Walking in the Ancestral Land: Kinetics and Storytelling as Pathways of Resurgence in Richard Wagamese's *Medicine Walk* in light of Leanne B. Simpson's Concepts

Lect. Muzahim Hussein Mohammed
Al-Mustansiriayh University, College of Tourism Sciences - Baghdad / Iraq
muzahimhussein@uomustansiririyah.edu.iq
07703940313

السير في ارض الأسلاف: الحركة والسرد كمسارات للنهضة في رواية رحلة الشفاء لريتشارد واغاميس في ضوء مفاهيم ليان ب. سمبسون

المدرس مزاحم حسين محمد
الجامعة المستنصرية – كلية العلوم السياحية، بغداد \ العراق
muzahimhussein@uomustansiririyah.edu.iq
07703940313

Abstract

This article aims to investigate movement and storytelling as pathways of Indigenous resurgence in Richard Wagamese's *Medicine Walk* (2014). It employs a qualitative approach based on textual analysis of *Medicine Walk* by applying Leanne B. Simpson's concept of "Biskaabiiyang" that is literally translated as "return to ourselves", and radical Indigenous resurgence. The findings reveal that Wagamese deployed storytelling and kinetics as decolonizing modes of resisting the colonial policies of dispossession, cultural displacement, colonial shaming and assimilation by reclaiming the Indigenous people's resilience and kinship ties with their community, land and culture. Storytelling and movement reassert the Indigenous people's return to and presence on their land to dismantle the colonial system that seeks to undermine their sovereignty by disrupting their interconnectedness with their land. The article recommends applying more Indigenous frameworks to Wagamese's novels, especially those that are concerned with protagonists suffering from residential school trauma and which were solely examined through trauma studies frameworks. Future studies should consider the mobilization of Indigenous people to envision a decolonial future of freedom and sovereignty.

Keywords: Biskaabiiyang, Kinetics, Medicine Walk, radical resurgence, storytelling, Wagamese.

المستخلص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى استقصاء دور الحركة والسرد بوصفهما مسارين للنهضة الأصلية في رواية ريتشارد واغاميس (2014). رحلة الشفاء. ويعتمد المنهج الكيفي القائم على التحليل النصي للرواية من خلال توظيف مفهوم ليان ب. سمبسون "Biskaabiiyang" الذي يُترجم حرفياً بـ "العودة إلى ذواتنا"، إضافة إلى مفهوم النهضة الأصلية الجذرية. تكشف النتائج أن واغاميس قد وظّف السرد والحركة بوصفهما أدوات مضادة للاستعمارية ، لمقاومة سياسات الاستعمار القائمة على نزع الملكية، والإزاحة الثقافية، والتجريم الاستعماري، وسياسات الاستيعاب، وذلك عبر استعادة صمود الشعوب الأصلية وروابط القرابة التي تجمعها بمجتمعها وأرضها وثقافتها. كما يُعيد السرد والحركة تأكيد عودة الشعوب الأصلية إلى أرضها وحضورها الفاعل فيها، من أجل تفكيك النظام الاستعماري الذي يسعى إلى تقويض سيادتها عبر تعطيل ترابطها العميق بأرضها. ويوصي المقال بضرورة توظيف مزيد من الأطر النظرية الأصلية في دراسة روايات واغاميس، ولا سيما تلك التي تتناول أبطالاً يعانون من صدمات المدارس الداخلية، والتي غالباً ما جرى تناولها حصراً في إطار دراسات الصدمة. كما ينبغي على الدراسات المستقبلية أن تولي اهتماماً أكبر بكيفية حشد الشعوب الأصلية لتصور مستقبلٍ تحرري ولا استعماري يقوم على الحرية والسيادة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : العودة الى الذات ، الحركة، رواية رحلة الشفاء، النهضة الجذرية، السرد، واغاميس.

1. Introduction

Richard Wagamese was born on October 14, 1955 in Minaki, in north western Ontario, Canada, to a family of the Wabaseemoong Independent Nations. He was a member of the Ojibway tribe which is part of a larger nation known as Anishinaabeg (Patterson-White, 2021). Wagamese's tribe led the traditional Ojibway lifestyle, fishing, trapping and hunting. In his early childhood he lived in a community with his parents, siblings, maternity grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins (La Hoz, 2021, p.3).

As a member of a family traumatized by the colonial policies of assimilation, Wagamese suffered intergenerational victimization (Wang, 2023). Left at home with little food by their parents who went to drink in a nearby town, the two-year old Wagamese and his three siblings wandered to a railroad station. There, they were taken by a policeman. Then, Wagamese spent his childhood in a series of Ontario foster homes before being adopted by a nonnative family (Patterson-White, 2021).

