized setting for contemporary authentic Aboriginal experience, and the nomadic state of wandering takes on the sheen of being truly lost. Historically, the Anishinabe people were nomadic though they were skillfully nomadic. It was not a random path they followed but a strategic path forged from centuries of gathering knowledge about seasons and resources. Both the nomadic and sedentary lifestyles were normal for Anishinabe people. Colonization interrupted this lifestyle and forever changed their traditions.

While Sewell argues against the reserve as being the sole place of authentic identity construction, she does give thanks to the people on reserves who struggled to "...preserve what they could of their culture. For their sacrifices and their strength those people do deserve honour and our sincere thanks" (30). This idea is also present in Keeper'n Me as it is Keeper who keeps the tradition of story-telling alive and relevant. He realizes through his relationship with Garnet that it is necessary in order for both of them to rekindle their connection to the past to build a future. Reading Keeper'n Me by itself, it is possible to make some very tidy conclusions about the role of story-telling. As Geraldine Balzer notes, "In helping Garnet rediscover his past, Keeper is again able to imagine his future, and through the retelling of the traditional stories both find themselves and their place in the collective consciousness of the community" (223). Keeper and Garnet are both exiled at one time in the novel, Keeper through alcohol and Garnet through being "scooped" and raised in all-white families with no connection to the fact that he was Aboriginal. Together they figure out how to reconnect to their community as story-teller and student. The book is very tidy in its conclusions about the effects of story-telling and reserve life as being essential elements of one's cultural survival. However, this tidiness is offset by two important and somewhat oppositional experiences of both Richard Wagamese himself and the main character in his second novel, Joshua Kane.

Coming home for Joshua Kane in A Quality of Light is more of an ideological place than a physical one as McLeod suggests because Joshua never goes to live on a reserve and had never been born on one. Important also is Wagamese and what the novels represent to himself and those who read and are moved by his fiction. In

representing ideological locations within the text *Wagamese* is helping those Aboriginal people who read it to find place within the text, and to educate non-Aboriginal people about what it is like to be an intercultural adoptee in Canada. The idea of coming home through stories is incomplete, however, without cooperation of non-Aboriginal people as well. The desire for harmony has been a common thread throughout the novels: harmony between men and women, and harmony between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The Oka crisis and Johnny's death frame *A Quality of Light* and signify the challenge of finding harmony between cultures that are clearly at violent odds. While such disparity exists between the cultures, moving forward, as Green suggests, becomes more complicated than Canadians simply acknowledging Aboriginal peoples' struggles for cultural survival. It involves a complete restructuring of society, its values and assumptions. The intercultural adoptee is an appropriate trope as they have been forced, however successfully or unsuccessfully, to traverse in both cultural landscapes. Their overall comfort in this liminal space acts as a kind of barometer for relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people within the texts. Therefore coming home requires that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people make the needed ideological shifts necessary for everyone to come home.

Conclusion

When read in the context of colonialism the two novels Keeper'N Me and A Quality of Light by Richard Wagamese offer a multilayered look at what it means to be interculturally adopted as an Aboriginal person in Canada with special significance to agency and power dynamics. While other literature and critical work done on transracial adoption and the transracial fictive adoptee offer useful critical points of departure concerning the liminality of that position as a social barometer upon which to gauge race relations, social cohesiveness, and ideas of nationality as explored by Callahan, Wagamese's texts become specific representations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in Canada. Callahan also provides a good starting point when examining the assumptions that adoption is under duress to perform biology to somehow mimic filial bonds and the pressure that such assumptions layer onto intercultural adoption. The ongoing colonial policies and practices regarding Aboriginal peoples in Canada exemplified by Aboriginal children being taken, in many cases without warrant, such as in the Sixties Scoop, complicates and adds to the pressures on these adoptions. The continued presence of Child Welfare agencies in the lives of many Aboriginal peoples whether through government or band run agencies is a continued legacy of the assumptions and beliefs that propelled the Scoop.

