

Coming Home:

Sovereign Bodies and Sovereign Land in Indigenous Poetry, 1990-2012

By

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Abstract

This thesis probes the ways in which land-based and bodily violence inform contemporary North American Indigenous poetry. Since the “Oka Crisis” of 1990, English-speaking North American Indigenous writers have produced a substantial body of poetry that has significant implications in forwarding national sovereignty struggles. Gender violence enabled settler colonial land appropriation; resource exploitation also harmed Indigenous bodies. This project considers the ways in which Indigenous authors with diverse geographic, cultural and embodied experiences employ common strategies toward using poetry as an emancipatory tool. A poem is both whole, and a fragment of a larger body of work; engaging with the works of individual poets, and multi-authored anthologies allows for varied readings of the same poems and their engagements with the project’s key themes of homeland and embodiment. This paper is informed by the reading of many Indigenous theorists and poets, and aligns with an Indigenous-feminist critique that suggests that nationalist sovereignty struggles are meaningless as long as bodily violence against Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people is still prevalent. As such, contemporary struggles for reclaiming Indigenous lands must also be struggles toward a sovereign erotic, sovereignty over one’s sexuality and gender identity.

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Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	v
Chapter One: Introduction	1
I. (Re)writing Settler-Colonial Conquest Narratives	4
II. Methodologies	28
Chapter 2: Your Skin is the Map: Tracing Body Cartographies in Indigenous Women’s Poetry	41
I. More Than a Metaphor: Settler-Colonial Exploitation of Bodies and Land	42
II. “Where’s Home?”: The Significance Of Home/lands to Poets Employing Body Cartography	47
III. “Maps Evoke a Bloody History”: Cartographies of Violence, Cartographies of Healing	53
IV. “Refused To Be Shaped By the Makers of Maps”: The Land As Stubborn and Resilient	59
V. “Ask Permission”: Using a Consent-Based Model to Re-Map Borders of Land and Bodies	66
Chapter 3: Sovereign Bodies, Sovereign Earth	72
Chapter 4: Epilogue: Mapping “Oka”, Body Cartographies and Sovereign Erotics	99
Works Cited	103
Appendix A	112

Chapter 1

Introduction

This project examines the relationship between embodiment and sovereignty in the poetry of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people, in the settler colonial landscape now known as North America. In the years since the “Oka Crisis”, English-speaking North American Indigenous poets have produced a substantial amount of poetry that has significant implications in forwarding sovereignty struggles among Indigenous nations. The central argument of this project is that poets including Deborah Miranda, Qwo-Li Driskill, Joy Harjo, Marilyn Dumont, Jeannette Armstrong and Gregory Scofield, write poetry that reflects a “post-Oka” consciousness and the frustration with violent settler colonial interactions, while simultaneously providing a roadmap for decolonizing communities and working toward the erotic wholeness necessary for reclaiming bodies, land and language. The political utility of this selection of poetry relies on two key approaches. The first concerns mapping topographical features onto flesh and, conversely, attributing bodily, sensual and human imagery to the land in a process referred to as *body cartographies*. The second approach involves exploring the ways in which Indigenous women and Two-Spirit writers are reclaiming *sovereign erotics* (Akiwenzie-Damm 2003; Driskill 2003, 2004; Miranda 2002; Rifkin 2011; Warrior 2008).

This thesis engages with the concept of sovereignty, both individually and nationally. Embodied, or personal, sovereignty is a term that refers to being in charge of

one's own body: in terms of its physical safety, its gendered and sexual performances and expressions, and its autonomy in terms of being able to dictate who is granted "access" to the borders of one's body through sexual relationships. Referring to national or land-based sovereignty, I am focusing on self-determination, regarding land use and management, language preservation and revitalization, and the continuation of ceremony and governance in ways that allow a nation to function autonomously. Personal and national sovereignty are interrelated, as most clearly shown in a chart included in an article by Cherokee academic and anti-racist, feminist, reproductive rights activist Andrea Smith, entitled "Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change" (Smith 2005b). In her article, Smith quotes materials written by "Sacred Circle, a national American Indian resource center for domestic and sexual violence based in South Dakota" (Smith 2005b, 124-125). A chart in this brochure, entitled "Sovereign Women Strengthen Sovereign Nations" (Appendix A, 112), suggests that sovereignty requires a land base, bodily autonomy, self-determination, a stable economy, the (responsible) use of resources and, finally, a distinct cultural identity and the preservation of tribal-specific histories and narratives (quoted in Smith 2005b, 124-125). Based upon this holistic definition, sovereignty can be understood as the "right to power and control" over all the factors listed above, including self-governance, sexual sovereignty and the ability to control land and resource management, in ways that resist colonial violence and control.

In her book *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Andrea Smith critiques a model of decolonizing nations that fails to first address gendered and sexual violence. She writes,

It has been through sexual violence and through the imposition of European gender relationships of Native communities that Europeans were able to colonize Native peoples in the first place. [By maintaining] these gender systems, [Indigenous peoples] will be unable to decolonize and fully assert...sovereignty. (Smith 2005a, 139)

The countries now known as Canada and the United States of America were founded using multiple forms of violence. Smith, in *Conquest*, emphasizes the correlation between marking the bodies of Indigenous peoples, and correspondingly their land bases, as “inherently violable” territories (55). A key component of Smith’s methodology is to focus on the literal rape of bodies before discussing the metaphorical ‘rape of the land’. She asserts that: (1) fighting land claims battles is immaterial if the bodies whose land is contested are systematically disenfranchised and subject to sexual and physical violence, rape and murder; and (2) through resource exploitation, dirty industry and nuclear test sites on Indigenous territories, the bodies of Indigenous women are “raped once again” (2005b, 67) through colonial enterprises. Smith’s critique of settler-colonialism informs my emphasis on bodily sovereignty as integral to assertions of national and land-based sovereignty. It becomes the framework for considering the ways in which poetry is a decolonizing intervention.

One way in which Indigenous peoples can challenge the gender violence that was a tool to facilitate colonial land theft (Smith 2005b, 137) is through reimagining their own relationships with sexuality and documenting that journey through poetry. Responding to this legacy of violence, poets including Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, Deborah Miranda, Qwo-Li

Driskill and Gregory Scofield, as well as academics such as Andrea Smith, have all made explicit in their creative and theoretical writing that healthy sexuality is a necessary step toward a healthy community and nation. On this basis, I argue that these poets deploy sovereign erotics to map ways forward to sovereignty for Indigenous nations. Their poetry presents sovereign erotics as a key that will contribute to decolonization for all Indigenous people, from different nations, geographic locations, genders and sexualities. The poetry discussed within this project traces the forward motion, out of the state of grief over the devastation of the earth and the violation of the bodies of Indigenous peoples, into a state of erotic wholeness, creativity and celebration. By participating in acts of “radical, holistic decolonization” (Driskill 2004, 58), poetry is not only a reflection and articulation of adversity, but also a tool in overcoming it.

I. (Re)writing Settler-Colonial Conquest Narratives

The regulation of Native identity has been central to the colonization process in both Canada and the United States. Systems of classification and control enable settler governments to define who is "Indian," and control access to Native land. These regulatory systems have forcibly supplanted traditional Indigenous ways of identifying the self in relation to land and community, functioning discursively to naturalize colonial world views. Decolonization, then, must involve deconstructing and reshaping how we understand Indigenous identity.

- Bonita Lawrence, “Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview”

The characterization of Indigenous identity and sexuality features not only in policy documents, but also in creative texts by settlers since first Contact.¹ Settler colonial writing, in the forms of journals and creative texts, was characterized from its inception by the simultaneous, and contradictory, hypersexualization and abjection of Indigenous expressions of sensuality, sexuality and ceremony. William Berkhoffer, in *The White Man's Indian*, traces stereotypical images of indigeneity right back to Christopher Columbus, stating that "the initial image of the Indian, like the word itself, came from the pen of Columbus" (Berkhoffer 1979, 5). In her critique of the barrage of stereotypes of Indigenous femininity and masculinity that emerged through European writing, Janice Acoose includes an excerpt of Amerigo Vespucci's "New World ethnography... *Mundus Novus*...published around 1504-1505. The passage opens with Vespucci depicting Indigenous women as "[going] about naked and...very libidinous; yet they have bodies that are tolerably beautiful and cleanly" (Acoose 1992, 26). Acoose observes in this excerpt that Vespucci desired the bodies of the Indigenous women he encountered on his voyage, but that his Christian sense of morality conflicts with desire and thus he suggests that it is the women who are lusty and given to prostituting themselves" (27). The relationship between desire and abjection of Indigenous women's bodies exhibited here can be extended to the ways in which conquerors vilified Indigenous sexuality and gender expressions, including by applying the colonial category "berdache" to Two-Spirit people presenting themselves (in terms of dress) as well as performing gender roles and labour traditionally assigned to the opposite gender, and to relationships that Europeans perceived as being between persons of the

¹ The term "settler", in this thesis, is used to refer to the non-Indigenous populations of the settler-colonial states of Canada and the United States. It disrupts the normalizing of the colonial nation and reminds the reader that, for e.g., while the Quebecois population involved in the Oka Crisis felt strong nationalist ties and entitlement to 'their land', the bridge, it is, in fact, Haudenosaunee land.

same gender; early encounters between Spanish conquerors and 'berdaches' were met with "everything from amazement, to disgust, and even violence" (Roscoe 1998, 4). By "linking ascriptions of savagery to transgressions of sexual nature," colonial perspectives on, and punishment of, Indigenous sexuality "defined European rule as sexual colonization and justified its violences" (Morgensen 2010, 111).

The stereotypes relating to Indigenous sexuality "informed by a White-Christian patriarchy" (Acoose 1992, i) that emerge as early as the sixteenth century have persisted in the Euro-Canadian literary tradition. In the works of selected Canadian writers, including Margaret Laurence and William Kinsella, Janice Acoose finds that:

Indigenous women are imprisoned in images that perpetuate racist and sexist stereotypes. Stereotypic images of Indian princesses, squaw drudges, suffering helpless victims, tawny temptresses, or loose squaws falsify Indigenous women's realities and ... foster cultural attitudes that encourage sexual, physical, verbal, or psychological violence against Indigenous women. Stereotypic images of Indigenous women also ... protect the White-Christian-patriarchal power structure. (1992, 1)

Acoose highlights the connection between the ideologies of a racist settler state and the appearance of stereotypes that reify these beliefs in the literature of the dominant population: in this case, Canadian literature and poetry. One individual who produced such work is Duncan Campbell Scott. Scott (1862 –1947) is best known for two potentially disparate, but interconnected, facets of his life. From 1913-1932, he served as the head of the Department of Indian Affairs, where he sought to "get rid of the Indian problem" by supporting the residential school system, which he argued would "kill the Indian to save

the man” (Cliff 2004). He also wrote poetry, which often depicted and celebrated the vast landscapes of the nation in a patriotic but deeply pathologizing way, consistent with the great myth of *terra nullius* (Richardson 1993). Other poems are a perverse ode to a ‘waning race’, such as “The Onondaga Madonna” (Scott 1898). A segment of the poem reads,

This woman of a weird and waning race,
 The tragic savage lurking in her face...
 Her blood is mingled with her ancient foes,
 And thrills with war and wildness in her veins; ...
 And closer in the shawl about her breast,
 The latest promise of her nation's doom,
 Paler than she her baby clings and lies,
 The primal warrior gleaming from his eyes... (Scott 1898, 14)

The poem’s message is indicative of a white colonial frame of mind that characterizes Indigenous people as a “dying race” while also writing about the beauty of the landscape that settlers occupy. In his role as an Indian Agent, Scott invested in narratives that spoke to the “disappearance” of Aboriginal peoples through intermarriage, and notably through Indigenous women having children with white fathers. While the poetry may express this in a *lamenting* tone, of course this ‘disappearance’ was exactly what Scott envisioned as an answer to “The Indian Problem”. The interconnection between the genocidal agenda of an Indian agent such as Scott and his poetic contributions can inform a reader’s understanding of the political work being done in the poetry of contemporary Indigenous writers such as Deborah Miranda and Marilyn Dumont. In this comparison, their poetry is not only part of a contemporary conversation among Indigenous theorists and poets, but is also part of a

much larger and older dialogue regarding the construction, and subsequent critique, of Euro-Canadian stereotypes of Indigeneity.

One poem that enters this textual dialogue is Deborah Miranda's "I Am Not a Witness". This poem can be read as one response to "The Onondaga Madonna," challenging the premise put forward by the infamous Indian Agent and author of Canadian "nature poetry". She writes,

Mixed-blood, I lay claim by the arch
of my eyebrows, short nose, dark hands.
I am not a witness. I am left behind, child
of children who were locked in the Mission
and raped.

I did not see this: I was not there—but I am here. (Miranda 1999, 73)

This poem is an entry in the ongoing conversation concerning the 'survival' of Indigenous nations in the Americas, despite the colonial institutions such as the Spanish missions mentioned in the poem, as well as the reserve/reservation systems, and the residential/boarding schools. Miranda responds to Scott, both in her poem and in her very existence as a descendant of Esselen and Chumash peoples, some of whom were sent to missions, and also as a woman of mixed heritage. Her existence as a Two-Spirit woman of "Esselen, Chumash, French and Jewish ancestry" (Miranda 2005) embodies many identity categories, and refutes the colonial fantasy of the child "paler than she," wherein nations could be 'disappeared out of existence' through a series of assimilatory tactics and gendered laws such as the sections of the Indian Act that specifically targeted women.

Poetry is conversational by its very nature. As in the example above, poems are short, accessible and often anthologized within a broader literary context, grouped in various ways according to (1) temporality/ era, (2) genre/ theme and (3) the geographical locations of the authors. These groupings enable readers to consider poetic influences over time, and to witness the ways in which writers transform or subvert themes expressed by earlier poets. Marilyn Dumont's *A Really Good Brown Girl* is a prime example of this type of (re)writing, as she 'speaks back' to conventions of modern English, to what constitutes 'good' poetry and literature, and to the ways in which Great White Men's poetry has been privileged historically over Aboriginal literatures in general, and over Aboriginal women's poetry most specifically. In the final section of *A Really Good Brown Girl*, Dumont weaves geographical images into a story of self-affirmation wherein she reclaims her own body as if reclaiming the land to which she has limited rights, both as Métis and as a woman. She writes, presumably of an estranged lover,

he would never have suspected
 that I'd find my way back
 through clear cuts, slash and burn,
 along right-of-ways, cut-lines, nerve-endings,
 longitude and latitude,
 along arteries, over skin plains, and valleys of hair,
 topographical features of flesh,
 ... He never would have guessed
 that I'd become a forester of my own flesh. (Dumont 1996, 73)

Dumont uses the language of cartography, and in so doing, challenges the divisions between topographies of flesh and earth. This re-mapping, which I will examine as a central feature of Chapter Two, also situates Dumont's work within a larger conversation. Her rejections of English language conventions and of European cartography not only speak back to settler poets, but also contribute to the development of a body of creative work that resists certain stereotypes surrounding Indigenous poetry as being predictable or homogenous.

The reduction of the entire complex body of Indigenous poetry – or, worse, all of Indigenous literature – into a single entity, is a form of psychic violence. When critics approach Indigenous authors as a single group with a single writing style, they ignore the complex cultural realities that inform each author's unique writing. Miranda writes about the problems associated with the over-simplification and mis-categorization of Indigenous poetry, stating:

Often, poetry falls into one of three categories for convenient discussion: a) a generalized grief; b) "nature writing" in which the Indian "connection to the land" is highlighted; and c) "ceremony" or description of a ritual event. Thus, stereotypes about Indians are perpetuated in the education of children and young scholars, who, rather than being enlightened about Indian lives, struggles, or history, are typically left unaware that a much more complex genre of American Indian literature exists, or that Indians engage in passionate, intensely intimate affairs of the heart and body which have been, somewhere, expressed in poetic, published form. (2002, 139)

What Miranda highlights here is poetry's ability to defy convention and stereotypes: erotic poetry, or poetry that challenges colonial notions of Indigenous sexuality, selfhood, or relationships to the earth or to lovers proves not only that "Indians engage in passionate, intensely intimate affairs of the heart and body," but also that Indigenous poetry exists to communicate what matters most to Indigenous writers. In this way, Indigenous poetry defies demands to meet the expectations of a non-Indigenous literary audience with preconceived notions of what it means to be Indigenous in North America in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While the authors considered in this study diverge based upon geographic and national differences, their poems can be read as reflecting certain commonalities of experience. As Wanda Nanibush argues,

Colonialism is the experience that we all share, even if it has different histories ... [T]he stand that the Kanien'kehaka took in the Pines was also a traumatic event for the community and for all of us who acted in solidarity. It connects to a list of colonial traumas like "Starlight tours of Saskatoon," "Ipperwash," "Burnt Church," "500 missing and murdered Aboriginal women," "Trail of Tears," "Residential Schools" and many, many more. These specific events become part of a larger collective Indigenous history of colonialism and our resistance to it. Each new colonial event brings up a prior trauma, something almost forgotten, repressed or something that has been attempted to be erased. (Nanibush 2010)

Nanibush's words confirm the cross-tribal reverberations of events such as Oka. They also note the translation of these shared experiences into a conversation that transcends geography and exists between, and within, collections of poetry. Nanibush names the

conflict at the Pines, also referred to throughout this project as the “Oka Crisis” or “Oka,” as one such event that sent shock waves through Indigenous nations across North America.