In his memoir *One Native Life,* Wagamese narrates his experience as a foster kid who ended in the system because his parents "had been sent to residential school and never developed parenting skills" (2009, p.18). He explains: "they couldn't offer the nurturing and protection I needed" (2009, p. 81).

Wagamese's adoption didn't only severe his familial ties, but also removed him from his kincentric ties with his Indigenous land, wider community and cultural traditions, leaving him later on struggling with his identity (Robinson, 2013). For him, the impact of his disconnection from his family and culture was similar to the destructive legacy of the residential schooling (Wang, 2023). Speaking about his painful and traumatized childhood experiences with foster homes and adoption, Wagamese declares:

I lived in two foster homes until I was adopted at age nine. ... The seven years I spent in that adopted home were filled with beatings, mental and emotional abuse, and a complete dislocation and disassociation from anything Indian or Ojibwa. I was permitted only the strict Presbyterian ethic of that household. It was as much an institutional kidnapping as a residential school (2009, p. 142)

In search for cultural reconnection with his Native culture, Wagamese left home and school at the age of sixteen. He lived on the streets where he became involved in a life of drugs and alcohol because of which he was imprisoned. At the same time, he took refuge in public libraries, both for shelter and for his growing love of reading and learning (Patterson-White, 2021). He started to slowly educate himself by reading works written by Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner and Eudora Welty (Hanson, 2014).

After 21 years of separation from his family and tribe, Wagamese reunited with them at the age of 23, and he finally began to experience more of his native culture (Patterson-White, 2021). He was given his native name Mushkotay Beezheekee Anakwat - Buffalo Cloud by a tribal leader who chose him as the storyteller of his tribe (Lederman, 2017).

Wagamese's first writing job was for the First Nations Newspaper *New Breed*. He worked as a journalist and won numerous awards. In 1994, he wrote his first novel, *Keeper 'n Me*. After that, He went on to write five other novels, a volume of poetry, and nonfiction works, including two memoirs (Patterson-White, 2021). In 2014, he published *Medicine Walk.* depicts his life struggle with alcoholism and post-traumatic stress disorder. According to Wagamese, he based his literary depiction of the destructive impact of alcoholism on his personal experiences (Hanson, 2014).

However, according to Robinson (2013), Wagamese's novels embody his personal journey towards "personal and cultural reconstruction" (Robinson, 2013, p. 88). Wagamese's personal transformation and reconnection to his cultural roots and identity form the core of *Medicine Walk*, in which he documented his struggles as a victim of intergenerational trauma. In the novel, Wagamese presented the sixteen-year-old protagonist Frank Starlight who was adopted by the old man, Bunky, because his biological father Eldon failed to take care of him. The novel traces Frank's journey back to his familial ties with his father and culture. Although Frank's early connection with his culture and land was maintained by his adoptee, he failed to grasp the essence of being Indian. It was until he embarked on a journey to the backcountry with his father that Frank felt grounded and rooted in his Indigenous culture and was able to meditate on his father's past, understand his present situation and envision a decolonized future of freedom. On his journey to bury his father in the backcountry, Frank learned through his father's stories about the destructive impact of colonialism on his family's history, and grew more empathetic toward his father with whom he was angry before the journey begins. Thus, the novel foregrounds storytelling and kinetics, not only as sources of healing, but also as decolonizing modes of radical resurgence and mobilization. Storytelling and the return to the Indigenous roots reclaimed the kinship ties between Frank, his father, their land and future generations.

2. Literature review

This literature review offers an insight into the past studies that investigated Richard Wagamese's novels especially his two most acclaimed novels *Indian Horse*, and *Medicine Walk*.

Ulya (2023), investigated how the protagonist in Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*, Saul Indian Horse, suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect as a result of the Indian Residential school system. Abused at school, Saul suffered trauma and the resulting experiences of alcoholism, aggression and depression.

Francesca Mussi's article "Land and storytelling: Indigenous pathways towards healing, spiritual regeneration, and resurgence" (2023) discussed the Indigenous land a site of healing the traumatic experiences of the Indian Residential school system. It also explored the importance of storytelling in Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*. Mussi argued that storytelling provides healing through the reclamation of Indigenous kinship ties with the land.

Similarly, Charlton (2018) investigated the relationship between land and story. However, unlike Mussi, she applied Russell West-Pavlov's theory of literary DieXis to examine the interlapping of storytelling and home in Wagamese's *Indian Horse* and *Medicine Walk*. She argues that the sense of home and belonging is traceable in the two novels in which the protagonists' journey carries their sense of land-connectedness. This relationality involves the participation of non-human elements in the rearticulation of the notion of the Indigenous home. This notion is fluid because, as Charlton argued, home in Wagamese's novels is not physical and fixed, but rather transportable by the protagonist through stories.