The exploration of the constructed nature of identity through fictive Aboriginal adoptees in the works of Richard Wagamese contests the language that depicts natural versus unnatural within the filial and affiliative relationships in the texts and offers new spaces in which adoptees may incorporate all aspects of their insider/outsider experience in the formation of positive identities. Issues of language that affect all adoptees have to

do with the language which posits birth/natural children against adoptive/unnatural children. This basic binary in the rhetoric surrounding adoption is also one that would require that everyone be educated as to the damaging effect this has on the formation of positive identity construction for the adoptee. Wagamese's texts explore the dangers of the binaries in language and how this affects identity formation of Aboriginal adoptees disassociated from positive cultural indicators, especially when confronting damaging racist images of the Indian created by the dominant culture. It is tricky both for the characters in Wagamese's novels and for adoptees like Wagamese himself to find positive cultural associations when adopted into an all white world surrounded with negative stereotypical images of Indians. As Said suggests, breaking down the power of these images requires more than just exposing them as being false, because their true power lies in the societal power structures that they are embedded in and the myths which they support. The novels then can be seen as both responding to and exposing the image of the Indian as false and damaging while telling the stories behind the myths in a persistent, relevant fashion.

This project examined elements of strategic essentialism and essentialism that were used in both novels in relation to markers of Nativeness and authenticity of voice. In Keeper'N Me Garnet Raven returns to an idyllic reserve setting and resumes a traditional life with his family and community. In A Quality of Light the main character Joshua Kane also assumes an idyllic situation, but off the reserve incorporating Anishinabe culture into his rural life. Both characters approach Nativeness differently but find similar happiness, which may not be reflective of the majority of Aboriginal adoptees' experience but which can be read as strategically essentializing possibilities for

positive Aboriginal life experience. A complicated look at appropriation of essentialist notions of Nativeness within A Quality of Light concerns the discussion of Johnny Gebhardt, the German-Caucasian character's appropriation of an Aboriginal identity. Johnny's appropriation of Aboriginal identity is presented as being pro-Aboriginal steeped in his political affiliations with Aboriginal causes having experienced most of the major political Aboriginal actions first hand. Wagamese both supports and subverts ideas that there is a connection between race and identity and that identity is about choice.

The absence of women in both texts was discussed solely in terms of the adoption origin fantasy and as a reflection of many Aboriginal communities still being in a state of turmoil driven by patriarchal ideologies found in colonialism. The search for missing mothers is a common element in literature containing fictive adoptees; Wagamese departs from this norm by substituting the birth mother figure with father figures, Keeper in Keeper'N Me and Johnny in A Quality of Light. This may be indicative of an Anishinabe way of organizing community that I am not privy to or just an example of how the absence of women characters may denote an imbalance within Aboriginal communities as a result of colonial imposition. It is interesting to note that in his third novel Dream Wheels Wagamese has many strong, present and functioning women characters. The focus of the book is trauma and recovering from trauma and the characters are not all Aboriginal nor is the story focused on Aboriginal life experience.

The idea of coming home has significance for many Aboriginal people in light of colonialist practices that have removed or attempted to remove them from their cultures. For Aboriginal adoptees homecoming holds both allure and trepidation. On the one hand given the numbers of intercultural adoptions of Aboriginal children that break down,

many of these children want a community to go to where they will find belonging and recognition but that is not to say that they will find that. For this reason and others homecoming may be problematic for many Aboriginal adoptees. For those that had successful adoptions and managed to flourish in all white societies the idea of coming home may be complicated when the life they have lived comes under scrutiny. If they chose to seek repatriation with their birth families, what does that say about their adoptive families, what then would be home, the community they were adopted from or the community they grew up in? All of this discussion is to say nothing of the confusion brought about by mixed race intercultural Aboriginal adoptees. Though not stated explicitly in A Quality of Light, the possibility that Joshua is only half Indian is distinct. Nothing is stated about a potential birth father, so Joshua could be of mixed ancestry. It would be interesting to see how and if discussions of the adoption of Aboriginal children of mixed ancestry changes the dynamics of identity formation in the novels when discussing essentialism and constructivism.