In the summer of 1990, the towns of Oka and Chateauguy, Quebec clashed with the Mohawk of Kanésatake over the proposed addition of nine holes to a golf course that would encroach upon and disturb a wooded area known as “The Pines.” This area is a meeting ground, as well as a sacred burial ground, for the Kanésatake Mohawk; while the land was never formally recognized as Mohawk by being granted ‘Aboriginal Title’ by the State, it is a well-known area of land of great significance to the community. During the summer of 1990, a conflict arose and escalated, following the initially peaceful protest in which the Mohawk created a blockade at the Mercier Bridge, disturbing commuter traffic and angering the settler population of Quebec. As the confrontation persisted, both the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Sûreté Québécois (SQ, the Quebec provincial police) were called in. Shots were fired on both sides; the only gunshot fatality was a member of the SQ, Marcel Lemay. Lemay was caught in a storm of bullets and struck in an area not protected by his bullet proof-vest, and it is assumed that the bullet came from the weapon of a Mohawk protester (Obomsawin 2000). While Lemay’s death was certainly tragic, it is noteworthy that there is a consistent media emphasis on Lemay’s young family: his wife was pregnant with their second child at the time of his death (“Standoff at Oka: A Mohawk standoff becomes a rallying cry for native anger and frustration” ; “Sister of Slain Officer at Oka Makes Peace With Mohawks” 2010; Foot and Post 2010; Kalant 2004; Reuters 1990). Even though the only fatal gunshot wound was sustained by Lemay, the violent clashes between the Québécois settlers and the Mohawk led to at least two other deaths: a non-Native elderly man who died of tear gas inhalation, and also 71-year-old Joe

Armstrong, an elderly Mohawk man who died as a result of his injuries following being stoned by protesters while evacuating Kahnawake via the Mercier Bridge confrontation between the SQ and the Mohawk communities of Kahnawake and Kanasatake as they were evacuating vulnerable community members due to the escalating confrontations (Komuves 1992):

In the afternoon of August 28, some residents of Kahnawake also begin to evacuate in a convoy of some 70 vehicles, mostly women, children, & elders. They use the north exit near the Mercier Bridge, but are detained by the SQ, who search every vehicle and delay them for over 2 hours. In the meantime, local radio stations (including Montreal's CJMS) broadcast the location of the convoy. By the time the convoy is underway, a mob of over 500 white people has gathered. They begin throwing rocks at the Mohawk vehicles, smashing windows and injuring persons inside. One elder, Joe Armstrong (71 years old) is hit in the chest with a large boulder. He would die one week later of a heart attack. Although there were approx. 30-40 police on hand, they made no effort to stop the rock throwing. (Obomsawin 2000)

While there is acknowledgment of violence experienced by both sides, there is little mention in the mainstream media on Armstrong's death, and far more attention paid to the death of Lemay, and, almost always in the context of concern for, or a collective grief for, Lemay's wife. Concern for her, a pregnant woman made a widow, overshadowed the treatment of pregnant Mohawk women, on the other side of the blockades. Obomsawin (2000) notes the omission of stories that point to violence experienced by Mohawk women,

including pregnant women, trying to leave Kanesatake and Kahnawake – either to receive medical care or to flee for safety. Smith recounts the story of one of the women who gave birth in Kanesatake during the time of the clashes:

During the 1990 Mohawk crisis in the town of Oka, a white mob surrounded the ambulance of a Native woman attempting to leave the Mohawk reservation because she was hemorrhaging after having given birth. She was forced to “spread her legs” to prove she had given birth. The police at the scene refused to intervene.

(Smith 2003, 79)

The sexual violence directed against this woman’s body immediately following giving birth stands in harsh juxtaposition to the concern for the welfare of Lemay’s wife and child. Additionally, Kalant quotes John Ciaccia, Quebec’s former Minister of Indian Affairs, who recalls a particularly vulgar conversation that took place at a Quebecois strategy meeting during the “Oka Crisis”. According to Ciaccia,

at a strategy meeting during Oka, General Foster introduced the possible use of the CF-5, a low-flying reconnaissance plane, to gather information over Kanesatake. The noise from the plane is so loud that it could “affect pregnant women and cause premature births or stillbirths. A member of the committee asked with a smile, ‘how many pregnant women are there at Oka? Maybe we should send two CF5.’ He wasn’t joking.” (Ciaccia 2000 quoted in Kalant 2004, 235)

While the Surete (Quebec provincial police) presented their actions as imbuing “calm, ... lucidity and ... [a] rational approach” (Reuters 1990, 3), I argue that the violation of the body of a hemorrhaging woman post-natally (Smith 2003; Obomsawin 1993), and the

above comments regarding the induction of pre-mature labor or stillbirths among the Mohawk women behind the blockades indicates a climate of sexual violence not depicted alongside the mainstream depictions of both the Canadian government and of the Mohawks of Kanesatake and Kahnawake.

With this evidence, we see that sexual violence and the use of excessive bodily force existed alongside the disputes over the right to land during the “Oka crisis.” Amelia Kalant writes, “as told by environmentalists, traditionalists, and many women activists, the dispute [at Kanesatake] was a contest over *development, nature, the value of land, colonialism and gendered politics*” (Kalant 2004). “Oka” serves as the temporal marker for the poetry examined in this project for two reasons. As a relatively recent, highly publicized event in Canadian history, it still informs the artistic works of writers and visual artists in Canada today (Ladner 2010a). In turn, as a clash over land and burial rights that attempted the ‘crowding out’ or relocation of Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories to benefit members of the settler society, it transcends national boundaries and triggers memories of other national moments of trauma, thereby allowing this project to consider works from outside of a “Canadian” context.

In a project that is not concerned with only one territory, the logic behind choosing the “Oka Crisis” as a way to contextualize and periodize the poetry selected may not be immediately obvious. However, as Kiera Ladner notes in the introduction to *This Is An Honour Song: Twenty Years Since the Blockades*, the travels of Ellen Gabriel, a Mohawk writer from Kanesatake who served as Mohawk spokesperson for negotiations during the Oka Crisis (Swain 2011, 125), demonstrate “the importance and the impact that their

resistance has had far beyond the borders of Kanieh'kehaka territory" (Ladner 2010a, 4). Oka is a significant moment felt across the continent in ways that confound and resist colonial understandings of territories and borders. The Oka conflict can be read as parallel to the confrontation between the American Indian Movement and the FBI at Wounded Knee, and the subsequent death of Anna-Mae Aquash, as featured in the works of Driskill and Chrystos, or of the "Red Sticks" (Creek) war of 1813- 1814 (Coles 2002, 444) that features prominently in the work of Harjo. The legacies of relocation raised by the crisis also can invoke the forcible removal of the Cherokee from the southeastern U.S. states to Indian Territory, known as The Trail of Tears, as evidenced in the work of Driskill. All of these confrontations were highly gendered. In turn, the events of the 1800s, which include the Red Sticks War, the Trail of Tears, and the massacre at Wounded Knee are linked to the contemporary events of protest and struggle in the AIM standoff at Wounded Knee, and at Oka. They reflect centuries-old struggles with colonial mismanagement and theft of Indigenous lands, and the militarized colonial violence directed against Indigenous bodies, including incidents where the military exerts undue and sexualized force: for example, hitting Indigenous men in the genitals (Smith 2005b), or searching up the skirt of a Mohawk woman who had just given birth (Smith 2003, 79).

There is a specific history linking together the land battles fought by warrior societies and the AIM, and thereby linking together the Mohawk experience at Oka in 1990 with the events of 1973, both at Wounded Knee and at Kahnawake. Alfred and Lowe, in their (Alfred 2005) article on "Warrior Societies in Contemporary Indigenous Communities", note:

Warrior societies and the Red Power movement expanded throughout the 1970s, often working together during episodes of crisis and mobilization. In 1973, the Mohawk Warrior Society stood in armed resistance against the Quebec Provincial Police at Kahnawake. The prominent Red Power organization, the American Indian Movement (AIM), allied with the Mohawk Warrior Society during this “siege at the Longhouse.” While AIM had received widespread attention during the siege at Wounded Knee in South Dakota earlier that year, this was the first time the Mohawk Warrior Society had drawn attention from mainstream society and from governments. Later that year, AIM adopted the term “warrior society” for its promotional poster A Red Man’s International Warrior Society, and attributed its imagery and words to the Kahnawake Mohawk Warrior Society leader, Louis Hall (Karoniaktajeh). (Alfred 2005)

The interconnections between the standoff at Wounded Knee (1973) and the “Oka Crisis” (1990) demonstrate the ways in which solidarity traverses national and territorial boundaries in order to resist colonial land theft, resource mismanagement and interferences on traditional ways of life, including the ability to protect sacred burial grounds, hold traditional ceremonies and maintain control over one’s land base, language and body.

Oka serves as the historical anchor for this project, but does not wholly define the selection of the poetry. All of the poems examined herein were written in North America and published between 1990 and 2012. This time period has been productive in terms of the writing and publishing of poetry that is concerned with the prevalent themes of the

“Oka Crisis”. As previously noted, Oka is seen by numerous “environmentalists, traditionalists, and many women activists” as “a contest over development, nature, the value of land, colonialism and gendered politics” (Kalant 2004, 163). The poetry selected engages with these categories, and pays particular attention to the intersection of gendered and land-based violence in colonial land and resource appropriation. Therefore, the poets are not linked by tribal affiliation (most are not Mohawk), geography, or gender. Rather, they are chosen for the ways in which their poetry highlights the interconnection between the exploitation, reclamation, and decolonization of bodies and land. The content and imagery employed in their poetry, regardless of their geographical locations, evinces the desire to assert sovereignty first over the body and then over the land, in response to the colonization of both.

Oka, like many other historical and contemporary conflicts between settler-colonists and Indigenous peoples, was a moment of frustration over settler-colonial disregard for the Indigenous peoples’ attempts to preserve and maintain their traditional territories, customs, and burial grounds. In the Canadian context, it evoked the experience of dispossession from one’s homeland, the theft of land by settler-colonial power, settler state violence against Indigenous peoples and their harmful stereotyping that contributes to lateral and external violences against women and Two-Spirit people. Oka was also about ancestral and land-based histories and memories, and about respecting the land as living, infused with life. “The Pines” is a sacred burial ground, which made landed links with the past a central aspect of the struggle to protect this specific territory. In the American context, Oka also links to the 1973 standoff at Wounded Knee, and the relationship that formed in that same year between the Haudonasaunee and the American Indian Movement

(AIM) – an instance of trans-national solidarity and resistance to settler-colonial state violence. This project thus decidedly engages any Indigenous author’s poems that articulate these overarching themes of longstanding settler-colonial disrespect of Indigenous (home)lands, traditions, bodies, and ancestors, and the subsequent movements to reclaim personal and national autonomy through articulations of sovereign sexuality.

Oka triggers the recollection of myriad collective traumas in the histories of Indigenous nations, as listed by Nanibush (2010, 171). This translates into a common experience in the works of poets from varied tribal affiliations. For instance, Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) writes,

I watched rocks²/ Hurlled and smash/ into the cars of Mohawk men/ women and
 children/ on a bridge in Montreal/ and the million dollar/ rock slide/ blockades/ on
 ten BC roads/ after stones rained/ down rock cliffs/ on police lifting/ human
 blockades/ protecting the/ slow disintegration/ of bones into sand/ resting under
 headstones/on Lilliut land/.../ I study the rocks/ I have set into a circle/ opening to
 the east/on this mountain top. (1990, 23-4)

Armstrong blurs national and geographical boundaries and finds common experiences between her people, the Okanagan, and the Mohawk: of blockades, confrontation, and land protection struggles. Similarly, Douglas Nepinak’s short play, “The Crisis in Oka, Manitoba”, politicizes the felt effects of Oka elsewhere in Canada (Nepinak 2010). As well, Shirley

² Due to the style of some of Armstrong’s poetry, which uses only two or three words per line, I have chosen to use slashes between the lines, rather than use the original formatting. It detracts from the reader’s ease of reading the poem by causing the excerpt to span too many pages.

Wheeler's poem, "Pickling Beets: Five Years After Oka", articulates the pervasive memory of "Oka", felt across tribal affiliations, after the passage of time, and triggered by a visceral reaction to the site of beet-stained hands (Wheeler 1995). Because of the large media presence at the blockades, which sent reverberations across North American Indigenous communities (as well as bringing Aboriginal land struggles to the attention of settler Canadian populations as never before), "Oka not only inspired artists to write songs, performances, theatrical works and contributions to the visual arts, it impacted the practices of a generation of artists who continue to create works today" (Ladner 2010b)

In an interview, Métis multimedia artist Rebecca Belmore quotes Métis revolutionary Louis Riel, who said "my people will sleep for 100 years and when they awake, it will be the artists who give them back their spirit" (Riel quoted in Belmore 2010, 209). Kelly Morgan proposes that "imaginative literature such as fiction and poetry is 'a more accurate gauge of cultural realities than the ethnographic, anthropological, and historical record'" (Morgan quoted in Monture 2008, 156). It is a form that, as Lee Maracle notes, is linked to traditions including storytelling and song (Maracle and Da Cunha 9). Creative writing employs innovative uses of the English language: "reinventing the enemy's language" (Bird 1997). In a time when many of the hundreds of Indigenous languages of North America are no longer spoken, making use of English in creative ways is another way of decolonizing language. In addition, poetry is a form that allows for the inclusion of the "mother tongue" in ways that complicate the reading for a non-Indigenous audience. This can be disruptive in a way that can mimic the experience of being an "outsider" – something that is rarely experienced by a member of the English-speaking majority within a country like Canada. Despite the potential for poetry to be interpreted as a more aesthetic

form of writing than an academic essay, poets insist on the political relevance of their work. For instance, Chrystos writes “that poetry without politics is narcissistic” (Chrystos 1995, 129) and “everything is political – there is no neutral, safe place we can hide out in waiting for the brutality to go away” (129). Chrystos writes politically, and situates her work “in the erotic”, which as Joy Harjo argues, is “to be alive” (Harjo quoted in Miranda 2002, 145).

Peter H. Russell, in his chapter on Oka and Ipperwash as ‘flashpoint events’, defines this term as an event that occurs “when members of the Aboriginal community see that government, without settling the long-standing dispute, is permitting activities to take place that ignore Aboriginal interests in the area, and, in effect, deny Aboriginal or treaty rights”³ (2010, 29). Poetry, especially after a flashpoint event such as the “Oka Crisis”, is a powerful tool for expressing a politics of redefinition. It is possible to capture in poetry what it means to be a poet and Indigenous in North America in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Poets use their words to help envision, shape and incite action toward reclaiming sovereignty over language, lovemaking and land. This is, in part, because of poetry’s innate ability to use a variety of literary and political tools. Addressing Gregory Scofield’s work, Driskill writes that this “poetry is full of the humor, rage, erotic power and sovereign identity that is needed for us to survive as colonized people living with layered

³ Ipperwash refers to the confrontation between Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and the Ojibway (Chippewa) of Kettle Point and Stony Creek. The raid to remove the peaceful protesters from Ipperwash Provincial Park, dubbed “Operation Maple”, was ordered by then-premier Mike Harris. The 2007 inquiry found Harris, Ottawa (government officials), and the OPP, jointly responsible for the excessive use of force that resulted in Dudley George’s death. In relation to the raid on Ipperwash Park, Harris said “I want the fucking Indians out of the park”, indicative of his attitude toward the conflict and its resolution (*Ipperwash inquiry spreads blame for George’s death* 2007).

forms of oppression” (Driskill 2003, 228), and is radical in its ability to grant the author and the readers “freedom in the context we inherit” (Da Cunha 2008). Neal McLeod also addresses the ability of poets to ensure the survival of the earth, as he writes

we are her living body
storytellers and poets
hold traces of her (2010, 247),

confirming the link between human bodies and the earth, and the expression of this relationship through poetry.

In the introduction to a special issue of the Indigenous literary periodical, *Gatherings*, Kateri Damm makes explicit the relationship between creative writing, Indigenous sovereignty struggles, and a radical reimagining of ‘home’ as existing within poetry rather than only on a specific land base. She writes,

Indigenous writers. This is the ground upon which we stand. This is the motherland. The gathering place. The place for remembering, for singing, for telling stories, for honouring the bones of our ancestors. This is why ... our writing is resistance. And protest. Ipperwash. Gustafsen Lake, Wanganui, Kahnesatake, Wounded Knee, Chiapas Restigouche, Hawai’i Nei, Green Moutaning Roa, Neaashiinigmiing... the Black Hills, Uluru, Halawa Valley, Nochemowenaing... our sacred places, our homelands, our memories are in our words. (Damm 1996)

Within this single passage, Damm evokes the names of many flashpoint events, and recalls the trauma felt by the lands and bodies of Indigenous nations the world over. At the end of the quotation, she writes that the words and poetry of Indigenous writers are enduring, a

way of ensuring the survival of nations, even as their land bases may be appropriated or decimated through the actions of colonizers. So, collections of poetry and creative writing become what Jeannette Armstrong calls “continuance links”(1991, 82), with the poems allowing interweaving of ancestral and current stories, and resisting colonial attempts at erasure of history, land, language and nations.

Throughout her work as an educator, activist and poet, Armstrong has “articulated a cross-tribal call for resistance and action against Canadian settler governments and to counter the dominance of capitalism that has sustained destruction of the environment within North America” (Andrews 2011a, 80). Jennifer Andrews also notes the distinction between coastal (with more permanent dwellings) and semi-migratory nations, including Armstrong’s people, the Okanagan. She stresses how this distinction contributes to the creation of ‘portable’ art forms, “primarily through the distinct and complex use of sound in language”(82), as in poetry and song. This distinction, as Armstrong intends it, emphasizes the importance of spoken or sung forms of art versus visual art. While the concept may have initially come from semi-migratory nations, who made seasonal homes, versus coastal nations, it is compelling to think about the concept of poetry, as housed within the body, as it applies to people who are not necessarily living on their original land base. Writers who, through loss of Aboriginal ‘Status’ or urban out-migration, are no longer living on their original territory, often write about their bodies as their homelands. Therefore, asserting sovereignty over their sexuality and their bodies becomes a way of ‘defending their nation’ in a way that defies the conventional definitions of sovereignty as necessarily requiring a land-base. It also enables poets to form a type of intentional community through their words. For example, the “next world” that Harjo envisions is a world that shifts away from

the endemic greed and land devastation associated with capitalist colonial societies that affects Indigenous nations the world over. However, perspectives about home/lands (as explored in greater detail in Chapter 2) are not homogenous; they vary greatly among authors who are not living on their original territories, such as Harjo, versus authors who grew up and still remain on their home territories, such as Armstrong.