The healing power of stories is also investigated in Robinson (2013), Robertson (2023), and Tjandra (2024). The authors, discussed the role of storytelling in Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* and *Medicine Walk* in healing the intergenerational trauma and the breakdown of the Indigenous families caused by the dispossessive policies of the Residential schools. According to them, healing is achieved by breaking the silence and reclaiming the ability to speak and help the Indigenous communities reassert their land-based cultural traditions.

Resisting the colonial policies of erasure, assimilation and violence formed the core of the articles written by Hakeem, Rukhsana & Khan (2024), and Banerjee (2025). Situating *Indian Horse* in transnational and postcolonial context, the authors investigated the significance of storytelling in *Indian Horse* in challenging the colonial narratives which seek to erase the Indigenous presence, and reclaiming the Indigenous sovereignty, memory, land and culture by reasserting ancestral knowledge transmission. This mode of resistance involves the protection of the Indigenous people's identity and survival.

Franck Miroux (2019) investigated the use of storytelling as a means of challenging the colonial history of the Indian residential schools by applying trauma theory. The article demonstrated that through non-linear, fragmented oral narrative strategies, flashbacks and memory disruptions, Wagamese reconfigures colonial historiography and reshaped the fractured identity of Saul Indian Horse. Additionally, Ali, Jan & Ilyas (2024) applied Sigmund Freud's concepts of repression, trauma to examine the impact of trauma and cultural loss on the psyche of the protagonist in Indian Horse.

Furthermore, Parvathy U. (2014) explored racism in Wagamese's *Indian Horse*. The article delves into the marginalization and oppression suffered by

the Indigenous people at the hands of the white people by examining the psychological impact of racial prejudice, hatred and rejection on Saul who lacks a sense of belonging at his school and among his white hockey players. The writer foregrounds the role of communal, intergenerational and land-based memory in surviving racial violence, dislocation and discrimination. Parvathy U. contended that memory is a site of ancestral connection and land kinship.

Conversely, Shafi, Murtaza and Asghar (2024) addressed racism and racial politics in *Indian Horse* through Critical Race Theory framework. They applied the concepts in Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic's *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (2001).

The impact of the adoption of native children by non-native families was investigated in Wasyliw's thesis (2007). Wasyliw investigated how adoption in Wagamese's *Keeper'n Me* and *A Quality of Light* effected the Indigenous children's sense of nativeness.

Cores-Antepazo's 2025 article is a unique study of Wagamese's *Indian Horse* because, unlike the other past studies, it investigates storytelling, trauma, dispossession, racism and resilience by applying Leanne B. Simpson's concept of Indigenous resurgence. Cores-Antepazo contends that through Indigenous ways of being, storytelling and kinship with the land, Saul attained healing and resurgence on personal and communal levels.

Whetten (2021) challenged the "culture clash" approach that reads Indigenous literature through Western-centric perspectives that undervalue the Indigenous cultures, values and traditions. Whetten argued that applying "the culture clash" approach to Wagamese's *Indian Horse*. She argued that reading Wagamese's *Indian Horse* from a Western mindset causes damages

to its Indigenous value as a work that foregrounds Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Instead, Whetten recommended an Indigenous approach of reading Wagamese's novel and any other Indigenous literary work in order to foster humility and respect on the part of the non-Indigenous readers.

Most of these past studies are concerned with trauma and other issues like racism, violence and healing. They apply trauma studies, Critical Race Theory and psychoanalytic frameworks. However, this article will explore kinetics and storytelling as decolonizing processes of resurgence, re-emergence and political mobilization by following the journey and delving, through storytelling, into Eldon Starlight's past and connect it with his son's present so as to create individual and communal resurgence that moves away from the trauma of the past and the misery of the present to the freedom and sovereignty of the future.

3. Theoretical framework

The article applies the concepts of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg story-teller, scholar, and activist, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson who based the theoretical foundations of her critical concepts on Nishnaabeg intelligence, her Indigenous worldviews and land-based practices. In her book, *Dancing on our turtle's back: Stories of Nishnaabeg re-creation, resurgence, and a new emergence* (2011), Simpson investigated the destructive legacy of settler colonialism and articulated Indigenous radical resurgence as a decolonizing process that counters the colonial system of Indigenous cultural erasure and dispossession (Gharkan, 2025).