Adoption in this project has been discussed as both a literary device used to explore cultural and social tensions as well as to evoke the realities of the adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes. Intercultural adoption in Canada has been seen to be both an institution that affords little or no agency to Aboriginal peoples exposing the arrogance and ignorance of well meaning social workers informed by policies of assimilation. It also provides opportunity for some Aboriginal adoptees to experience the benefits of living in the mainstream society. Sinclair notes about the Sixties Scoop, children are still being taken in great numbers by these agencies today just not so blatantly, and he aptly calls it the Millennium Scoop (67). Although practices

have changed to reflect what the agencies learned from the mistakes made in the Sixties Scoop such as the importance of positive cultural affiliations, there is still a large number of Aboriginal children being adopted into non-Aboriginal homes because of the lack of availability of Aboriginal homes in a position to adopt (77-78). Sinclair calls for new approaches informed by adult Aboriginal adoptees as to what would benefit the children when rendering these adoptions, as ceasing intercultural adoptions is not possible.

Changes must be made to ensure that grim statistics of up to 95% by the time Aboriginal adoptees are in their teens (65, 77). Perhaps Wagamese and other adoptee authors may also provide a critical source for informing adoption practices. In some instances adoptions work out as seen in A Quality of Light although the representation of successful adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes seems to be downplayed as the relatively minor success of the novel can attest. Perhaps the successful adoption of Joshua Kane goes against certain held ideas about Nativeness that neither Aboriginal nor non-Aboriginal peoples are prepared to accept. In others cases the foster care and adoption system have tragic effects on the Aboriginal adoptee such as the case of Garnet Raven in Keeper'N Me although the novel itself was very successful perhaps because it is reflective of expected Aboriginal experience within the Child Welfare System. In this way the novels adhere to what people expect of intercultural Aboriginal adoptions and when it defies what is expected as A Quality of Light does, it lacks commercial success. The representation of fictive Aboriginal adoptees like the adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes is complicated and does not fit into simple categorizations or assumptions about what constitutes a person's cultural affiliations or what informs the construction of their identity. Hopefully more will be

written about the experience of Aboriginal adoptees in Canada as the fictive intercultural Aboriginal adoptee does occupy a unique liminal space and it would be interesting to see how that liminal space changes or evolves through time and through evolving adoption practices exposing Canada's colonialist tendencies regardless of the political rhetoric.

Notes

¹ This is a greatly abbreviated summary of the debate over what constitutes Aboriginal literature and how we should categorize literature of vastly diverse cultures under the umbrella term Aboriginal literature. See both articles by Thomas King, "Godzilla and the Post-Colonial" and Kateri Damm's "Says Who: Colonialism, Identity and Defining Indigenous Literature" for a more comprehensive discussion of this matter. For the purpose of this thesis I will side with Ruffo and accept that colonialism affects all Aboriginal peoples and therefore affects their writing even if it is not the subject matter they elect to write about.

² For the most part I will be using the term Aboriginal when discussing Aboriginal peoples and the legally defined Indians. The novels use the term Indian exclusively and not just to denote status Indians. As well other sources use terms such as Native, Indigenous and First Nations to denote Aboriginal peoples. For the sake of clarity I will use just one term but will cite the others as they are written. However, when dealing with culturally-specific terms such as Anishinabe, Cree or Okanagan, I will use those terms.

³ I will be using the term inter-cultural adoption in place of transracial and interracial adoption, although in most sources I use, the term transracial is most common. I use the term interchangeably although each term denotes certain assumptions regarding identity formation and construction. The problem with the term transracial is the idea that race separates humans into quantifiable groups, which is highly suspect. The problem with inter-cultural adoption is the assumption that a newborn child has cultural affiliations to any group.

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