Harjo, a Muskogee-Creek Two-Spirit poet, theorist and literary critic, elegantly answers one question that is central to the present project, which is, *why poetry?* What is it about this form that makes it such a powerful tool in reclaiming individual and national sovereignty over bodies, lands and languages? She says, “I believe in the power of words to create the world [...] I have a poem that will turn hatred to love. And one to release me from fear” (Harjo quoted in Darroch 1998, 1). As much as Harjo writes to release herself from the state of fear, she also uses her position as a published author to invite others to experience the transformational power of writing for themselves. In an interview, when asked to give advice to young writers, Harjo offered the following comment: “Those who write are assisting in constructing the next world, the next consciousness. Study with all parts of your being, not just your intellect. Always allow yourself to be surprised. And, write” (Nevins 2008, 13). As a possible explanation for why poetry is integral to “constructing the next world”, Rubelise Da Cunha notes that

Poetical language is metaphorical, emotional and transformative. In this sense, it can be revolutionary... The transformation starts from the inside, and it is exactly because the revolution starts inside the self and inside the language that it can effectively act on the level of social transformation. (Da Cunha 2008, 57-8)

Harjo's writing is demonstrative of that transformation, as it traces her life from teenage mother, to university student, to professor cum musician and poet. Her poetry maps her geographical journey across the United States, as explored in Chapter 2. It also shares the references to historical traumas ("Flashpoint events"), including the Trail of Tears and the Red Stick War (see Chapter 2), therefore it participates in writing poetry that shows survival, from both gendered and land-based violences.

Poetry, through analogy, metaphor and the physical form of the words on the page, is a way of translating experiences that are difficult to express into a language of truth, beauty and revelation (Harjo in Bird 1997, 54). For Harjo, "Poetry then saved me, turned into a force of beauty, all its own, beyond me, beyond anything I could imagine on my own" (Harjo in Bird 1997). Patricia Monture, in her essay "Women's Words", notes poetry's ability to productively channel and express difficult emotions such as frustration and grief: "When I struggle and I cannot for the life of me write a sentence or have a complete thought, I write jagged lines and call it a poem. On these days I am writing to survive" (Monture 2008, 154).

However, the transformative power of poetry extends beyond its power for the author as an individual. Rubelise da Cunha calls attention to how "the act of reading poetry is also transformative. It is the moment in which the self will communicate directly with the audience, and then the idea of transformation goes beyond the individual to the group level. When I think about storytelling, I always think about this idea of telling stories in order to come to terms with one's past and transforming the community" (Da Cunha 2008). It is a way of translating a felt relationship between oneself and one's family, community,

nation and the natural environment. Mari-Jo Moore, a writer of mixed Cherokee, Dutch and Irish ancestry, writes,

I have found a deepening connection to the land through experiencing poetry. The land where my ancestors lived and died for thousands of years. The land fed with the skin, bones and flesh of those who have gone before me. The same land that now feeds me, and waits for me to return the favour.” (Moore 2000, 6)

Moore calls upon the reader to understand poetry as a way of expressing or translating history. In addition, she makes explicit that our bodies feed the earth as the earth feeds bodies, a circular and regenerative relationship. For Moore, poetry is a vehicle for connecting to past generations. As evident in the works of Driskill and Scofield in particular, this connection sometimes comes from using the ‘mother tongues’ (Cherokee and Cree respectively), which are interspersed with inventive uses of English, the “enemy’s language” (Bird 1997). Moore’s poem, contained within *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language*, stands alone as a poem and also contributes to the larger conversation of why Indigenous authors might choose to express themselves through poetry. Poems are simultaneously whole stories and fragments of a whole. When collections or anthologies of poetry are read cover to cover, they invite the reader to consider over-arching themes, such as land stewardship, ownership or exploitation and the relationship between creative writing and mothering.

The poets discussed above, including Armstrong and Harjo, have written about why they choose poetry as a means of self-expression and political resistance. From their commentary, the reader understands that Indigenous poets choose their form deliberately

for a number of reasons. Writing and publishing poetry is seen as a “continuance link” (Cardinal and Armstrong 1991, 82) that connects poets to past and future generations of storytellers and affirms the survival not only of the nation, but also of its stories. Poetry is also a way to express the inexpressible, giving voice to difficult emotions through fragmented line styles and veiled or metaphorical references to horrible acts of violence (Million 2009; Monture 2008). It is a portable art form that withstands relocation and displacement better than visual art such as sculptures (Andrews 2011a, 80); the body becomes the “container” that holds poets’ memories, and their words (Miranda 2005, 17). The metaphorical language of poetry is a weapon used by the poets to speak their difficult truths (Harjo in Bird 1997, 54). This poetry is not only a means of expression but also of rearticulation: it participates in a re-imagining and re-mapping what Harjo refers to as “the next world”⁴.

While Oka serves as way to periodize this project, the selection of the content reflects an enormous diversity of poets, from different nations, cultures, upbringings, abilities, ages, and – significantly – geographic locations. The content of their poems is not homogenous, nor are their writing styles. What emerges most significantly is the ways in which their poetry addresses embodiment. The body is an important site of resistance and these authors see sovereignty over sexuality as a significant step toward holistic decolonization. This thesis is about the body – its desires, safety, pleasure and pain. It considers how the body is written about through the selection of poems and critical

⁴ This is an image borrowed from the Hopi worldview, which states that the fourth world will soon be destroyed and give way to the fifth world.

writing, with the acknowledgement that Indigenous perspectives on embodiment and on feminism and the body are far more complex and varied than can be adequately depicted within the scope, length and duration of this project. The project relies on the groundwork of Indigenous authors who politicize the importance of the body as a site for nationhood, such as Andrea Smith, Joyce Green and Jessica Yee, and sees the body as an important site for asserting nationhood because of the ways in which the body was controlled in order to forward colonial land appropriation. However, the emphasis of the project is on reading the poetry as theory, and reading the conversations among poets and critics, in order to construct a unique argument for the role that poetry plays in asserting sovereignty on a personal and national level.

II. Methodologies

This project is comprised largely of textual analysis. It engages with the poetry of Indigenous authors with divergent geographic, cultural and embodied experiences in an a way that aims to call attention to common strategies toward using poetry as an emancipatory tool, for reclaiming agency over one's body and land-base. In the textual analysis, the similarities that are highlighted show common strategies toward resisting colonial degradation of Indigenous land and bodies. The theoretical underpinnings come largely from Andrea Smith's book *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, which studies the relationship between land-based and sexual violence, and asserts that the two cannot be separated. I also draw on the theoretical and conversational insights put

forth by the poets themselves, in order to flesh out Smith's project and make connections between *Conquest* and creative articulations of sovereign sexualities.

As mentioned above, the poems examined in this project all support the claim that poetry is a potent anti-colonial tool, which may be used not only to write about a wide variety of environmental and social issues but also as a way to reclaim sexual and national sovereignty. Single author texts include Deborah Miranda's *Indian Cartography* and *The Zen of La Llorona*, Qwo-Li Driskill's *Walking With Ghosts*, Gregory Scofield's *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkiy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin: Love Medicine and One Song*, Jeannette Armstrong's *Breath Tracks*, Marilyn Dumont's *Green Girl Dreams Mountains* and *A Really Good Brown Girl*, and Chrystos' *In Her I Am*. When these books of poetry are read together and alongside secondary criticism (which in many instances is written by one of the above authors), patterns readily emerge. The first of two significant features shared by all the noted books is their use of land imagery to describe bodily features and their ascription of bodily features to the land: a narrative move that I examine as "body cartographies." The second is their use of the erotic in ways that, at once, defy the features of "conventional" Anglo-European love poetry, while using land-based imagery to describe the bodies of lovers in a way that resists a colonial gender binary. These two elements both serve to blur the distinction between bodies and land. However, a significant distinction is that whereas body cartographies often invoke the violence imposed interconnectively upon both land and bodies, the nature and earth imagery in Indigenous erotic poetry, particularly by Two-Spirit and women poets, reaffirms the manifold expressions of Indigenous sexuality.

The themes that focus my account of single-authored books of poetry also characterize a variety of themed anthologies of poetry. For instance, *My Home as I Remember*, edited by Lee Maracle and Sandra Laronde, joins prose, poetry, short stories and artwork in articulating that the concept of home is unfixed, and can be found within the body or within the words on a page. The question raised over and over again in the anthology, “where’s home,” appears as at once a global, national, familial, and personal matter. The violent dislocation of many Indigenous people from their homelands, and the subsequent violences that target the land, are shared experiences, but they also vary greatly depending on a person’s background. Regardless of the individual circumstances that affect where the writers’ homes are today, the need to locate a home – and the possibility that home can be housed within poetry – is an overarching theme not only in this anthology but also in many works examined in Chapters Two and Three. A number of other anthologies reflect the themes of this project. *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica* (Damm, ed., 2010) is an anthology that was born out of frustration with the lack of published Indigenous erotica. *This is an Honour Song: Twenty Years Since the Blockades* (Ladner and Simpson, eds. 2010), with its essays, plays, poetry, and artwork by contributors from a variety of nations across Canada, assertively interlinks “Oka” with other historical moments of colonial violence and the production of art and poetry in resistance. Finally, while not specifically prioritizing poetry, the anthologies *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations* (Simpson, ed. 2008) and *W’Daub Awa: Speaking True, A Kegedonce Anthology* dynamically analogize bodies as land and land as bodies in a manner that transcends metaphor by demonstrating how human bodies are damaged by damage to the water, air and earth.

The identification of texts proceeded by following textual conversations between the selected creative writers, who also are critics, and the selected critics, who also are creative writers. Their close interconnection resulted in a significant amount of overlap among the authors of the project's primary and secondary sources. Articles that particularly informed arguments about poetry as a tool for decolonization and poetry's employment of alternative cartographies, including body cartographies, are (in chronological order) Deborah Miranda's (2002) "Dildos, Hummingbirds and Driving Her Crazy", Qwo-Li Driskill's (2004) "Stolen from Our Bodies", as well as the works of several settler critics: Kelli Lyon Johnson's (2007) "Writing Deeper Maps", Mark Rifkin's (2011) "The Erotics of Sovereignty", and Jennifer Andrews' (2011) "Space, Place, Land and the Meaning(s) of Home". Miranda's essay "Dildos, Hummingbirds and Driving Her Crazy: The Search for American Indian Women's Love Poetry" represented a major moment in the quest for greater visibility and recognition of, as well as more publications or anthologies of, Indigenous erotica. Her analysis of Chrystos' erotic poetry provides an excellent model for the close reading of erotic poetry, and the usefulness of these types of poems for forwarding embodied sovereignty and healing from legacies of colonial violence.

Driskill's "Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/ Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic" demonstrates hir ability to interweave hir own poetry and others' poetry, including that of Chrystos, into a deeply theoretical essay. Driskill traces the roots of hir own trauma alongside the emergence of the term Two-Spirit, to which s/he assigns not a single definition for one specific context, but rather a quality that "resists colonial definitions of who we are" (Driskill 2004, 53). In addition to defining and providing and history of the term "Two-Spirit," Driskill's essay defines a significant term for

this project, “Sovereign Erotic,” as “an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations” (2004, 53). Driskill also delineates between the erotic and the ‘personal,’ writing: “I do not see the erotic as a realm of personal consequence only. Our relationships with the erotic impact our larger communities, just as our communities impact our senses of the erotic. A Sovereign Erotic relates our bodies to our nations, traditions, and histories” (2004, 54). The analysis in this thesis proceeds from foundational definitions in this article.

Johnson’s “Writing Deeper Maps: Mapmaking, Local Indigenous Knowledges, and Literary Nationalism in Native Women’s Writing” provides invaluable insight into the gendered nature of European cartography. The essay proposes that mapmaking is informed by legacies of heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and imperialism. This, in turn, feeds Indigenous women writers’ desires to replace these types of maps, which ignored intimate knowledge of the land, and re-named the land after white men rather than, for example, after the medicines that grew there, knowledge of which often would have been held by women. Johnson’s article uses Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms* as an example of a novel that rejects European cartography in favour of “deeper” maps (Hogan 1997, 23). Johnson’s close reading of *Solar Storms* informs my comparison of how poetry and fiction, as two divergent types of creative writing, approach a critique of colonial land theft and the “science” of cartography.

Rifkin’s (2011) “The Erotics of Sovereignty” identifies embodied sovereignty as a key concept emerging from Driskill’s *Walking With Ghosts*, and in particular from the poem

“Map of the Americas.” Rifkin’s argument is of particular relevance to this thesis because of his close engagement with the links between embodiment and sovereignty found throughout Driskill’s poetry and theoretical writing. Rifkin’s overlapping consideration of Driskill’s creative and theoretical works also is valuable as a model to this project’s methodological decision to engage the works of authors who write both poetry and literary criticism, often of each other’s works, and in a highly conversational manner.

Both the structure and content of Andrews’ essay “Space, Place, Land and the Meaning of Home” closely align with this project (2011c). Andrews considers the interconnectedness of land and body when examining how ‘home’ is defined in the poetry of authors such as Dumont, Armstrong, Gunn Allen, and Harjo. She pays particular attention to the shifting perceptions and definitions of ‘home’ in those writers whose lives have been lived in many places, far away from their ancestral homelands. Her consideration of Gail Guthrie Valaskakis’ argument – that “until Indians were relegated to reservations, ‘home’ was often a territory, not a fixed site, and houses were portable” (Valaskakis 111, quoted in Andrews 2011c, 222-3; Valaskakis 2005) – aligns well with Armstrong’s discussion of poetry as a portable art form suitable for semi-migratory peoples (Andrews 2011c, 224-5) as opposed to more permanent forms of Indigenous visual art. Andrews’ engagement with the poetry of Joy Harjo as signifying a map of her life and journeys is most useful to this project’s account of the multiple cartographies housed in Harjo’s *A Map to the Next World*.

This project methodologically centers its focus on writers of both Indigenous theory and poetry. Authors such as Daniel Heath Justice and Deborah A. Miranda occupy the dual roles of poet and critic, author and theorist. This positions them in conversation with other

writers who are simultaneously writing creative works that address similar (though uniquely personal) issues around embodiment and decolonization while functioning as readers and critics of their own colleagues' works. Focusing on such works thus directly engages this project in the *conversational* form of Indigenous literary criticism. Scholarship that is situated within critical conversations helps to illuminate the politics and authorial intent behind creative texts. It is particularly useful in the context of this project, as it demonstrates that Indigenous creative writers think together and that Indigenous theorists create new forms of representation together. In turn, doing scholarship that attends to conversations destabilizes any sense of privilege otherwise felt by a researcher who is writing as an outsider. I am conscious of my position as a settler academic writing on the real and material issues around trauma, sexualities and queer identities under settler colonialism. Therefore, instead of privileging the voice of a researcher and external analyst of the work, scholarship is situated as the interpretation by an outsider of messages around (re)mapping land, reclaiming the colonized body, and considering alternative expressions of sexuality and gender identity. Finally, in honouring the conversational aspect of the work being done to reclaim a 'distorted' or colonized erotic (Miranda 2005), this research tries to identify common threads within the anti-colonial poetic interventions of women and Two-Spirit poets writing about embodied decolonization and a sovereign erotic, without creating a homogenous or monolithic category or group. While these commonalities exist, this project does not interpret them as commonalities among the diversity of Indigenous nations. Rather, it sees the common threads as reflective of the matters that are important to Indigenous writers and theorists in the era of poetic works to which this thesis attends. This approach acknowledges the words of Beth Brant, who writes, "every story and

storyteller must be accorded full attention and a deep respect”, for they remind us that “many parts make up the integration of a community ... Each part is distinct, yet each part acts in accordance with the whole” (Brant 1988, 43).

This project takes inspiration from Smith’s *Conquest* in defining its argument and the direction of the argument’s application: that Indigenous poets recognizably engage body cartographies *first* as a tool for supporting sexual and bodily autonomy, and *second* as a tool for reimagining sovereignty over the (often feminized and constructed as violable) landscape. By opening her book with a discussion of “Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide”, Smith explicitly insists that any consideration of the metaphorical ‘rape of the land’ must be *preceded* by an acknowledgement of North American Indigenous women’s real, daily, lived experiences of violence in the contemporary moment. She writes that “the history of sexual violence and genocide among Native women illustrates how gender violence functions as a tool for racism and colonialism among women of color in general” (Smith 2005a, 15), and traces not only colonial violence but also lateral violence experienced today by Indigenous women across this continent, to colonial discourses around “Indian bodies [as] ‘dirty’ ... sexually violable and ‘rapeable’”, and notes how this perverse logic is extended so that “the rape of bodies that are considered inherently impure or dirty simply does not count” (Smith 2005a). One of Smith’s central arguments, then, is that the rape of individual Indigenous women’s bodies must be addressed as a systemic perpetuation of colonialism and that addressing this must come *before* more rhetorical examinations of sovereignty. In a later discussion entitled “Rape of the Land”, Smith emphasizes the marking of Native peoples as “inherently violable through a process of sexual colonization [and,] by extension, their lands and territories have become marked as

violable as well” (Smith 2005a, 55). The centering of the literal rape of bodies before discussing the metaphorical rape of the land is a key component to Smith’s approach, which insists that fighting land claims battles is immaterial if the bodies whose land is contested are systematically disenfranchised and subject to sexual and physical violence, rape and murder.