Against the colonial myth of the disappearing Indian and the destructive impact of cognitive imperialism, Simpson upholds the Indigenous people's resistance and resilience.

She believed that Indigenous people have the seeds of their resurgence in their cultural teachings that are 'planted' by their ancestors.

Simpson regards her elders, ancestors and their teachings as the driving force of the Indigenous radical resurgence (2011). She states that "In our greatest period of destruction, our Grandparents resisted by planting the seeds of resurgence…" (2011, p. 73). Therefore, the elders and the ancestors are instrumental in building resurgence because they "direct our people to live their lives in a way that promotes positive relationships with the land, their families and all of Creation (Simpson, 2011, p. 75). Therefore, they reassert the relational nature of their Indigenous cultures and protect their people's strong kinship ties with their culture and land.

It's important to note that Simpson's attachment to her Indigenous culture and land forms the core of her decolonizing modes of resistance and

resurgence that aim to confront and disrupt the colonial modes of normalized dispossession (Gharkan, 2025, p. 25). In *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back*, she centers her decolonizing method on her Nishnaabeg intelligence, Creation and Recreation stories, land-based and creative practices (Gharkan, 2025, p. 25). This is due to her belief that resurgence is rooted in Indigenous cultures. In other words, she aims to reconnect the Nishnaabeg intelligence, knowledge systems, languages, traditions, creativity, and spiritual world with the indigenous land to reenact decolonizing resurgence and to reassert the Indigenous people's presence that maintain cultural flourishment (Simpson, 2011).

Therefore, Indigenous people must reclaim their holistic way of life in order to put an end to colonialism and maintain their well-being and promote the good life or what Simpson calls *mino bimaadiziwin* (2011, p. 19). Living the good life, "physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually" (Simpson, 2011, pp. 47-48) help the Indigenous people access their Indigenous knowledge that is instrumental to their resurgence. The means to access this knowledge is termed by Simpson as Biskaabiiyang which she literally translates to "returning to ourselves" (Simpson, 2011, p. 57). According to her, Biskaabiiyang means "pick[ing] up the things we were forced to leave behind, whether they are songs, dances, values, or philosophies, and bring them into existence in the future" (2011, pp.54-55). Thus, Biskaabiiyang is a process of decolonization that implements resurgence by reviving the Nishnaabeg Knowledge through creative practices such as dancing, singing, drumming and storytelling (Simpson, 2011).

Based on her theory of resurgence, transforming the colonial present depends on the Indigenous people flourishing from the inside by foregrounding Indigenous way of being, thinking, and living. In this sense,

Biskaabiiyang acts as a decolonizing process because it resists the colonial distortion of Indigenous past. It "does not literally mean returning to the past, but rather re-creating the cultural and political flourishment of the past to support the well-being of our contemporary citizens" (Simpson, 2011, p. 56). Thus, Simpson dismantles the logic of colonialism and cognitive imperialism which seeks to sever the Indigenous people from [their cultural teachings, traditions] and the resurgent lifestyle of their elders and ancestors (Gharkan, 2025, p. 26). She unsettles the colonial discourse regarding Indigenous history which is seen as dead and irrelevant, by stressing the indispensability of the Indigenous ancestors in preserving their culture for future generations to create a path toward liberation (Simpson, 2011).

Therefore, resurgence allows cultural revitalization, transmission and continuity that enable Indigenous people to reconnect their past with their present to create a vision of a decolonized future in which their cultures are validated and their traditions are respected.

4. Discussion

Medicine Walk centers around the journey towards resurgence and re-emergence that began with Eldon Starlight asking his son Frank who lives with his guardian Bunky to come and travel with him to the backcountry. Eldon, dying of liver failure caused by excessive drinking, told Frank: "I want you to head into the backcountry with me."

"I need you to bury me facing east," he said. "Sitting up, in the warrior way" (Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 29).

At first, the son didn't take his father's request seriously because he considers his father as irresponsible, cruel and coward. This familial disconnection between the father and the son embodies the damaging impact of colonialism on Indigenous families and cultures. Because of his intergenerational trauma, Eldon failed to practice his Indigenous and relational ways of being that require him to take care of his son who as a child, is supposed to be treated as sacred because of his central position in Indigenous cultures.

The journey foregrounds the reclamation of the Indigenous ways of being as Eldon requested his son to bury him "in the warrior way." The revitalization of the Indigenous burial practices embodies Eldon's quest for belonging that reconnects him with his land. This grounded practice is closely related to Eldon's transformative journey from trauma to autonomy and sovereignty.

Eldon's search for cultural reconnection entails the reassertion of Indigenous embodied and place-based practices such as walking, storytelling and ceremony. In *As We Have Always Done* (2017), Simpson speaks about walking as a resurgent act of generating intellectual and emotional knowledge. This kind of knowledge will transform the father-son relationship.

Through their involvement in kinetics or movement, both Eldon and Frank will anchor their bodies in their land and reclaim their ties to the spiritual world and engage in "Nishnaabeg ways of living" (Simpson, 2017, p.28).

While on their journey to the backcountry, Eldon told Frank stories about his past. This storytelling serves as a decolonizing act that counters the colonial policies of dispossession. For Eldon, storytelling is a process of returning to his Indigenous relationality and kinship. According to Simpson, Storytelling is one mechanism through which Biskaabiiyang operates (2011, p. 117). The interconnectedness between storytelling and what it means to be Indian is foregrounded by the half-Indian woman whom Eldon and Frank met on the second night of their journey to the backcountry (Patterson-White, 2021). She told Frank: "It's all we are in the end. Our stories" (Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 99). She took notice of Eldon's bravery, kindness and determination in telling his painful past to his son.

In this context, Eldon showed his resistance and resilience by deciding to tell his stories because "Storytelling is at its core decolonizing, … it is a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both *Nishnaabeg* and *peoples* (Simpson, 2011, p. 36). Eldon's painful confessions will liberate him from the cycle of silence and shame and create a space of reconnection, belonging, holism, understanding and reconciliation (Tjandra, 2024). Speaking about his sense of dislocation and estrangement, Eldon told Frank "I never belonged nowhere, Frank. Never belonged nowhere or to nobody," he said. He gazed into the fire as though it was where his words and the strength to say them were coming from (Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 137). In this quote, Eldon's search for belonging is connected to the fire that is a sacred symbol in Indigenous

cultures. He feels cultural uprootedness because of being unable to practice his Indigenous spirituality and ceremonies.

Eldon's journey symbolizes his endeavor to come home through stories (McLeod, 2007) and to bring Frank to his Native roots and home. It's a sign of his resistance of colonial dispossession and erasure, and his intent to reconnect his son to his land, traditions and knowledge. Despite failing in his role as a father, Eldon's later commitment to telling his stories to his son enacts resistance (Simpson, 2011). Eldon's resistance to colonialism is evidenced by his expression of shame for being unable to defend his mother against her abusive husband, for neglecting his wife's who died at childbirth and for abandoning his son and leaving him with another man. Eldon told his son

> **…I was ashameda myself, Frank. Bone deep shamed. I was scared if I started in on tellin' about myself I'd break down an' I wanted to be strong for her. I really did. But layin' there knowin' how weak I really was brung on the dark in me. The dark that always sucked me back into drinkin'(Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 199).**

By breaking up the silence and speaking about his sufferings, Eldon breaks the cycle of intergenerational trauma that severed him from his indigenous culture and familial ties. This is the first step toward his resistance for colonial shame that will reassert his Indigenous presence against the colonial assimilative policies. In this regard, Simpson contended that

> **We are not shameful people. We have done nothing wrong. I began to realize that shame can only take hold when we are disconnected from the stories of resistance within our own families and communities. I placed that shame as an insidious**

> **and infectious part of the cognitive imperialism that was aimed at convincing us that we were a weak and defeated people, and that there was no point in resisting or resurging (Simpson, 2011, p. 12)**

In the quote above, Simpson examined shame as a colonial tool that targets the indigenous ways of knowing and being in order to impede the Indigenous resurgence. Shame threatens to destroy the holistic structure of Indigenous families, communities and nations. It seeks to stigmatize the Indigenous people and to make them ashamed of their traditions and values. Therefore, challenging colonial shame through "Storytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives (Simpson, 2011, p. 37).

Thus, instead of succumbing to his victimization, Eldon spoke about his traumatized experiences and contextualized them within communal history of colonial violence, disruption of kinship and dispossession which he resisted through his storied presence with his son. Eldon confronted his past and silence that resulted in his failure to take his responsibility as a father and a cultural transmitter of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom, and forced him to seek escape through alcoholism (Tjandra, 2024). Frank also suffered from colonial shame because of the negative stereotypes attached to his identity by the white settler. In an angry conversation with his father, Frank stated: "You think that's all there is to it. Bein' taken care of? Goin' to school and bein' picked on because you don't know who the fuck you are, bein' called Injun, wagon-burner, squaw-hopper, Tonto?" (Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p.96).