This argument seems to be compatible with Emerance Baker’s desire to “see [Indigenous women’s] bodies made material in theory”(Baker 2005, 7), a goal valued within this project. In her article “Loving Indianess: Storytelling as Survivance”, she writes about holding one’s community in a loving gaze as an emancipatory strategy, but she is quick to express her desire to see the *individual bodies* of her community’s women made material. In other words, body sovereignty and body cartographies are not abstract concepts. They have real, material implications. In the process of exploring the poetry referred to above, and the theoretical writing that illuminates it, it is necessary to remain constantly accountable to the writers whose work is being examined. Doing so involves being positioned in relation to stories that the communal trauma of colonialism imposed upon Indigenous nations, not only “blood”, or embodied, memory but also recounting the lived violences personally experienced by the writers, at the hands of lovers, family members and strangers. Both lateral and external violences against Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people are linked to colonial discourses that make Indigenous sexuality perverse and exploitable. These concepts have not ceased to be enacted, nor have their impacts ceased to be expressed in physical acts of violence.

This thesis uses Smith's centering of the literal rape of bodies before the metaphorical 'rape of the land' as a framework for considering the poetry of Indigenous writers writing about violence against bodies and land. This model is compatible with Baker's desire to "see bodies made material in theory," and also serves as a reminder that the conversations taking between these theorists and poets is not abstract, but is rooted in the realities of psychic, physical, sexual and land-based violence experienced by the writers, their nations and Indigenous peoples across North America. By recognizing that having sovereignty over one's body has real, material implications, and is not simply an exercise in the aesthetics of metaphor, I am reminded that I must hold myself highly accountable to the poets translating their experiences into art.

As noted, this project develops its analysis by articulating the position of a settler scholar working on Indigenous feminist poetry, in a manner that never ceases to consider the implications of this positioning while not allowing that condition to dominate the conversations the project engages. Feeling highly accountable and slightly uncomfortable is not necessarily a bad thing, if it helps to maintain a respectful attitude and uphold standards consistent with Trinh Minh-ha's suggestion that we must always act as though the people about whom we are writing are in the room with us (Trinh 1989). Considering the role of a non-Indigenous academic carrying out this research, the model that Helen Hoy puts forward in her work as a non-Indigenous literary critic of Indigenous literature is particularly compelling. She writes that "deciding not to speak ... beyond one's own experience ... can be a self-indulgent evasion of political effort or a principled effort at non-imperialist engagement" (Hoy quoted in Blyth 2008). The theoretical writing of Daniel

Heath Justice also informs settler scholars Helen Hoy and Molly Blyth in profound ways.

Hoy writes,

According to Cherokee scholar and University of Toronto English professor, Daniel Heath Justice, however, the often-repeated imperative that "non-Natives stay out of Native Studies" (2) is an inadequate solution to my dilemma. As he writes: "It has never been as simplistic as 'only Indians should teach/write about/talk about Indian issues.' Considerate non-Indians have a place in our communities and we hold enormous respect for those who are sincere and responsible, regardless of their ethnicity ..." (Hoy quoted in Blyth 2008, 266)

This sincerity and responsibility can find itself echoed with great care in Blyth's writing, where she situates herself,

"in each story", as the white academic believing myself to be out of place in these profoundly Aboriginal spaces. Yet despite my self, my white subjectivity and the colonial burden that I must "bear" I argue that all three stories become places of hope, and spaces of decolonization and radical transformation both for my students and for me. (Blyth 2008, 5)

Responsibly engaging with texts allows for useful dialogue, and is preferable to not doing the work necessary to ethically enter this conversation.

In turn, as a project that engages evident conversations among Indigenous writers, I as a settler scholar am positioned so that it becomes neither my task nor my intention to "discover" something new in the works; rather my work seeks to respond to their claims to

Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous readers about decolonization. I construct arguments about the ways in which these often-dissimilar texts can be read together in order to demonstrate the far-reaching use of poetry to do a particular kind of anti-colonial work: to decolonize bodies and lands by prioritizing sovereignty over one's body as a necessary tool in reclaiming what has been lost through the institutional, physical, sexual and psychic violence of colonization. The project contains close readings of a variety of poems by the selected authors and intersperses the primary texts (poems) carefully within parts of the conversation occurring within secondary texts (critical essays). The form and structure of the project also is deliberate. Whereas subheadings in Chapter 1 are strictly organizational, subheadings in Chapter 2 are content-based, reflecting their assessment of the complex contents of the texts under study by functioning as a type of map. With each subheading building on the previous, Chapter 2 traces a journey from colonial gendered and sexual violence, to the relationship between homeland and bodies, to historical ties of cartography to patriarchal and imperial violence and the ways that the land resists these violent maps. Finally, the chapter argues that Two-Spirit and women poets write about mapping in ways that argue for consent, thereby illuminating for the readers something that the poets already know: that the poems themselves are roadmaps out of the legacies of colonial violence and toward the erotic wholeness necessary for sovereign nations. Chapter 3 extends and deepens these ideas, as it places discussions of consent and sovereign sexuality into an active context by tracing the multiple ways in which sovereign erotics emerge in the writing of Two-Spirit and women poets in a single and continuous account. The Epilogue then affirms the specific utility of poetry as a political and anti-colonial tool, acknowledging the underlying perspective shared by many of the theorists that "[t]here is

little reason for writing poetry outside of the struggle for humanity” (Maracle and Da Cunha 2008, 61).

Chapter 2

Your Skin Is The Map: Tracing Body Cartographies

In Indigenous Women's Poetry

Writing body cartographies is the creative authorial decision to transpose bodily features onto the land, and to render the body a topographical map. The analogy between topographical features of flesh and land transcends metaphor. Colonial violence against the land is inseparable from the multiple forms of violence – psychic, physical, sexual and land based – enacted upon Indigenous bodies, especially the bodies of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people. This is because of their ties to reproducing the *physical* nation, through childbirth, and the *spiritual* nation, through ceremony. Beyond that, Two-Spirit people were targeted because their existence challenges the colonial gender binary and the Christian institution of (heterosexual) marriage, which contextualized the colonizer's attitude whereby "queer sexualities and genders are degraded, ignored, condemned, and destroyed" (Driskill 2004, 54). It also challenges colonial stereotypes of Indigenous sexuality; as Craig Womack notes, "a queer Indian presence . . . *fundamentally* challenges the American mythos about Indians in a manner the public will not accept" (Womack quoted in Driskill 2004, 58). Poets considered in this chapter, especially Joy Harjo, Marilyn Dumont, Qwo-Li Driskill and Deborah Miranda, use their poetry to rewrite colonial maps and resist the violent erasure of bodies from the land, which enabled settler-colonial land appropriation, theft and exploitation.

I. More Than a Metaphor: Settler Colonial Exploitation of Bodies and Land

Attacks on nature are also attacks on Native women's bodies, and by extension, the bodies of Native children.

- Katsi Cook, Mohawk midwife

Since the first settler-colonial contact with North American Indigenous communities, an ongoing 'conquest narrative' has characterized the journals of colonizers including Christopher Columbus and Bartholome de las Casas, as well as the poetry and creative texts produced by settler writers, from first settlement to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From contact onward, many authors mythologize the land as a space that is open and vulnerable to being dominated: through settler colonies and the development of new villages, as well as through subduing the unruly and willful (feminized) Earth through agriculture, forestry and hydroelectric damming. Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale, in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, write that "women's bodies have historically been used as a metaphor for a 'modern', European nation – as, for example, Delacroix's famous rendition of Marianne as a bare-breasted, flag-bearing heroine, leading the French nation into battle" (Pickles and Rutherford 2005, 9). They note a historical context for the feminization of the land and the nation, which precedes the colonization of what is now North America. The parallel between the land and the bodies of the Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people living on this land, however, is central to the colonial enterprise.

Writing about the land as inherently violable space that is available and vulnerable to rape, draws attention to the ways in which each of these forms of violence helped to justify and perpetuate the other. As Andrea Smith notes,

Native peoples have become marked as inherently violable through a process of sexual colonization. By extension, their lands and territories have become marked as violable as well. The connection between the colonization of Native people's bodies – particularly Native women's bodies – and Native lands is not simply metaphorical ... Native peoples, and by extension, Native lands and territories, are marked inherently violable through sexual colonization." (Smith 2005a, 55)

Smith's ordering seems to suggest to the reader that considering sexual and land-based violences as separate concerns ignores their intrinsic interconnection between the two.

Shaunga Tagore writes that "when we think about the connection between the rape of the land (facilitated by colonialism) and the rape of women's bodies (justified by colonialism), this connection is not a mere metaphor" (Tagore 2009) because, as Smith relates, "the colonial patriarchal mind that seeks to control the sexuality of women and Indigenous peoples also controls nature"⁵(2003, 80). Later in *Conquest*, Smith notes the inability of Indigenous peoples to "decolonize without addressing sexism ... [A]ttempting to do so ignores the fact that it has been precisely through gender violence that we have lost our lands in the first place" (Smith 2005a, 137). As traced in Bonita Lawrence's study of

⁵ The term Tagore uses, "rape of the land", is suggestive of the interconnection between violent and disrespectful exploitation *without prior and informed consent* of those who are descendents of and stewards of that land, *and* how the disrespectful interchange once again 'rapes' bodies, as noted in Smith, through the ways in which contamination of food and water sources interferes with normal neurological and reproductive functions in fetuses, children, and sexually mature women.

the loss of “status” and sovereignty under colonial legislation, the “1869 [Gradual Enfranchisement] Act was ... crucial in beginning the process of removing the Indian status of Native women who married non-Natives and indeed of forcing Native women to become members of their husbands’ communities upon marriage, reversing the matrifocal practices common in many of the eastern nations” and also physically removing these women from their homelands (Lawrence 2004, 33). In light of this discussion, and as defined by Andrea Smith, sexual violence cannot be limited to “individual acts of rape – rather it encompasses a wide range of strategies designed not only to destroy people, but to destroy their sense of being a people” (Smith 2005a, 3). In this sense, clearly, sexual violence and gendered violence enable the dislocation of a nation from its land base and its sense of autonomy. Diane Da Silva explains the settler colonial violence that enabled land thefts and that compromises the physical, sexual and spiritual health of Indigenous peoples in answer to her pre-teen daughter addressing the disappearances and murders faced by Anishnaabe women:

It is because we carry life in our womb and we carry the Ancestors of our people to the children. We are always the reminder of creating life for our people. Without us, the people will vanish from this earth. Our culture will cease, our memories too will disappear and we will become extinct.” (2010, 65)

Here, Da Silva points to the ways in which women are targeted as part of genocidal colonial tactics, specifically because of their ability to give birth.

Environmental racism, in this context, is a mechanism for exerting settler colonial domination that denies Indigenous peoples the right to life, as well as access to clean water,

air, food and physical health, including reproductive health – all qualities shared, under these conditions, with non-Indigenous people of colour who suffer from the same processes. As such, Smith argues, environmental racism becomes “another form of sexual violence, as it violates the bodies of Native and other marginalized peoples” (2005a, 66). She notes that “in areas where uranium is mined ... Indian people face skyrocketing rates of cancer and birth defects” (2005a, 66). In addition, she tells of Indigenous women in the Marshall Islands, used as a U.S. nuclear test site, who have experienced giving birth to non-viable fetuses, mutilated by their in-utero exposure to radiation. These are an example of the denial of Indigenous peoples’ right to life, through their denial of the right to a healthy pregnancy and healthy children (Smith 2005a). These examples buttress Smith’s argument connecting environmental racism and sexual violence: “through the rape of the earth, Native women’s bodies are raped once again” (Smith 2005a, 67).

The targeting of women’s bodies for their ability to physically reproduce the nation is coupled with the targeting of Two-Spirit people’s bodies not only because of homophobia and transphobia, but also due to recognition of their ability to “[keep] particular ceremonies” and “[perpetuate] a sacred history”, which are two of the four “attributes of peoplehood” that Tom Holm identifies as having “helped to ensure the survival of Indian tribes throughout the devastating eras of conquest, colonization and forced assimilation” (quoted in Erikson 2010, 472). Imagery around motherhood and nurturing appears in the poetry of Two-Spirit poets including Qwo-Li Driskill and Gregory Scofield, supporting this argument. The first two of the “four attributes of peoplehood” put forward by Tom Holm are the maintenance of language and the understanding of place (Erikson 2010, 472 ,

emphasis added). An understanding of place, and of bodies' relationships to the place(s) where they reside, is the aspect of sovereignty that is most pertinent to consider when exploring cartographic themes in poetry. Therefore, it is relevant to examine not just how the poets propose mapping a new way home, but where they consider home to be.

II. "Where's Home?": The Significance of Home/lands To Poets Employing Body Cartography

*Because the only home
is each other
they've occupied all
the rest
colonized it. An idea about ourselves
is all we own.*

- Paula Gunn Allen, "Some Like Indians Endure"

In her essay, "Space, Place, Land and the Meaning(s) of Home", Jennifer Andrews notes the differing perspectives on land held by Indigenous authors brought up on their traditional territories, as distinct from the views of urban-dwelling poets who were brought up removed from their ancestral territories. Andrews distinguishes between poets living on and off of reserves, and asserts that for poets including Jeannette Armstrong and Kimberley Blaeser, "'Indian Reserves' are spaces and places that signify their ancestral and childhood home" (Andrews 2011c, 223). However, for poets including Marilyn Dumont and Marie Annharte Baker, Andrews notes that their "ties to land are based less on the specifics of a single geographic location" (Andrews 2011c, 224). While Andrews argues that their

views can be linked to “the flexibility of the concept of ‘Indian Country’” (224), I argue that it may be even more accurate to read them as conceiving of a homeland that is portable and contained within their bodies.

For Jeannette Armstrong, “the land constantly speaks” (quoted in Andrews 2011b, 175); her homeland is understood as a geographical location, within the Okanagan Valley.

As a woman brought up on the original territory of her people, she writes,

blood of my people
 courses through
 veins
 coming to me
 through dust
 rising and falling
 across ages
 the dust
 that is *my people*
 that is the land” (1990, 17)

This passage signals the continuity she feels between the land and her body, in that she sees the land as the material substance of her ancestors’ flesh. As well, she writes of the land as feminized, in a way that refutes any negative colonial associations between the feminine and a violable space. For Armstrong, the land is

a fertile ground
 from which generations spring
 out of the landscape of grandmother. (1990, 17)

Here she situates the importance of the land to current and future generations, as well as to preserving the historical landscape and the bones of ancestors.

For Miranda, who did not grow up on her traditional territory, her relationship to one specific area of land or even to the continent in its entirety diverges from the perspective held by Armstrong. In “Home”, she wonders,

Ah, sweetheart,
 this pillaged continent’s not what I’ve lost,
 not the sanctuary searched for since birth.
 All lusts ever harbored, each stolen deed of desire-
 these fantasies aren’t native land. Where’s home? (Miranda 2005)

Several pages later, in a different poem, Miranda answers her own question with the line: “here in the dark nation of my body I am never homeless”(Miranda 2005). Similarly, in “Indian Territory”, Driskill writes,

who gave your body back to you?
 Hush.
 This is home now.
 You are home.
 You are home. (2005, 57)

The passage confirms a link between embodied sovereignty and ‘coming home’, by inferring that “Indian Territory” now lives within the body of whoever s/he addresses in this poem. This vision of home as contained within the body, particularly as it pertains to the notion of ‘mapping ways home’, is also evident in Driskill’s poem “Stolen from Our bodies”. S/he writes,

we were stolen from our bodies
 we were stolen from our homes
 and we are fighters in this long war
 to bring us all back home. (2004, 54)

The parallel line structure and repetition of “*we were stolen from our bodies*” and then “*we were stolen from our homes*” (2005, 54, emphasis added) suggests an equation of bodies and homes. Therefore, the stanza’s final line, by referencing bringing “us all back home”, suggests that home can refer to the home of one’s body, so that the war to get back to one’s home may include a struggle toward sovereign sexuality. The presence of topographical and mapping imagery in Miranda and Driskill’s work on bodies and sexuality indicates their understanding of autonomy of the flesh as a necessary step toward decolonizing a nation that may or may not still be geographically near its homeland. In her poem “After San Quentin,” Miranda writes,

All this time I thought we had nothing
 --no land, no prayers, no language.
 I was wrong.
 We are the containers
 that hold our colonized history. (2005, 17)

Miranda’s understanding of bodies as “the containers that hold our colonized history”(17) gives her back what she thought was lost.

Marilyn Dumont, in *A Really Good Brown Girl*, writes about the geographic regions significant to her life as she moved from Saskatchewan to Vancouver, a time that was dealt with in more depth and darkness in her book *Green Girl Dreams Mountains* (Dumont 2001). In “Liquid Prairie”, she writes,

I miss the North Saskatchewan that runs through
those trees that shoot up black and grand from its cool hips. (1996)

Here she situates her embodied memory of Saskatchewan in a way that views the prairies as alive, and as associated with fertility. Then, at the end of the poem, Dumont lets the reader know that she has moved:

I sit on this thin coast
but haven't yet been on that belly of water
they call the ocean. (1996, 65)

This passage links the land and water once again to images associated with fertility. The water of the womb is connected to the water of the earth and speaks to the natural cycles that link reproduction to the moon and water through tidal pulls. At first glance, the imagery around the moon, womb and reproduction seems to feminize the landscape in a way that might exclude Two-Spirit writers from using this language of fertility in relation to their bodies as well as the earth. Yet both Gregory Scofield in *Love Medicine and One Song* and Qwo-Li Driskill in *Walking with Ghosts* confirm that imagery around mothering and the womb is not just limited to those who are biologically female, but that the 'mothering' of a nation is also about nurturing cultural survival and the spiritual health of the nation. Scofield, in his poem "Drive By", declares that is the speaker is "birthing...poems like some love-sick fool" (Scofield 2009, 36), positioning the writing of poetry as a generative act. It follows that the poetry is generative as it breathes life into old ceremonies and naturalizes queer lovemaking.