In order to return to the ancestral land and maintain freedom and sovereignty through resurgence, both Frank and his father should reconnect with their ancestors. By telling his past and remembering the ancestors and their teachings, they will dismantle the colonial legacy. According to Becka Chalie "The wisest ones got taught more. Our people. Starlights. We're meant to be teachers and storytellers. They say nights like this bring them teachin's and stories back and that's when they oughta be passed on again" (Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 147). Frank started to realize the value of stories that encode the teachings of his ancestors and their resilience in the face of white settler colonialism. Simpson reinforced the ancestors' role in their survival and resistance by stating that

> **We have those things today because our Ancestors often acted within the family unit to physically survive, to pass on what they could to their children, to occupy and use our lands as we always had. This, in and of itself, tells me a lot about how to build Indigenous renaissance and resurgence (2011, p.14)**

In the quote above, the interrelatedness of stories, land, resistance and resurgence is pivotal and forms the core of Simpson's reconfiguration of the colonial control over the land. For her "Nishnaabeg landscape flourishes with our stories of resistance and resurgence… the stories explain the resistance of my Ancestors and the seeds of resurgence they so carefully saved and planted. (Simpson, 2011, p. 17). Frank also became more aware of the holistic nature of his culture as Becka Charlie told him that "The stars are in us." (Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 152)

Eldon's act of remembering through walking and storytelling embodies a rejection of his victimization and his intent to guide his son to the path of

resurgence and a decolonized future through his ancestors who are his "strongest visionaries [who will] inspire [them] to vision alternative futures" (Simpson, 2011, pp. 21-22).

By walking the land, narrating the past and listening to the stories, both the father and the son reclaimed their familial and communal ties. Their Indigenous knowledge flourished (Simpson, 2011) because "this knowledge is created and communicated through the movement of body and sound, testimony and witnessing, remembering, protest and insurrection, by creating a space of storied presencing, alternative imaginings, transformation, reclamation—resurgence (Simpson, 2011, p. 109). Remembering becomes decolonial because it unsettles the colonial discourse and cognitive imperialism that seek to render the Indigenous people as dead, disappearing, forgotten and unable to see "their [ancestors'] philosophies and their strategies of mobilization and the complexities of their plan for resurgence" (Simpson, 2011, p. 109).

Despite his troubled childhood, traumatic Korean War service and alcoholism (Patterson-White, 2021), there are moments in Eldon's life in which he was

> **wonderin' if time could make goin' back to other things possible too. Goin' back to other people, other places. My mother and such. Never ever thought them kinda thoughts before. Found myself wonderin' if returnin' was somethin' a man could do, if ya could walk back over your trail and maybe reclaim things. They were odd thoughts but she hadda way of getting them into my head." (Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 198)**

The quote above mixes Indigenous orality with the written text. This is evident of the Indigenization of English by the Indigenous speaker. It expresses Eldon's resilience by seeking to reclaim the things that settler colonialism ripped away from him. This enacts Biskaabiiyang which Simpson defines as "the process of returning to ourselves, a reengagement with the things we have left behind, a reemergence, an unfolding from the inside out—is a concept, an individual and collective process of decolonization and resurgence. To me, it is the embodied processes as freedom. It is a flight out of the structure of settler colonialism and into the processes and relationships of freedom and self-determination encoded and practiced within Nishnaabewin or grounded normativity (Simpson, 2017, p. 17).

Upon reaching the mountain ridge where Eldon wished to be buried, Eldon and Frank experience the place as sacred, peaceful, ceremonial and spiritual. Eldon told Frank that "I come to know some peace here, Frank," his father said. "This here's the only place I felt like I belonged, like I fit, where I never fucked up. Couldn't think of no better place to leave from" (Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 137).

Wagamese describes the scene as follows:

> **When they breached the rim of trees at the top of the ridge, the last of the clouds parted and sun reclaimed the western sky. The clouds were dappled now in a burnished gold and he thought that this was all the cathedral he'd ever need.**
> **(Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 122).**

According to Simpson, Eldon and Frank's 'presencing' on the land created a constellation of relationships that forms a flight path out of settler colonialism into Indigeneity (2017, p. 217). Dismantling settler colonialism is

evident in the way Wagamese referred to the mountain ridge as 'the cathedral.' This aligns with Indigenous cultures that view the land as their spiritual sanctuary, the place of their sacred rituals and belonging. This reconfiguration of the land as a spiritual being unsettles the colonial capitalist mindset that considers it as an empty no-man's property to be conquered and controlled for materialistic benefit (Gharkan & Otaiwi, 2014).