The image of veins as rivers, as utilized in Leanne Simpson's (2008) non-fiction work, *Lighting the Eighth Fire*, suggests that both water and blood represent important

pathways for remapping; she notes that the water of the womb is an unborn child's first home, and references the correlation between veins and rivers as containing the life force of people and nature, respectively (2008, 206). Harjo employs similar imagery in her poem, "Map to the Next World", where she writes that "The place of entry [to the next world] is the sea of your mother's blood, your father's small death as he longs to know himself in another" (2000, 20). Here she makes explicit that just as sexuality and birth are important in creating the next world, so too is the type of rebirth that takes us away from the devastation of the previous world. Veins are pathways, and, like rivers of water can be dammed and destroy life, *or* can be protected and sustain life, so it is with the rivers of blood in our veins. The lines that precede this, in "A Map to the Next World", are:

Our forgetfulness stalks us, walks the earth behind us, leaving a trail of paper
diapers, needles, and wasted blood

An imperfect map will have to do, little one. (Harjo 2000, 19)

In linking her reference to blood in the context of drug abuse, violence and death, with the image of blood as the entry point to creating new life, Harjo signals that veins are fragile ecosystems, sustaining people as long as they are intact and alive.

Each collection of poetry presents these notions of bodies and body cartographies in a different way. Miranda, Armstrong, and Harjo write of what has been lost and destroyed through resource exploitation and greed, representing the scars not shown on European maps. Driskill and Chrystos write about the Trail of Tears, the term used to refer to the violent and brutal relocations of Cherokee people and other Indigenous nations from the Southeastern States to West of the Mississippi River, in 1838-1839. Dumont writes about

urban landscapes as containing a heartbeat, veins, and arteries, suggesting the quality that Gerald Vizenor calls *survivance* – a hybrid of survival and resistance – even amidst the concrete and inhospitable environments that exist along major corridors in Vancouver (Vizenor 2009; Dumont 2001). A uniting thread among the various poems is that they acknowledge the ways in which colonial violence shapes the landscape in which they live, regardless of whether they represent that as one particular city or region, or the entirety of the continent.

III. “Maps Evoke A Bloody History”: Cartographies of Violence, Cartographies of Healing

*Because they are so closely linked to definitions of and claims to Native lands,
European maps iterate, instigate and justify colonial violence against the people to
whom the lands belong*

*- Kelli Lyon Johnson, “Writing Deeper Maps: Mapmaking, Local Indigenous Knowledges
and Literary Nationalism in Native Women’s Writing”*

Colonial mapping is a violent enterprise that emerges from the deaths and/or forced relocations of the land’s original inhabitants. This mapping also is highly gendered, as it rewards the aggressive, masculinized colonizer who takes the land through force. In her essay on writing “deeper” maps (Hogan 1997) in Indigenous literatures, Johnson notes that

a number of Native women writers from a variety of nations: Linda Hogan, Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo, Kimberly Blaeser, Deborah Miranda, Leslie Marmon Silko,

LeAnne Howe use images of maps and mapping as a way of interrogating European mapmaking as a colonial enterprise, exposing the wholesale theft of land that began in the Americas in the fifteenth century and that continues today. (2008, 106)

Johnson then extends this argument to account for “many Native women writers’ interest in European and Indigenous maps” (2008, 106) – an interest also found in the work of Two-Spirit writers. She notes, for instance, that Hogan, Erdrich, and Miranda “repeatedly insist that maps are not metaphors, and they seek Indigenous paradigms for understanding and representing Native lands that are not predicated on possession and violation” (2008, 106). For example, in “Old Territories, New Maps”, Miranda writes,

Sweet, these are the maps we made together,

Territories we foolishly vowed to own.

Here, the place we wandered off the map, moved deep into a land without scars.

(Miranda 2005)

Here Miranda proposes new maps and a way toward healing, while disavowing European cartography and critiquing the concept of land ownership. Within the context of this chapter, there are four types, or models of mapping identified in the works of the selected poets : 1) mapping topographical features of the land (hills, rivers, valleys) onto bodies, as explored in the poetry of Marilyn Dumont ; 2) having the form of the poem, as well as its content, function as a map, as in Harjo’s “Map to the Next World”; 3) a poetic anthology functioning as a geographical (Harjo) or genealogical (Miranda) map, marking the journey of one’s life or one’s family across ‘borders’; and 4) a type of ‘mapping’ that requires an intimate knowledge of the land (or body), and of its backroads, places not shown on any

conventional map, as in Miranda's poetry, which blurs the lines between this experience-based type of mapping as applying to the land as well as to the intimate geographies of lovers' bodies. All four of these types of mapping, or alternative cartographies, resist being categorized as mere metaphors or aesthetic decisions.

Smith notes that violence against women's bodies being analogized as violence against the land and vice versa cannot be and is not a simple metaphor. Gendered violence enabled colonial land theft, and settler colonial resource exploitation (as in mines and refineries adjacent to reserves/reservations) rapes the both the land and the bodies of its residents – and particularly to women of child-bearing age. The poets also write about maps in ways that disrupt the colonial enterprise of mapping, which is deeply rooted in capitalist concepts of ownership and the conquest of nature. As Smith notes,

A common complaint among colonizers was that indigenous peoples did not properly subdue the natural environment. This reasoning became the colonizer's legal basis for appropriating land from Native peoples. For instance, Governor John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay colony declared that America fell under the legal rubric of *vacuum domicilium* because the Indians had not 'subdued' it and therefore had only a 'natural' and not a 'civil' right to it. (Smith 2005a, 56)

This logic hinges upon the need to *see* evidence of a markedly altered landscape in order to believe that any attempts at land management had occurred; on the contrary, responsible land management, including controlled burning of forested areas and the responsible farming of crops such as corn, had been going on for thousands of years.

Finally, in direct opposition to a capitalist relationship to the earth that views it as a source of potential wealth, poets including Harjo, Armstrong, Driskill and Miranda write about mapping in a way which stresses the need for an intimate knowledge of the topographies in question- be they topographies of flesh or of earth; in this way, the poets resist colonial conquest narratives that sought/seek to subdue nature and control sexuality *through force*. Cartography violently imposes new borders not only through force against the land's inhabitants but through its creation of borders in a manner that is more concerned with profit maximization through access to water and other resources. An alternative model of mapping, as proposed by Hogan and Harjo, is born out of a more intimate knowledge of a particular territory, disseminated orally as well as in print, to account for what cannot be drawn on any map (Hogan 1997).

The poems support traditional knowledge and also, despite somber topics including biological degradation of sacred territories, are hopeful in their prediction of a future in which Indigenous lands and bodies prove resilient, find "way[s] back through clear cuts, slash and burn, along right-of-ways, cut-lines, nerve endings, longitude and latitude, along arteries, over skin plains, and valleys of hair, topographical features of flesh" (Dumont 1996, 73).

One historical figure that features prominently in the poetry of Cherokee poet Qwo-Li Driskill and Mvskoke (Creek) poet Joy Harjo is Andrew Jackson. Jackson's involvement in the forcible relocation and murder of many Cherokee people from Georgia to Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears has forever altered the physical landscape of his people, removing and relocating their entire nation onto a foreign section of land, and "leaving trails across

the continent” (Harjo 2000). Similarly, Jackson’s role in the Red Stick War of 1813-1814, where Creek people were murdered and displaced, and their fertile farmland destroyed, is significant in Harjo’s ancestral memory (Jordan 2008). In Driskill’s poem “Letter to Tsi-ge’yu” (“beloved”, 2005, 34-5), the land is transformed into a body, with rivers as veins, now filled with the blood of his ancestors: in this way, Driskill recalls the visceral or ‘blood’ memory of the Trail of Tears, the path along which the forcible relocation occurred. In *A Map to the Next World*, Harjo refers to how “Andrew Jackson was made president after being medaled with high war honors by the U.S. Government for killing Mvskoke women and children who were resisting being forced from their homelands” (2000, 59). Harjo also maps the part of her history, as a Mvskoke/Creek woman, that preceded her physical birth. She constructs a temporal and geographical map for the paths that her life has taken in what Andrews calls “cartographic alternatives, turning her body into a map to reflect on the historical displacement of the Muskogee people and forge a meaningful homeplace” (Andrews 2011c, 253). Using Driskill and Harjo’s examples of Jackson being rewarded at least in part for his involvement in the forcible relocations of Indigenous nations off their original homelands, as well as the renaming of U.S. landmarks and cities after many U.S. war heroes including Jackson, it becomes evident that the colonial enterprise of remapping new borders and place names is not a mere formality; it emerges from the violent, often deadly relocation of the people being moved, and also rewards those responsible for the moving, altering place names to reward colonial land theft.

The relationship between physical violence against, and deaths of, Indigenous peoples, and the renaming of their lands is described in Miranda’s article, “Extermination of the Joyas: Gendercide in Spanish California”. She explains that,

Erasure of tribal terms, tribal group names, and personal tribal names during colonization was a strategy used by European colonizers throughout the Americas.

...To replace various tribal words with a Spanish word is indeed an appropriation of sovereignty. (Miranda 2010, 260)

For Two-Spirit people and for women, European maps recall the violence, dominance and removal of their bodily and national sovereignty. European maps not only bear the names of white men instead of Indigenous place names; they also function as an historical record, frozen in time, mapping the forcible relocation of nations such as the Cherokee, and the murders of Indigenous women, children and Two-Spirit peoples as a way to facilitate genocide against Indigenous nations. Violent colonial tools such as the Indian Act and the loss of status imposed upon Indigenous women who married white men, and onto their children, further dispossessed Indigenous peoples from their homelands and facilitated urbanization, displacement and land theft. However, while maps may have been historically associated with imperialism and colonialism, re-mapping is a rejection of the violence of European cartography. Maps feature prominently in the works of many contemporary Indigenous women and Two-Spirit poets. Rejecting European maps, through creating new maps or returning to old ones, can be a positive step toward decolonization.

In Christopher Board's 1967 text, "Maps as Models", he offers the idea that "maps are useful analytical tools which help investigators to see the...world in a new light, or even to allow them an entirely new view of reality" (quoted in Andrews 2011b, 143). It follows that "recovering and using the practice of mapping thus promotes cultural survival and sovereignty" (Johnson 2008, 111) among Indigenous peoples. The appearance of body

cartographies as a theme within Indigenous poetry is a positive step. What the poems map is also what they propose as part of the path forward. Miranda writes that for her, “These poems are a record of my journey out of destruction and into a North American indigenous state of creativity, the erotic and joy” (Miranda 2005, 4). They may not be maps with a scale, nor will they tell you how long your journey might be or the order in which it will unfold; but for Miranda, they map her journey back to her (erotic, whole) self and to a sovereign articulation of her sexuality and positionality.

IV. “Refused To Be Shaped By The Makers Of Maps”: The Land As Stubborn And Resilient

What I liked was that the land refused to be shaped by the makers of maps. Land had its own will. (Hogan 1997, 123)

Novelist Linda Hogan tells the story of a stubborn land, a land that “embodies ancestral pain”(LaRocque quoted in Million 2009, 72) and actively resists colonial remapping in much the same way as Dumont writes about fighting her way back to an autonomous self. Hogan’s landscape is hard to ‘pin down’; it contains waterways that require knowledge of the land far more intimate than that of early colonial cartographers. The relationship between European mapping and traditional Indigenous knowledge is one fraught with contradiction. Despite their inaccuracies, and their inability to reflect the colonial devastation of landscapes through the damage left by hydroelectric and nuclear energy projects,

European maps have come to represent the epitome of scientific accuracy, as the explosion of European mapping that is sometimes called the “cartographic

revolution” coincided with colonial competition and the rise of science in the seventeenth century...In the dominant culture, mapping territory can no longer be separated from controlling or owning territory. (Johnson 2008, 105-6)

Mapping an area as a way of declaring ownership confirms the earlier argument that mapping is bound up in colonial violence. However, the alternative cartographic models, such as making one’s own map, and using a map that is invisible but passed down orally, as in Harjo’s “A Map to the Next World”, suggests that mapping can be much less static; it can reflect a constantly changing landscape and our constantly evolving roles as guardians of intimate topographical knowledge.

Several poets write about a willful land, or about an ability to see beyond “Western” maps and into the deeper layers of the landscape. For instance, in Miranda’s “Indian Cartography”, the opening segment affirms that places, “like family bloodlines”, are rife with individually assigned and three-dimensional meanings that cannot be captured in the form of a “Western” map. Of her father, Miranda writes, “When he comes to the valley drowned by a displaced river he swims out, floats on his face with eyes open, looks down into lands not drawn on any map”(Miranda 1999, 69). Miranda’s mention of the altered landscape is an evocative image, and aligns with the arguments put forward by Andrea Smith and Kelli Lyons Johnson. These theorists make reference to lands such as dried-up riverbeds and contaminated soil, devastated by colonial resource exploitation, which are absent from the particular narratives of “Western” cartography. Colonial maps are frozen in one particular moment in time, and align with the concept of a “dead” land, separate from the human existence on its surface.

Smith addresses the disconnection between the land and human existence on its surface in her critique of pro-population control environmentalism. The population control sentiment expressed by the environmental groups she examines “assumes that people are not part of the world. This sentiment also assumes that all people, not just those with wealth and institutional power, are equally responsible for massive environmental destruction” (63). By way of contrast, mapping topographical features onto the body and bodily attributes onto the land helps to challenge any artificial separation between the two. Dumont’s “Not Just a Platform For My Dance” is an example of personification of the land that demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between land and bodies. She writes,

This headstrong grass and relenting willow
 these flat-footed fields and applauding leaves
 these frank winds and electric sky
 are my prayer
 they are my medicine
 and they become my song
 this land is not
 just a platform for my dance. (1996, 46)

Her poem talks about an intimate type of citizenship. The land takes on living characteristics; it is not just dead earth beneath her feet. Citizenship of this land does not equate with the right “to set my house my car my fence” on it (Dumont 1996, 46). In “He Taught Me”, later in the same collection of poetry, Dumont writes about the speaker’s body as if it is the land, as if the speaker and her lover are traversing pathways “along arteries, over skin plains and valleys of hair, topographical features of flesh” (73). By writing about

land as body and body as land, Dumont's poetry illuminates and brings to life what Mari-Jo Moore, noted Aboriginal writer and theorist, means when she writes:

I have found a deepening connection to the land through experiencing poetry. The land where my ancestors lived and died for thousands of years. The land fed with the skin, bones and flesh of those who have gone before me. The same land that now feeds me, and waits for me to return the favour. (2000, 6 , emphasis added)

Similarly, by animating the earth as living, and noting that it is not "just a plot to bury my dead my seed" (Dumont 1996, 46), Dumont reminds her readers that even while the earth has significance for its ability to sustain life through food and water, and to house the dead at sacred burial sites (such as "The Pines"), the land also lives independent of human interference.

Getting lost and finding places uncharted on any map also can be deeply liberating and representative of erotic discovery and healing. Deborah Miranda's poem "Old Territory, New Maps" tracks the road trip she takes with her new lover. The poem is about honouring and "pleasuring old spirits" (2005, 75), as much as it is about discovering new pleasure within each other's bodies. She notes how, like

Those people whose lands we cross,

We don't live by lines drawn on paper (2005, 75),

highlighting their rejection of not only certain maps, but also certain ways of knowing.

Later in the poem, Miranda recalls how,

After twelve hundred miles together

We enter green forest along a fearless river.

This dense topography we can't see through

...

there at last you clasp my hand, guide it

to a place beyond maps... (2005, 76)

Miranda draws a parallel between the uncharted territory discovered “deep into a land without scars” (2005, 76), and the awakening of sexual pleasure and new possibilities in a queer relationship, having been married to a man for many years beforehand. This story begs to be told in the form of a poem, honouring the thoughtful pauses in the conversation and the journey, and allowing reader to observe links between rearticulations of sexuality and a different relationship to the land through a rejection of European cartography.

Linda Hogan's novel *Solar Storms* explores the role of mapping in preserving intimate knowledge of the land. It refers to alternative pathways that require knowing the land better than the maps do, and to the terrible lies and tricks of history, preserved and somehow reified through the deceptive maps of European cartographers. Its main characters are all women, driven by a willful desire to explore the land of their ancestors; as well, two of the central characters in the book, Bush and Dora-Rouge, possess knowledge of hidden pathways that allow a seemingly impossible canoe voyage to become a reality. When Bush looks for their destination on a map, and sighs, “I've looked and looked and I just can't see it” (Hogan 1997, 137), Dora-Rouge reminds her, “These maps are not our inventions. Maps are only masks over the face of God. There are other ways around the world” (138). Hogan's novel is full of references to what she calls “deeper maps” (123). Johnson defines these deeper maps (Hogan 1997) as “one kind of Indigenous mapmaking practice, one that recognizes the importance of narratives, especially local narratives, in the

history of Indigenous cartographic traditions” (Johnson 114). However, the crucial difference between the contribution made by Hogan’s novel and the poetry of Miranda, Dumont, Harjo and Diane Glancy, among others, is that *Solar Storms* tells the reader in a more direct fashion about the inadequacies of colonial maps, whereas the poetry considered in this chapter actually functions as its own type of map. The anthologies can be read as maps of the authors’ lives and relocations, as is the case with Miranda’s *Indian Cartography*, Dumont’s *Green Girl Dreams Mountains*, and, most significantly, Harjo’s *A Map to the Next World*.

Poems such as “Map to the Next World” and “Indian Cartography” actually function as roadmaps toward decolonization. These are both poems that lend themselves well to being read aloud: they further distance themselves from two-dimensional maps that are frozen in time and space, removed from personal experience and an intimate relationship to the ever-changing landscape. Andrews writes that Diane Glancy’s *The Relief of America* “explores alternative cartographies by attending to the lost and forgotten memories of those whose terrain was taken from them in the effort to build America” (Andrews 2011b, 143); the same is true of Miranda’s two collections of poetry, *The Zen of La Llorona* and *Indian Cartography*. “Indian Cartography” begins with an image of her father, who, in other parts of her family’s genealogical map, is incarcerated in San Quentin Prison. Here, though, Miranda writes,

My father opens a map of California
traces mountain ranges, county borders like family bloodlines. Tuolumne,
Salinas, Los Angeles, Paso Robles,
Ventura, Santa Barbara, Saticoy,

Tehachapi. Places he was happy,
 or where tragedy greeted him
 like an old unpleasant relative. (1999, 76)

The image of her father's hands tracing the physical copy of a "standard" European map of California, and associating its borders and topographies with family stories, suggests to the reader that the map is meaningless without the stories that he recalls. In a sense, by individualizing the experience of this landscape, Miranda refutes the idea of an empirical, scientific truth ever being contained within colonial cartographies, designed to expedite the exploitations of the California gold rush.

An especially fascinating relationship between mapping and poetics appears throughout the entirety of Joy Harjo's *A Map to the Next World*. This is because, as much as Harjo's poetry offers up a map toward a new world through awakening the power of the erotic, reviving traditional knowledge and remembering humans' rightful place within the natural world, her book of poetry also reveals a map of her own journey. In a non-linear fashion, *A Map to the Next World* recounts the story of her life, and traces her moves from Oklahoma to California to Hawai'i. In "holdup", "twins meet up with monsters in the glittering city", and "returning from the enemy", Harjo writes about being robbed at gunpoint, along with writer and friend Greg Sarris, in Los Angeles. This robbery was the catalyst for Harjo's move to Hawai'i, which is not mentioned until toward the end of the anthology ("earthly desire", 2000, 115). Harjo writes of countless other travels, including her trips to Italy and Norway, and also refers to trips where she leaves her body, in part because of a desire to leave the memories of violent situations in her childhood. Her emphasis on travel signals the ability of a people to survive despite such traumas as

forcible relocation, such the Trail of Tears. In “A Map to the Next World”, she writes, “for the soul is a wanderer with many hands and feet”(Harjo 2000, 19), so physical removal, either voluntarily or by force (and this collection of poetry references both) does not limit the possibility for cultural survival, which is housed within the rituals of song and of lovemaking.

V. “Ask Permission”: Using a Consent-Based Model To Re-Map Borders Of Land and Bodies

Beware. The territory of love does not take kindly to being colonized.

- Deborah Miranda, “The Territory of Love”

Poets including Cheryl Savaggeau (in Laronde and Maracle, eds. 2000, 61), Akiwenzie Damm, Driskill, Dumont, Harjo and Scofield, write about mapping and borders as ways of asserting control over their bodies, and requiring a consent-based model in their expressions of sexuality that recalls the taking of both *bodies* and *land* by force under settler colonialism. The relationship between mapping and sexuality is complex; both cartography and sexual acts have the potential to be performed with great care and mutual respect (between cartographer and the area mapped, between lovers). Conversely, both mapping and sex can be used in ways that do not respect the limitations of touch, or the order of the natural world.

Through his emphasis on lovemaking in the Cree tradition as an expression of “reverence, respect and the sacred”(Cariou 2009, iii), Scofield in *Love Medicine* and his

other works presents a model that is melodic, sensual, and nuanced. Rifkin writes that *Love Medicine* is a book that contributes to decolonization, saying “instead of seeing Aboriginal peoples as the victims of sexual abuse, as in residential schools, *Love Medicine* posits Aboriginal peoples as sexual beings with a precontact”, as well as a post-contact, “history of complex, loving relationships”(Rifkin 2011, 198-9). Scofield’s writing offers reverent love poems while simultaneously emphasizing consent as an important part of any sacred and loving relationship. Scofield’s discussion of consent can be found in his introductory remarks, where he writes, “I have asked ... my dream-love, to whom this book is dedicated ... permission to share him with you, to present him in the most honourable, honest and sacred way I know” (2009, 3). Having requested consent to share these intimate poems with a wider audience, Scofield’s prior negotiations of consent in the context of his romantic relationship(s) with the recurring characters Dean and Michelle emerge in “Long ride home”. He writes,

The crevice of you, that gorge
 between hip and thigh,
 that smooth divide, flat out
 as any highway
 a long ride home, Green light
 my red night traveler, I’ll ride
 the map
 as far as it goes, drive you
 the way you were meant
 to be driven: hard to the touch. (2009, 35)

From this passage, the reader understands that a conversation has taken place between the lovers. The speaker grants his lover a “green light” to travel and explore him, while he “ride[s] the map” of his lover’s body, in a reciprocal gesture of erotic touch. The poem continues,

Light on the brakes- Go on
 My explorer, stretch all your miles
Go on
 Take the wheel, take it...(2009, 35)

The passage demonstrates the duality of pleasure, where the poet is anxious to please his lover, and by granting his lover permission to explore his body he effectively disrupts the colonial associations with ‘explorers’ as unwanted intruders onto the land.

The negotiations of lovemaking are featured throughout much of Indigenous erotic poetry. The many different forms taken by these discussions of consent reflect the diversity of personalities, expressions of gender and sexuality, and personal and national life experiences of the authors. While Scofield writes about having established consent in a respectful relationship, Harjo preemptively reminds her future lover to always “ask permission” (2000, 77), demonstrating the other half of that equation and affirming that healthy sexuality requires an open dialogue between all parties involved. Savaggeau warns the intended audience of her poem, *You are walking the trails/ that declare this body/Abanaki land*” (in Laronde and Maracle, eds. 2000, 61), animating her body as the land and asserting sovereignty over her own flesh. In “Map of the Americas”, Driskill expresses trepidation in allowing his non-Indigenous lover entry into the territory of his

body through lovemaking, as s/he writes, “When your hands travel across my hemispheres, know these lands have been invaded before” (2005, 11). By saying so, s/he reminds hir lover that while hir body is only one person, it is also what Miranda calls “the container” of a “colonized history” (2005, 17) that recalls national traumas as if they were done to hir body. Harjo takes the conversation regarding consent even further. In mapping her body and mind as a country, she effectively names herself a ‘border agent’, responsible for allowing entry into her ‘country’, her body. She writes:

The laws of the gods I claim state:

When entering another country do not claim ownership.

It’s important to address the souls there kindly, with respect.

Ask permission.

I am asking you to leave the country of my body, my mind, if you have anything other than honorable intentions. (Harjo 2000, 77, original italics)

By requesting respect, and by referring to the laws and beliefs of her people, Harjo asserts sovereignty over her own sexuality, and also as an embodiment of a sovereign (Mvskoke) nation. She blurs the line between sovereign sexuality and national sovereignty by demanding consent in any interaction with an outsider, be it sexual or territorial.

Dumont, in “He Taught Me”, uses an inverse model of “body topography” in which the body is now described as the land the man conquers, but the speaking I (the woman in the poem) is able to remain “forester” of her own body and her own land. For Dumont, in “He Taught Me”, sex is not a one-sided, ‘taking’ activity, but rather requires a constant negotiation of consent. The speaker does not relent and allow herself to be “cut down”. Rather, she navigates her way back through the destruction of “clear cuts”, and comes back

to herself and her sexuality, declaring at the end of the poem that “I’d become a forester of my own flesh” (2006, 73). Here she speaks back to the colonial paradigm of the land lying open and vulnerable to rape and conquest. In fact, she is resisting the colonial model where consent was not needed to exploit land and bodies, due to the assumption that the land was not being sufficiently exploited by Indigenous peoples to be considered rightfully ‘theirs’. Similarly, Indigenous bodies were seen as open to exploitation, due to their association, within colonial mentality, with abjection and/or hypersexuality.

Perhaps one of the best examples of a poem which maps consent is Jeannette Armstrong’s poem, “Let Me”:

Kiss your footprints
 In the grass
 I have been a warrior
 Because I suffer
 ...
 let
 me
 open my way
 among grasses
 I carry your seed
 The wind will wipe out
 Little traces of you. (Armstrong 1990)

Early in the poem, Armstrong situates the speaker’s erotic desire along a path of her lover’s footprints as they serve as a map toward fulfillment of this desire. Later, she writes “the wind will wipe out little traces of you” (1990, 62), which is reminiscent of Harjo’s “Map to

the Next World”, where she writes “The map must be of sand and can’t be read by ordinary light” (Harjo 2000, 59); both poets write about maps and pathways that are impermanent and easily lost over time. These perspectives on maps as mutable reject colonial notions of the land, or of its First Peoples, as static and unchanging. Armstrong reminds her reader of the inherent flux and mutability of the earth in the final poem of *Breath Tracks*. The poem, “Untitled”, is set during a snowstorm:

In the turning of the earth
 The winds blow over the snow
 ... all things change endlessly...
 there are tracks of things
 and the snow is disturbed
 by the feet passing
 and the land changes again. (1990, 111)

The land is changed, and always changing. Whereas some poems such as Miranda’s “Indian Cartography” trace the exploitation and damage done to the land, scars not shown on any map, Armstrong’s “Untitled” is more hopeful in its tone. It also confirms the inadequacy of European cartography for depicting the altered and alterable landscape, but it does so by using examples of the land changing itself. This portrays the earth more as embodied, possessing agency and the ability to heal its own wounds.

Finally, Harjo’s “A Map to the Next World” tells her granddaughter a story about how the earth and its inhabitants got into the state we are presently in. Harjo’s poem imagines one way that this story might end. She traces the histories of capitalist greed, exploitation, and pollution of the earth, as well as endemic social issues such as drug abuse,

before focusing on solutions that promote healing the damage humans have done to the earth and to each other. Harjo proposes relearning “the language of the land”, through embodied memory, and through the power of the erotic (2000, 59). “A Map to the Next World” is written for and dedicated to Harjo granddaughter, Desiray Kierra Chee. The poem is a type of narrated map that provides, among other things, a social commentary on the environmental degradation of the earth. Harjo invites the reader to survey the damage, to “take note of the proliferation of supermarkets and malls, the altars of money”, which for her are ubiquitous symbols of consumption and capitalism that “best describe the detour from grace” (2000, 19). Later in the poem, Harjo offers ways to get to the new world, noting that “there will be no X, no guidebook with words you can carry” (2000, 20). In other words, this will not be a two-dimensional map. Harjo writes that the “place of entry” to the next world is “the sea of your mother’s blood, your father’s small death as he longs to know himself in another” (2000, 20). She makes it clear that this map to the next world is to be found through the expression of sovereign sexuality.

Chapter 3

Sovereign Bodies, Sovereign Earth

In the introduction to *The Zen of La Llorona*, Deborah Miranda writes, “love and the erotic are powerfully creative forces in human lives, in what Joy Harjo calls ‘the epic search for grace’” (2005, 3). This chapter explores the ways in which poetry addresses erotic sovereignty, a term that refers to the relationship between sovereign sexuality and national sovereignty. To reiterate, “sovereign sexuality” refers to the ability to assert control over one’s body, including bodily comportment, gender identity and reproductive choice, without interference from another governing body (such as the colonial state). This concept of sovereign sexuality is compatible with the type of national sovereignty that Andrea Smith invokes in “Native American Feminism, Sovereignty and Social Change” (Smith 2005a). When these two types of sovereignty are read together (See Appendix A, 112), these two concepts encompass the qualities of “sovereign erotics”, or the “erotics of sovereignty” (Driskill 2003, 2004; Miranda 2002; Rifkin 2011; Warrior 2008).

This chapter focuses on the translation into poetry of the dispossession of North American Indigenous peoples from their homelands and of the search for healing from this trauma through alternative conceptions of home and belonging that honour sexual and gender diversity and diverse forms of love. Miranda, Driskill, Armstrong, Dumont, Chrystos, and Scofield all write about sensual pleasure as an integral component of ‘coming home’ and affirming their personal and national survival and renewal despite centuries of colonial violence. For many of these authors, as well as poets included in anthologies such as Kegedonce Press’ *My Home as I Remember* (Laronde and Maracle, eds. 2000), their

homelands are now internalized within their bodies. Given the correlation between “tribal” and “embodied” sovereignty (Smith 2005: 121), this chapter argues that Indigenous erotic poetry that expresses a pantheon of gender and sexual expressions, as well as the struggles for bodily autonomy under colonialism is part of a struggle toward Indigenous survival and autonomy after centuries of colonization.⁷ Smith writes,

gender justice is often articulated as being a separate issue from issues of survival for indigenous peoples. Such an understanding presupposes that we could actually decolonize without addressing sexism, which ignores the fact that it has been precisely through gender violence that we have lost our lands in the first place. (2003, 121)

As if to respond to this view of decolonization, Driskill writes that Two-Spirit people are “creating literatures that reflect Sovereign Erotics, and in doing so participate in the process of radical, holistic decolonization” (Driskill 2004, 58).

The effort to advance sovereignty struggles by acquiring autonomy over individual bodies correlates with the need for indigenous erotica. Miranda’s (2002) essay, “Dildos, Hummingbirds and Driving her Crazy: Searching for American Indian Women’s Love

⁷ In her essay, “Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change”, Smith includes a chart materials produced by “the Sacred Circle, a national American Indian resource center for domestic and sexual violence based in South Dakota”. Their brochure *Sovereign Women Sovereign Nations* “has a chart comparing “Tribal Sovereignty” to “Native Women’s Sovereignty”. Its first line reads that “All Tribal Nations have an inherent right to a land base: possession and control is unquestioned and honoured by other nations. To exist without fear, but with freedom” and, “All Native Women Have an Inherent Right to their body and path in life: the possession and control is unquestioned and honoured by others. To exist without fear, but with freedom” (quoted in Smith 2005b, 121).

Poetry and Erotics”, lamented the lack of published erotica. However, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm has since addressed this need by creating the anthology *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*. In terms of the ongoing conversation between theorists and poets (and those who are both), Justice, Womack, Miranda, Driskill and Damm all identify the value of creative writing as a way of asserting bodily and land-based sovereignty. Justice points to the need for at least two sustaining pillars for an autonomous community: “a community from which memory is spoken, and a sovereignty of mind and body, *both the body politic and the physical bod.*” (Justice 2010). This is the type of sovereignty explored in this project, one where there is agency over both land and body, and the two are inseparable.

Indigenous creative writers contribute to decolonization and to forwarding sovereignty movements through their ability to rewrite and re-present their tribal histories, and their sexualities, in ways that counter colonial narratives and stereotypes. Craig S. Womack writes that “[t]he ongoing expression of a tribal voice, through imagination, language and literature, contributes to keeping sovereignty alive in the citizens of a nation and gives sovereignty a meaning that is defined within the tribe rather than by external sources” (Womack quoted in Justice 2010, 117). He also reminds the reader that settler colonial writing around Indigenous sexuality was a form of psychic violence, and emphasizes the “right [of Indigenous writers] to present images of themselves” in a way that subverts the language of exoticization, abjection, as well as the imagery of conquest and violent colonial penetration of both body and land (Womack 1999, 14). Driskill notes that many Two-Spirit writers such as Brant, Scofield, Chrystos and Miranda, are “creating literatures that reflect a Sovereign Erotic, and in doing so participate in the process of radical, holistic decolonization” (Driskill 2004, 58). The stories these poets

tell are clearly contemporary but they are also referential and historical because, as Miranda writes, “We are the containers that hold our colonized history”(2005, 17). For Robert Warrior, liberation comes from the erotic: “To engage the erotic is to challenge the power of the psychic structures that keep us in our place” (Warrior quoted in Fagan 2008, 84-5). Warrior’s assertion, as well as many other ideas that will be expanded upon in this chapter, point to the erotic as liberating and contributing to forward motion, away from the violence of settler colonialism and toward a new, better world.

The body is an important site of political resistance. As the Indigenous poets examined here explain, depending on one’s individual, enduring relationship to a particular land or territory, defending sovereignty over one’s flesh is either a necessary first step to decolonizing and reclaiming one’s homeland, or is synonymous with reclaiming one’s home. For poets such as Gunn Allen,

because the only home
is each other
they’ve occupied all
the rest
colonized it. An idea about ourselves
is all we own. (in Driskill et al, eds, 2011, 3)

Given Gunn Allen’s work as a writer and critic of Two-Spirit erotic writing, this passage’s invitation to finding home in each other can be read as inseparable from the expression of a queer Indigenous erotic. Gunn Allen’s poem is one of many in a conversation about the necessity for Indigenous people to reclaim the right to their sexuality, to self-define their gender identities, to make love with and to love whomever they choose, and, as she

suggests, to create and disseminate ideas surrounding the multiplicities of Indigenous sexualities and gender identities. By insisting that “an idea” is all Indigenous Two-Spirit people own, Gunn Allen evokes a long-standing colonial history of simultaneous abjection and ravishment. Through these ideas about sexuality, the colonizers constructed the very stereotypes about Indigenous peoples (e.g. the “squaw”, the “bloodthirsty savage”, the “berdache”) that still may be employed today in the justification of sexual violence toward Indigenous persons. The deadly consequences of these stereotypes are perpetuated by mainstream society’s profound lack of attention to the rapes and murders of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people. These constructs of Indigenous sexualities both facilitate and the legacy of violent acts inflicted upon the bodies of Indigenous women, children and Two-Spirit people.