After burying his father on the mountain ridge, Frank engaged with the land as the source of healing, resurgence and renewal of Indigenous land-based practices. He reclaimed his kinship and relationality with the land that is envisioned by him as a decolonial space of harmony and freedom. Frank found himself in a constellated relationship with the the natural scene in which

> **He watched them ride into the swale and ease the horses to the water while the dogs and children ran in the rough grass. The men and women on horseback dismounted and their shouts came to him laden with hope and good humour (Wagamese, 2014, *Medicine Walk*, p. 223)**

This scene of men and women riding horseback and 'laden with hope and good humour' indicates Frank's realization of his ancestral lineage which made possible his envisioning of a decolonial future of resurgence, hope, healing, joy, kinship, communal belonging, reconnection, resilience and sovereignty.

The connection between walking the land and coming home and coming to know one's identity which is experienced by Frank is conveyed by Simpson. She pointed out

> **We always *feel* good after being out in the bush, or after ceremony. I thought of this that day as I walked. I thought of the word *e-yaa'oyaanh*, which means who I am, the way I am living or becoming, my identity (2011, p.11).**

The father-son reunion with their ancestral land reasserts their "Nishnaabeg presence, a decolonized and decolonizing space where [their] cultural understandings flourish (Simpson, 2011, p. 107). They restored their relationality with the land that opens up a decolonial and resurgent future of freedom and sovereignty. This closely aligns with Simpson's statement that "in the old days, stories connected our families to one another; they stitched together our collective consciousness; they stitched together our nation (2011, p. 119). By breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma through storytelling that offers him a flight out of colonial shame and silence, Eldon succeeded in transforming Frank's anger to empathy and understanding. Storytelling mobilizes Frank to move forward to an Indigenous understanding of his identity anchored in the reclamation of kinship ties with his father and the land in a way that resists the colonial erasure of the Indigenous notion of home and which Wang referred to as "colonial domicide" (2023, p. 94).

5. Conclusion

Richard Wagamese's *Medicine Walk* is a powerful literary enactment of Indigenous resurgence, relationality, and decolonization through land-based practices, storytelling, and intergenerational healing. Eldon's request to be buried "in the warrior way," facing east on sacred land, marks the beginning of his transformation from a man fragmented by colonial trauma into a father reclaiming his cultural responsibilities and relational ties. Through the physical and emotional journey into the backcountry with his son, Eldon engages in what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) calls *Biskaabiiyang*—a process of returning, re-emergence, and reengagement with Indigenous ways of being, rooted in land, kinship, and story.

Eldon's acts of storytelling—confessing his past, naming his pain, and reconnecting with his ancestors—function not only as personal healing but as political acts of decolonial resistance. As Simpson (2011) asserts, storytelling disrupts the colonial mechanisms of shame and silence by reactivating the intergenerational memory and Indigenous knowledge embedded in oral traditions. Through stories, Eldon dismantles the colonial shame that alienated him from his culture, family, and land, and creates a space where he and Frank can rebuild their severed bond.

The sacredness of land is central to this process. Wagamese's depiction of the mountain ridge as "the cathedral" reclaims nature as a spiritual sanctuary, in direct opposition to settler colonial perceptions of land as empty, disposable, and commodifiable. Frank's final vision of Indigenous people riding into the swale "laden with hope and good humour" (Wagamese, 2014, p. 223) signals his newfound understanding of his ancestral inheritance and his place within a constellation of kinship, ceremony, and hope. The

father-son journey becomes not only a path toward burial but toward *rebirth*—an enactment of grounded normativity and Indigenous sovereignty that resists what Wang (2023) terms "colonial domicide," the erasure of Indigenous homes and identities.

Ultimately, *Medicine Walk* affirms that resurgence begins with remembrance. Through embodied practices such as walking the land, telling stories, and listening deeply, both Eldon and Frank reclaim their Indigenous presence and relational accountability. Their reunion with the land restores a sense of belonging, identity, and futurity—offering a model of Indigenous healing grounded in love, resistance, and the enduring power of stories to carry nations forward.