The violence experienced by Indigenous women who are biologically female is distinct from other settler-colonial violence directed at Indigenous peoples, due to their ability to give birth. In Chapter 1 of *Conquest*, entitled “Sexual Violence as a tool of Genocide”, Smith emphasizes that, since Native women are “bearers of a counter-imperial order and pose a supreme threat to the dominant culture”, they are subject to “symbolic and literal control over their bodies” and their right to reproduce (Smith 2005a, 15). Smith cites the following two examples of this brutality: “two of the best looking of the squaws...lying in such a position...there can be no doubt they were first ravished and then shot dead. Nearly all of the dead were mutilated” (Smith 2005a, 15). The second example is of a pregnant woman, dragged into a church, “crying for mercy for herself and her unborn babe. She was followed and pierced with a dozen lances... The child was torn alive from the yet palpitating body of its mother, first plunged into holy water to be baptized, and

immediately its brains were dashed out against a wall” (2005a, 15). These horrifying images underscore the connections between the exertion of colonial power, sexual violence and attacking women’s ability to reproduce their nation, by way of highly gendered violence targeting women’s ability to reproduce. There have been innumerable instances of violent reactions to expressions of Indigenous sexuality that were judged to be deviating from the heteronormative expectations of Christian missionaries and settlers. Miranda writes about the fate of *joyas* (literally, jewels, referring to queer or Two-Spirit people) in “the area eventually known as California”, who were subjected to “the genocidal policies of the Spanish Crown” (Miranda 2010, 256). The population of Indigenous peoples in California fell from

one million at first contact ... to about ten thousand survivors in just over one hundred years. Part of this massive loss were third-gender people, who were lost not by “passive” colonizing collateral damage such as disease or starvation, but through active, conscious, violent extermination. (Miranda 2010, 256)

This extermination included “the use of dogs as weapons to kill or eat Indians” (2010, 258), in a particularly repulsive attempt to punish expressions of gender and sexuality that deviated from heterosexual, monogamous Christian marriage. For Two-Spirit people from North America, stories such as the extermination of the *joyas* are part of their embodied trauma, a legacy of violence inflicted upon the bodies of their ancestors. Unfortunately, Two-Spirit people in contemporary North American society still face homophobic, gendered violence.

The connection between erotic writing and the legacy of sexual violence faced by Two-Spirit people is evident throughout Qwo-Li Driskill’s *Walking With Ghosts*. The book is

dedicated “to those who survive”, and serves as a reminder that there were many who did not, including the subjects of several of Driskill’s poems. One of these poems is entitled “For Marsha P. (Pay It No Mind!) Johnson” (2005, 29). It tells the story of a drag queen “found floating in the Hudson River shortly after NYC Pride, 1992”, and serves as a reminder that “gendercide” (the act of killing someone based on their gender, above any other factor, Miranda 2010, 254) is not an abstract or historical concept; it continues to exist today. Driskill’s erotic poetry, especially “Map of the Americas”, addresses the negotiations and reservations faced by an Indigenous person who has a white lover, given the national and embodied memory of cultural and sexual violence from settler institutions. For instance, in “Map of the Americas” Driskill writes,

Sometimes I look at you
 And choke back sobs knowing
 You are here
 Because so many of my people
 Are not (2005, 9).

However, the poem is not a lament; it does not render the speaker a powerless victim, but rather, traces hir assertion of sovereignty over hir body. Further down in the poem, Driskill writes,

It is not without fear
 And memories awash in blood
 That I allow you to slip between
 My borders
 Rest in the warm valleys

Of my sovereign body (2005, 11).

This stanza demonstrates a way in which sovereign erotics overlap with the use of body cartographies. By saying “I allow you”, and “my sovereign body”, Driskill positions hir speaker as in control of hir own body, sovereign in hir own flesh. The final two lines of the poem,

Honor this

I walk out of genocide to touch you (11),

make it explicit that the real and ongoing physical and cultural genocide experienced by hir culture does not disappear entirely during lovemaking. However, the image of walking out of genocide is hopeful, victorious, and gives the poem a sense of moving forward into the future, while remembering the past and honouring the history of Driskill’s ancestors.

The theme of attempted cultural and physical genocide, and the associated loss of many nations’ capacity to subsist off the land, is addressed in erotic terms in Chrystos’ poem “Really Delicious Fry Bread”. This poem begins with lovemaking and cooking fry bread, and ends in powerful remembrance of

the women

who, thrown off their land

with death in every dawn

and starvation in their children’s eyes

made this food

so we’d all survive...

kept on

... so we could share bannock

experience in which *sovereignty does not occupy a space separate from that of intimacy and embodiment*, in which it is lived viscerally as part of individual selfhood” (Rifkin 2011). As Rifkin observes, Driskill’s poetry views national sovereignty as inseparable from sovereignty of the flesh.

Deborah Miranda also raises the question raised by Gunn Allen regarding the extent to which home has been relocated within the body in her poem, “Home”. Miranda’s approach differs from Gunn Allen’s in that she imagines her loss in the context of what home is *not*, at least not anymore. Addressing her lover, she observes,

Ah, sweetheart, this pillaged continent’s not
 what I’ve lost, not the sanctuary searched for since birth.
 All lusts ever harbored, each stolen deed of desire-
 these fantasies aren’t native land. Where’s home?” (Miranda 2005, 93)

In one of her academic essays, Miranda raises the same question – where’s home? – this time explaining that, as someone who “was born at UCLA Medical Center, raised in trailer parks and rural landscapes”, and who now has a PhD and is “fluent in English, can read Spanish, and was called to an aliyah at the bat mitzvah of [her] partner’s niece”, she wonders, “Who am I? Where is home?” (2010, 252). Miranda says that her “poetry and ... scholarship ... have worked through issues of complex identities for much of [her] life, as a mixed-blood woman with an Indian father and European American mother” (2010, 253). The institutional violence of the residential/boarding schools, missions, reserves, forced relocation of whole nations, the assignment and revocation of Indian ‘status,’ and the imposition of new, artificial borders and territories have resulted in large numbers of Indigenous people in Canada and the United States today not living on their original

territory. For Miranda, having established where home is *not*, the question becomes where to locate home. Her answer comes in the final lines of “Home”, as she declares, “I can’t draw a map, but I’ve wandered each curve and hollow./The place that knows me is a woman” (2005, 93). The closing lines of “Home” suggest not only that home is housed within the body of her lover, but also that the relationship to one’s home is also reciprocal: as much as residents know the land, the land knows its people.

Poetic engagements with the concept of ‘home’ differ between who identify with the land in a more mobile fashion and have lived in many different parts of North America, and authors who grew up on their ancestral land, with a more fixed notion of the relationship between ‘home’ and ‘land’. Whereas “the place that knows” Miranda is the flesh of her lover’s body, for Armstrong home is located on her ancestral territory. As an Okanagan woman who grew up on and still lives on Okanagan land, she notes the interconnection between land and language, mentioning the way in which individual languages adapt in order to create a vocabulary specific to their natural environment (Andrews 2011c). For Gunn Allen, Chrystos, Driskill and Scofield, their home is the body, or the bodies of their lovers. Sometimes, home is also referred to as “Indian Territory” (Driskill 2005, 56-7), or “Indian Country” (Valaskakis 2005). The concept of “Indian Country” is a way to reconceptualize national and transnational relationships as not necessarily being attached to one particular section of land, but rather to signify how heritage “is marked with the memories of events that newcomers seldom remember and Indians never forget” (Andrews 2011b). This more flexible concept of Indian Country allows those peoples who have been displaced from their original territories to cultivate a meaningful relationship to

the land on which they live now, and can be understood as a way to reject attempted genocide, manifested by forced relocations or loss of 'Status' under the Indian Act.

For instance, Driskill's "Love Poems: 1838-1839" explores the concept of finding home in relationship to the Cherokee heritage of having been forced out of Tennessee during the Trail of Tears. The poem is written in two parts, in side-by-side columns entitled "Tennessee" and "Indian Territory". It can be read as call and response between the two sides, or as two separate poetic conversations with the same person, the speaker. In this way, a segment of the poem reads,

Tennessee: my arms, muscled rivers,

You came to

Each morning.

Indian Country: Love the winding trails to my

Belly,

The valleys at my sternum,

The way I slope to you as a promise. (2005, 56)

This poem not only personifies the land but also eroticizes it. Driskill writes about the forced removal in a way that expresses the embodied trauma associated with the relocation, for those who survived. "Tennessee" writes,

after they seized you

they told me not to touch

anyone again. (2005, 57)

The language suggests the land is also violated by the removal of its inhabitants. "Indian Country" then speaks as the new lover, affirming that, even after having been removed

from a specific section of land, one can still find home, and healing, in this flexible and resilient concept of 'Indian Country'. The end of the poem reads,

who gave your body

back to you?

Hush.

This is home now.

You are home.

You are home. (2005, 57)

Reminiscent of Driskill's pairing of the lines, "we were stolen from our bodies, we were stolen from our homes" (2004, 50), these final lines of "Love Poems 1838-1839" suggest that whereas embodied sovereignty is challenged by the removal from one's homeland, erotic wholeness can come out of cultivating relationships to land and other bodies that resist the attempted elimination of indigeneity from colonized North America.

If the body is intimately linked to one's homeland or nation, then it follows that language, lovemaking, and ceremony also are key tenets of sovereign nations. Scofield's *Love Medicine and one Song: Sakihtowin-Maskihkihy Ekwa Peyak- Nikamowin* contains many poems that explore the relationship between the sacred and the erotic. In the same way that he writes about lovemaking as quenching his thirst, Scofield also writes about the satiation that comes from connecting to Cree, his 'mother tongue'. In "Policy of the Dispossessed," he observes how,

There among the buffalo bones and memories

an ancient language sprang from the earth

and wet my parched tongue. (Scofield 1993)

He places language, as well as erotic wholeness, at the centre of efforts to assert sovereignty over one's body, home/land and nation. Speaking one's native language and lovemaking in ways that resist colonial conceptions of Indigenous sexuality both assert decolonized selfhood.

These two components of erotic wholeness are linked together in Dumont's poetry. She describes Cree words as soul food, and writes about the seasons and trees as part of the natural world, as lovers. Dumont employs nature imagery in depicting lovers and lovemaking in ways similar to Scofield's language choices in *Love Medicine*. By linking language to the natural world that is the "source of our sustenance" (Cariou 2009, iv), Dumont insists that language, in the form of poetry, song and storytelling, is crucial to the future of Indigenous peoples. Scofield's poetry manages to celebrate language, lovemaking and ceremony, through challenging narrow views of what each of these categories represents. In "Morning in the White Room", he proclaims,

We made it
 Our celebration, a holy gathering
 Of the empty walls
 And all that haunt them.
 Take for instance,
 Your aqueous silhouette,
 How it danced
 To my mouth's sacred song (2009, 13).

By assigning musical and motion-filled imagery to lovemaking, and calling sex "holy" and cries of love "sacred", Scofield celebrates queer Indigenous sexuality. In "More

Rainberries”, he writes that, between lovers, “[b]reathing becomes ritual/ [t]ranscends into ceremony, inking images of sacred ceremony to lovemaking (2009, 20).

Scofield’s poems are full of possibility, finding new room for ceremony within his modern day life as a Two-Spirit, Cree writer. The poems suggest an erotic wholeness, wherein Scofield is able to affirm his national identity and spirituality through the powerful connections forged through sexuality. His poems represent expressions of freedom from conventional uses of English, whether in the form of mainstream celestial images found in older love poetry, the confines of a gender binary, or the institution of monogamy as the only valid form of sexual relationship. He also challenges the stereotypes assigned to Indigenous masculinity and femininity. For instance, in the final lines of “Morning in the White Room”, Scofield writes of and the speaker and his lover as “warriors/ whooping our victory”(2009, 13). Here Scofield queers the concept of ‘warrior’, which settler media incorrectly appropriated to portray to a hyper-masculine, aggressive, and dangerous Indigenous rebel – particularly after standoffs such as the “Oka Crisis” and Ipperwash.

Another poem that reaffirms the body and expressions of sexuality as good and natural is “Singing You” by Kateri Damm. An excerpt from the poem reads:

Her skin is the drum she is playing. Like medicine drawn from the earth, gently pounded and drawn into being, her body is good earth. Tomorrow a man’s sweat will drip over her and she will become lover and d newborn child. Shelter ... Let her touch you all over. And over ... and over again. Until you forget where one begins and the other ends, touch her. This is the way of muskrat diving. World of bone and hunger...she is singing for you. Come home. (Damm 2003, 246)

“Singing You”, the final poem in *W’Daub Awaē: Speaking True* (Damm and Cariou 2010, 176), writes about lovemaking and embodiment as ritual, co-creation, and a way back home. By writing about her body as “good earth”, the narrator affirms both the connection between land and bodies, and the subsequent need to respect bodies while fighting to protect the earth from which bodies come, and to which they return. -

Lovemaking has profound potential for assisting in the decolonization of the body. The poets explored here are expressing connections to their history, and to themselves, through lovemaking, which has the potential to be a life-affirming activity that can negate the punishment of Indigenous sexuality and gender after settler contact. Chrystos’ poem “I suck” (Akiwenzie-Damm 2003, 58) is one potent example of the ways in which lovemaking and erotic poetics help her to move beyond stored memories of abuse. She writes,

I am her pleasure, focused...

I’m erased into the fruit of her flowering, colors spinning...

I’m following her through fear...

through shame...

through cold memories into the valley where pleasure shimmers in a spring haze.

(Akiwenzie-Damm 2003, 58)

In her less than theoretical language of traversing her lover’s flesh, she writes about reclaiming the erotic, freed from sexualized violence. As Miranda observes, Chrystos’ poetry expresses “erotic pleasures in ways that confound the agendas of both heterosexism and colonization” (Miranda 2002, 142).

Another way in which Chrystos' writing confounds these agendas lies in how she writes about the reciprocity of lovemaking, using a mixture of ceremonial and more explicitly sexual imagery. In "The Wild River of Your Arms", Chrystos writes,

my tongue is fishing for your pleasure
 sweet water sweet grass
 in the wild river
 of our arms. (in Akiwenzie-Damm 2003, 130)

These lines suggest that she reaps pleasure from giving pleasure to her lover, and also describes making love in terms that are sacred and associated with ceremony: "sweet water sweet grass" (130). In an essay, Brant writes about the power of using "erotic imaging in Native lesbian work" as "a tool by which we heal ourselves" (1997, 201). She goes on to write that erotic imagery in queer Indigenous poetry is

powerfully and deftly evident in the hands of [many Two-Spirit writers] especially ... Janice Gould and Chrystos. In my own work, I have explored such themes as self-lovemaking, and the act of love between two women as a way to mend the broken circles of my own life, and hopefully to give sustenance to other women who are searching for new maps for their lives. (Brant 1997, 201-202)

Brant confirms the healing potential of writing erotic poetry, and also links this process with the previous chapter's topic, mapping. By identifying erotic poems as "sustenance" for "women who are searching for new maps for their lives", Brant suggests that poetry can function as a tool toward decolonization, and even as a roadmap for the journey.

One poem that traces this journey from violent, often internalized negative stereotypes to celebrating one's gender, sexuality and identity as an Indigenous person is

the poem “Indian Woman”, by Jeannette Armstrong. “Indian Woman” appears near the end of Armstrong’s *Breath Tracks*. The poem begins by listing violent, racist epithets about Indigenous womanhood:

I am a squaw/ a heathen/ a savage/.../ I am female / only in the ability / to breed
and bear papooses/ to be carried/ quaintly / on a board/ or lost/ to welfare/.../
The sinuous planes / of my brown body / carries no hint/ of the need/ to be
caressed/ desired/ loved/ Its only use/ to be raped/ beaten and bludgeoned/ In
some/ B-grade western. (1990, 106)

Armstrong makes a ‘laundry list’ of stereotypes that have permeated the settler literary imagination, from settler poetry and filmmaking to the reports of Child and Family Services. About halfway through the poem, the speaker in the poem declares “Some one is lying” (1990, 106), and challenges the psychic, sexual and physical violence experienced by Indigenous women under settler colonialism. The second part of the poem is where the healing takes place, traceable through the shifting language, imagery and tone of the writing. The speaker, who previously listed all of the negative colonial depictions of Indigenous womanhood, now declares,

...I am the keeper /Of generations/ I caress the lover gently/ Croon as I wrap the
baby/ With quietness I talk/ To the old ones/ And carefully lay to rest/ Loved ones/
I am the/ strength/ Of nations/.../ I am the giver of life / To whole tribes. (1990,
106-7)

“Indian Woman”, read in its entirety, expresses central arguments of this project. It demonstrates the transformative and healing potential of poetry, and uses poetry to express the significance of living one’s truth. For Armstrong, that truth depends upon her

ability to tell stories of Okanagan traditions, language, and resilience to other members of her community – to “teach them the songs ... give them truth.” (107) It also lies in her role as a keeper of traditions, a lover, and a mother, one who respects burial rights and honours her ancestors. The speaker affirms Armstrong’s interest in the reclamation and celebration of the complex realities of Indigenous life, and the power that comes from sovereignty over one’s own sexuality, body and land base. She writes, “I dance/ Slowly/ Filling my body/ With power/ Feeling it/ Knowing it” (107). This poem tracks the speaker’s journey into a state of erotic and embodied sovereignty in which she is truly inhabiting and owning her body. The poem renders the initial stereotypes absurd; in so doing, it can be read as a map toward erotic wholeness.