6. References

1. Ali, Z., Jan, A. S., & Ilyas, M., (2024), Literature as a Mirror of the Psyche: A Freudian Psychoanalytic Approach to Colonial Trauma in Indian Horse. *International Journal of Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences, 3*(3), 758–770. https://ijciss.org/
2. Banerjee, P. (2025). Cultural Conflicts, Identity Politics, and Indigenous Resistance in the Texts of Richard Wagamese and Michelle Good. *Research Scholar: An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations, 13*(2), 36–45. http://www.researchscholar.co.in/
3. Charlton, A. (2018). *Place-based identity in Northwestern Ontario Anishinaabe literature* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Saskatchewan).
   https://harvest.usask.ca/handle/10388/12169
4. Cores-Antepazo, C. (2025). Re-creation, re-membrance, and resurgence: Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*. *Canada & Beyond: A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies, 14*, 27–43. https://doi.org/10.14201/candb.v14i27-43
5. Emberley, J. (2007). *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal: Cultural practices and decolonization in Canada*. University of Toronto Press.
6. Gharkan, E. R., & Otaiwi, S. I. (2024a). Re-centering the Indigenous perceptions of the wolf in selected Native American and Canadian poetry. *Journal of Sustainable Studies, 6*(4), 2977–2995.
7. Gharkan, E. R. (2025). Decolonizing the urban space in Duncan Mercredi's selected poems. *Al-Qadisiyah Journal For Humanities Sciences*, *28* (2), 21-40.
8. Hakeem, M., Rukhsana, K., & Khan, B. (2024). Colonial oppression and cultural erasure in *Indian Horse*: A critical analysis of the residential school system as a tool of assimilation. *Journal of Contemporary Social Sciences, 4*(3), 327–332. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385416962
9. Hanson, Ch. (2014, April). A long journey. *Richard Wagamese*.
   https://quillandquire.com/authors/a-long-iourney/
10. La Loz, L. D. (2021). *Canada's biggest pride and shame in the book Indian Horse by Richard Wagamese* (Unpublished bachelor's thesis). Slezská univerzita v Opavě.
11. Lederman, M. (2017, March 24). Ojibway author Richard Wagamese found salvation in stories. *The Globe and Mail*. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/oiibway-author-richard-wagamese-found-salvation-in-stories/article34422836/
12. McLeod, N. (2007). Coming home through stories. In N. McLeod (Ed.), *Cree narrative memory: From treaties to contemporary times* (pp. 17–36). Purich Publishing.
13. Miroux, F. (2019). Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*: Stolen memories and recovered histories. *Actio Nova: Revista de Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada, 3*, 194–230. https://doi.org/10.15366/actionova2019.3.009
14. Mussi, F. (2023). Land and storytelling: Indigenous pathways towards healing, spiritual regeneration, and resurgence. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 58*(3), 660–676. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219894211031716

15. Parvathy, U. (2014). Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*: A critique on racism against Native Indians in Canada. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies, 2*(7), 255–259. http://www.theijhss.com/
16. Patterson-White, S. (2021, February 5). *Medicine Walk*. LitCharts. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/medicine-walk
17. Robinson, J. (2013). Re-storying the colonial landscape: Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne, 38*(2), 88–105. https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl38_2art05
18. Shafi, N., Murtaza, G., & Asghar, K. (2024). Institutional racism and racial politics in Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*: A critical race study. *Journal of Arts and Linguistics Studies, 2*(4), 2285–2301. https://doi.org/10.71281/jals.v2i4.238
19. Simpson, L. B. (2011). *Dancing on our turtle's back: Stories of Nishnaabeg re-creation, resurgence, and a new emergence*. ARP Books.
20. Simpson, L. B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. University of Minnesota Press.
21. Tjandra, N. (2024). Stories that mend: Reconciling intergenerational trauma in *Medicine Walk* (Unpublished undergraduate paper). Simon Fraser University.
22. Ulya, H. N. (2023). Child abuse suffered by Saul in Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*. *LILICS: Journal of Literature, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies, 2*(1), 263–274. https://doi.org/10.18860/lilics.v1i1.2795
23. Wagamese, R. (2009). *One native life*. D & M Publishers.
24. Wagamese, R. (2012). Returning to harmony. In Sh. Rogers, M. DeGagné, & J. Dewar (Eds.), *Response, responsibility, and renewal: Canada's reconciliation journey* (pp. 157–167). Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
25. Wagamese, R. (2014). *Medicine walk*. McClelland & Stewart.
26. Wang, M.-C. (2023). Guilt, diaspora, and colonial domicide: Trauma in Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*. In P.-h. Ni & M.-C. Wang (Eds.), *Liminality of justice in trauma and trauma literature* (pp. 94–99). Cambridge Scholars.
27. Wasyliw, J. (2007). *Imagining adoption: Filiation and affiliation in the works of Richard Wagamese* (Master's thesis). University of Manitoba. https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/handle/1993/2760
28. Whetten, H. (2021). Re-reading the "culture clash": Alternative ways of reading in *Indian Horse* (Master's thesis, Marquette University). *Marquette e-Publications*. https://epublications.marquette.edu/theses_open/671
29. Wiese, D. (2022). Nighttime invasions, colonial dispossession, and Indigenous resilience in Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*. *American, British and Canadian Studies, 28*(1), 54–68. https://doi.org/10.2478/abcsj-2022-0004