The wide variety of poetic styles examined in the last chapter that evoked “mapping” of land, bodies, consent, and decolonization, also is reflected in the erotic writing of Scofield, Miranda, Chrystos, Harjo, Driskill and Dumont. There is no one way that “Indigenous writers” write poetry; this is easily explained by the wide array of national or tribal affiliations, geographic locations and life experiences of the authors considered. This diversity, and the multiple ways in which poets can resist colonial land theft and sexual violence, is a central and critical aspect of the political work done by Indigenous poets. In “Notes Toward a Theory of Anomaly”, Justice writes that,

Imperialism and colonialism function, in large part, by imposing efficient means of exploiting resources through eliminating complexity and diversity ... either by co-opting those values and peoples that can be rendered absorbable, or to entirely isolate and/or eliminate those that are less amenable to simplification. Complexity

is the enemy of the colonial enterprise; as such, it's an absolutely necessary attribute of any viable mode of decolonization. (Justice 2010, 232)

Justice reminds readers that the reduction of the multitude of Indigenous nations' histories, languages and culture is a colonial weapon used to facilitate the elimination of this (singular) concept of indigeneity – and that a marked presence of complexity is useful in decolonization.

Reading the erotic poetry assembled within an anthology such as (2003) *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*, confirms and celebrates the radically different approaches to Indigenous erotics and the unifying “avowal of complex sexual desires” (Cariou in Scofield 2009, iii) housed within these poems. Most of the authors whose works are explored in this project are contributors to this anthology. Each writer approaches the aesthetics of erotica differently; the poetry and prose varies greatly depending on the geographic location and national identity of the author, as well as their gender identity, life experiences and sexuality. However, their common goal is to be sovereign subjects, rather than exploited objects. Beyond this, their goal is to be in charge of their own bodies, and to choose their own lovers and their own words to describe their erotic truths.

Although the imagery used by each poet examined in this project radically differ from each other, all of the poets reject the conventional, “celestial” language (Cariou 2009, iii) employed in canonical English love poetry, or what Dumont calls “the Great White way of writing English” (1996, 54). For example, in “Dildos, Hummingbirds, and Driving Her Crazy: Searching for American Indian Women's Love Poetry and Erotics”, Miranda examines the language used in Chrystos' erotic poem, “I Like a Woman Who Packs.” In this poem, Chrystos writes,

I Like a Woman Who Packs

not because she wants to be a man because she knows

I want a butch

who can loop my wrist with leather, whisper

Stay right here

I have something I need to do to you. (Chrystos 1993, 69 quoted in Miranda 2002, 141-2)

In response to this excerpt from Chrystos' work, Miranda cites Betty Louise Bell, a Cherokee writer and professor, who writes, "I am your worst nightmare: an Indian with a pen." (2002, 142) Miranda then extends Bell's argument to Chrystos' poetry, arguing that Chrystos takes this even further: She is an Indian woman with a dildo. Not only does she write her truth, but she helps create erotic pleasures in ways that confound the agendas of both heterosexism and colonization. If the pen is mightier than the sword, Chrystos seems to say, the dildo is mightier still in that it does not destroy one's enemy, but completely ignores him. (2002, 142)

In ignoring the colonial narratives surrounding Indigenous sexuality, Chrystos shows the reader that poetry is not simply a means of reacting to settler colonial violence, but rather it can be a liberatory tool, freeing the poet from writing against colonial stereotypes or even to a settler audience. Her poetry is highly intimate, and is far more concerned with the pleasure of her lover than with the possibility of offending a non-Indigenous reader; although non-Indigenous readers can certainly appreciate the power, beauty, and raw sexuality of Chrystos' love poetry.

What Miranda highlights in her reading of “I Like a Woman Who Packs” is the correlation between rejecting heteropatriarchy and the assertion of sovereign Indigenous erotics. By expressing “erotic pleasures in ways that confound the agendas of both heterosexism and colonization” (2002, 142), Chrystos’ poetry participates in decolonizing and reimagining what it means to be “in the erotic” (Harjo in Miranda 2002, 155). Betty Louise Bell highlights the importance of writing literature that counters colonialism; Chrystos takes that resistance to another level by not only writing against colonial narratives but also by living her life, erotically and interpersonally, in a way that, as Miranda writes, “ignores” (2002, 142) the attempts of settler colonial states to ‘enter the bedrooms’ of Indigenous peoples across the continent.

Miranda’s poetry challenges gendered stereotypes and complicates the notion that sexual partnerships need to be heterosexual. In “Love Poem to a Butch Woman” she addresses her lover,

This is how it is with me:

so strong, I want to draw the egg
 from your womb and nourish it in my own
 I want to mother your child made only
 of us, of me, you; no borrowed seed
 from any man....

I want to open my heart, the brightest aching slit
 of my soul, receive your pearl. (2005, 65)

Miranda associates masculine imagery with her queer lover. In providing Miranda’s womb with her egg, her lover, like Chrystos’ “Woman Who Packs”, is invited into a role that rejects

any possible need for a man, even for procreation. Her butch lover is positioned as the 'man', coming inside of her, regardless of actual biology. Both Chrystos and Miranda challenge the patriarchal assumptions surrounding sex and penetration as necessarily requiring a man.

Scofield writes about "Speaking the Soul's Language", and his poems express this intimate vocabulary. Scofield renders his desire for men, women, and Two-Spirit people as fluid, through his interweaving of Cree language and his evocative writing that links the erotic to earth-cycles, waterways and animals. In "He Is", Scofield figures his lover as

earthworm, caterpillar parting my lips, he is
slug slipping between my teeth and down, beating
moth wings, a flutter
inside my mouth." (2009, 8)

One commonality between the works of Dumont and Scofield is their use of nature imagery to describe and affirm sexuality. This includes the parallels they draw between desire and thirst, lovemaking and water. In "Wild Berries", Dumont addresses her lover, saying

It's as if
I am parched
And you are water
And my eyes drink
Til I am quenched
By your smooth taut skin. (1996, 35)

Likewise, in “For My Love, appealing to his Obstinate Skin”, Scofield writes of unfulfilled desires as a “lake of want” (34), associating wetness with desire. Similarly, the relationship between eroticism and water is expressed in “You, the Voyeur”, where Scofield writes,

The thought of you
 Free and stretching
 Brings such wet to my mouth,
 A wet so brilliant
 It far surpasses the law
 Determining
 Which way flows the sea. (2009, 31)

The poem’s correlation positions the fulfillment of sexual desire on the same plane as quenching one’s thirst by drinking water, one of the most basic and fundamental acts necessary for human survival. By employing these images of water and wetness in their erotic poetry, both Dumont and Scofield own their right to seek and experience pleasure, and normalize conversations about want and desire. In his essay on the works of Scofield, Driskill calls Scofield’s “love poems ... a tool for healing and erotic celebration” (2004, 61). In referring to the poems as a “tool”, Driskill supports one of this project’s central arguments: that poetry is not – or not only – an aesthetic exploration of historical pain or trauma, but rather is a means for writer and reader of moving forward from grief, through tenuous states of survival, into joy.

Brant writes about the need for healing Two-Spirit sexuality and restoring its traditional honour, stating:

The love that was natural in our world, has become unnatural as we become more consumed by the white world and values therein. Our sexuality has been colonized, sterilized, or whitewashed. Our sense of spirit has been colonized, sterilized, made over to pander to a growing consumer need for quick and easy redemption. What the dominant culture has never been able to comprehend is that spirit/sex/prayer/flesh/religion/natural is who I am as Two-Spirit. (quoted in Driskill 2003)

Brant's emphasis on erotic wholeness and her framing of Two-Spirit as an identity that includes spirituality, embodiment, "humour and earthiness" (Walker 2004, C11) are consistent with Driskill's commentary on Scofield's poetry. Contained within Scofield's poems is the "humor, rage, erotic power and sovereign identity that is needed for [the survival of] colonized people living with layered forms of oppression" (Driskill 2003, 228).

Through her interpretation of Harjo's writing, Miranda defines grace as "an indigenous erotic" (Miranda 2005, 3). In the previous chapter, Harjo's "A Map to the Next World" presented an example of an alternative model of cartography. In this poem, the pathway to a world that has evolved beyond capitalist greed is mapped through erotic discovery, of oneself and another, and through the conception and birth of new generations. With Miranda's definition of grace in mind, it is logical to follow Harjo's reference to the "place of entry" to the next world as a portal opened through the creative power of the erotic, through orgasm, conception, and the birth of a new generation. The *creative* potential of lovemaking is the antithesis of, and the antidote to, the *destructive* nature of the mindless consumerism and the resource exploitation that fuel capitalism. As a model of mapping that comes from Harjo's unique experiences as a Muskogee/Creek

woman, a mother and a poet, the poem offers a way to decolonize that invalidates colonial and heteropatriarchal maps. Her map relies instead on knowledge that is passed matrilineally, not just through birth but through navigating “by your mother’s voice,” in a manner that will “renew the song she is singing” (2000, 20). For the majority of the poem, the map offered suggests that sovereignty is embodied, stemming from the very act of lovemaking, through which new life arises. This poem illustrates the political and creative work being done by many poets, and not only Harjo. It also serves as a reminder that the erotic is a portal of connection to previous and future generations, a thread binding together those separated physically from each other, through time or space. Driskill best articulates this interconnection. S/he writes:

The Sovereign Erotics created by Two-Spirits are part of the healing of the wounded bodies of ourselves, our lands, and our planet ... Through over 500 years of colonization’s efforts to kill our startling beauty, our roots have proven too deep and complicated to pull out of the soil of our origin, the soil where we are nurtured by the sacrifices that were made by our ancestors’ commitment to love us (2004, 61).

This love is Scofield’s “medicine”, which counters the poison of land theft and gendered violences that would remove Indigenous peoples from their lands, their bodies, and themselves.

For Indigenous writers who assert sovereign erotics, defining one’s own sexuality and gender is an act of “radical, holistic decolonization” (Driskill 2004, 58) for two main reasons. Bodies are an important site of nationhood, where genocide is resisted through one’s embodied capacity to house and reproduce the nation despite inheriting forced

removal from one's home territory. As well, writing poetry that reflects the diversity of experiences and desires of poets who are women and/or Two-Spirit people offers a venue to critique and heal from colonial violence. The psychic, sexual and physical violence that centred colonial land theft deliberately targeted women and Two-Spirit people for the ways in which they threatened the propagation of a settler-colonial state. Given the relationship between gendered violence and nation formation, the pursuit of sovereign erotics presents an especially powerful mode of Indigenous decolonization.

Chapter 4

Epilogue: Mapping “Oka”, Body Cartographies and Sovereign Erotics

The ants will find their way home carrying

A burden so sweet it needs no name,

A story to tell about being taken up,

Removed, finding the intricate paths back

- Deborah Miranda, “Mesa Verde”

The poetry explored within this project traces the “intricate paths back” toward erotic wholeness and toward forging a non-destructive relationship to the land and to its past, present and future inhabitants. It examined the usefulness of poetry as a way to not only express emotions such as grief and anger following the psychic, sexual or physical acts of violence experienced by Indigenous people, communities and nations, but also as a way to channel those emotions toward a creative rearticulation of selfhood and peoplehood. The “Oka Crisis” served as an important temporal marker for the project. All of the poetry was written after this event. It was significant to Canadian artistic and literary production, as noted throughout *This is an Honour Song: Twenty Years Since the Blockades*.

When interviewed regarding the meaning of the “Oka Crisis” to her as an Anishnaabegkwe (Anishnaabe woman), Judy da Silva says, “My experience has been different from the Kanien’kehaka [Mohawk], but I know, like all of the women that have come before me, and the ones yet to be born, that our fight to protect our lands, our way of life and the health of our families is the same” (2010, 59). For Da Silva, and for many of the artists whose poetry is referenced in this project, the events at “Oka” as well as other

flashpoint events including Ipperwash and Wounded Knee are representative of clashes over the fundamental rights of Indigenous peoples everywhere. These include the right to clean water and air, food sovereignty, control over sacred burial grounds, and personal autonomy. This assertion of ownership and control over one's body includes the right to define what it means to be an Indigenous woman, man, Two-Spirit, or other gendered person.

Selected from the "gorgeous multitude" (Damm 2003, 4) of voices represented within Indigenous writing, the poetry contained within this thesis participates in struggles toward self-determination by its rejection of colonial impositions of new borders and place names, and of Western attempts to define, control and condemn Indigenous expressions of gender and sexuality. "Oka" was a specific historical moment that became emblematic of settler disrespect for Indigenous efforts to preserve the integrity of sacred burial grounds, and also became a sensationalized event in the media that then told stories based in settler biases about what it does or does not mean to be a warrior, mother or 'citizen'. For all of these reasons, and because of its continued reverberation in the contemporary media's depiction of land struggles, "Oka not only inspired artists to write songs, performances, theatrical works and contributions to the visual arts, it impacted the practices of a generation of artists who continue to create works today" (Simpson 2010b, 8).

The poetry referenced in this project was written after the "Oka Crisis", or, perhaps more accurately, the confrontation at Kahnésatake. However, the overarching themes are far broader than one particular struggle for one particular piece of land. They extend to the basic human rights of autonomy over one's body and sexuality (embodied sovereignty, or sovereign erotics) and the right to protect the health of the environment and its inhabitants

from reckless exploitation. As exhibited through the themes, language and imagery in the selected poetry, ownership of the body and protection of the land are inseparable. Violence against and control of Indigenous bodies was and is used as a weapon to facilitate colonial land theft. In addition, the consequences of resource exploitation are felt disproportionately by Indigenous women and children, who are vulnerable to harm from exposure to radiation and environmental toxins: as Andrea Smith intimates, their bodies are ‘raped’ again through the ‘rape’ and devastation of the earth (Smith 2003, 2005a, 2005b).

As the poems discussed in the chapter on body cartographies suggest, re-mapping is not only a matter of rejecting colonial borders, which have been designed to maximize profits. It is fundamentally about re-establishing a more intimate knowledge of the land than can be captured by a two-dimensional piece of paper. Alternative cartographies, such as those employed in Harjo’s “A Map to the Next World”, encourage the reader to take action: they demand a deeper connection to the earth, which reveals “deeper” maps (Hogan 1997, 23) that come from understanding the ways the earth has changed, and continues to change. These new ways of mapping require intimacy; and the negotiation of consent before traversing borders is analogous to healthy intimate relationships and lovemaking.

Poetry is a potent tool for resisting settler-colonial violence against land and bodies. Moore’s argument that she “found a deepening connection to the land through experiencing poetry” (2000, 6) supports another key argument advanced within this project: poetry transcends simple metaphors, functioning as a tool for decolonization. Poetry presents a roadmap to “reunite with the voices of the old ones, to carry out their

desires and prayers concerning ourselves and this earth, and to wake us up from our dreamless sleepwalking” (Moore 2000, 6). The writers use poetry to chart their journeys out of the violence, exploitation, and grief that are stored in the embodied memories of the poets, and into what Miranda calls “grace, or, an Indigenous erotic” (2005, 3).

Miranda opens *The Zen of La Llorona* by telling the tragic story of La Llorona, the woman for whom the collection is named. She writes about this figure of an “Indian woman claimed by a Spaniard” who bears his children but cannot tolerate her pain when her captor abandons her (2005, 1). She kills her children and is forever haunted by her grief. Only then “does she see the Spaniard’s true victory. He has stolen more than her land, her body, and her children. *He has stolen her power to create*” (2002: 1, emphasis added). By participating in creative acts, including lovemaking, mothering (literally or figuratively), and most of all through their poetry, the writers featured in this project are creating new maps to recover what has been lost. These maps depict pathways back to their land, families, and nations, to a state of embodied sovereignty in which they are nourished by the earth, by healthy sexuality, and by the performance of rituals, old and new. They write in order to “come home” (Damm 176).

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Appendix A

Sovereign Women Strengthen Sovereign Nations

Tribal Sovereignty

All Tribal Nations Have an Inherent Right to:

- 1) A land base: possession and control is unquestioned and honored by other nations. To exist without fear, but with freedom.
- 2) Self-governance: the ability and authority to make decisions regarding all matters concerning the Tribe without the approval or agreement of others. This includes the ways and methods of decision-making in social, political and other areas of life.
- 3) An economic base and resources: the control, use and development of resources, businesses or industries the tribe chooses. This includes resources that support the Tribal way of life, including the practice of spiritual ways.
- 4) A distinct language and historical and cultural identity: Each tribe defines and describes its history, including the impact of colonization and racism, tribal culture, worldview and traditions.

Colonization and violence against Native people means that power and control over Native people means that power and control over our tribal life way and land have been stolen.

As Native people, we have the right and responsibility to advocate for ourselves and our relatives in supporting our right to power and control over our tribal life way and land- tribal sovereignty.

Native Women's Sovereignty

All Native Women Have an Inherent Right to:

- 1) Their body and path in life: the possession and control is unquestioned and honored by others. To exist without fear, but with freedom.
- 2) Self-governance: the ability and authority to make decisions regarding all matters concerning themselves, without others' approval or agreement. This includes the ways and methods of decision-making in social, political and other areas of life.
- 3) An economic base and resources: the control, use and development of resources, businesses or industries that Native women choose. This includes resources that support individual Native women's chosen life ways, including the practice of spiritual ways.
- 4) A distinct language and historical and cultural identity: Each Native woman defines and describes her history, including the impact of colonization, racism and sexism, tribal women's culture, worldview and traditions.

Violence against women, and victimization in general, means that power and control over an individual's life and body have been stolen. As relatives of women who have been victimized, it is our right and responsibility to be advocates supporting every woman's right to power and control over her body and life- personal sovereignty.