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Deborah Saidero

Decolonial Refeminization and Resurgence in Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back**

Abstract I: Il contributo si ispira alle teorie femministe indigene sul genere, la rifemminizzazione, la decolonizzazione e la risorgenza per analizzare *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* (2011) di Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. Nello specifico, esamina come la scrittrice indigena utilizza le storie ancestrali dei Nishnaabe per immaginare una realtà diversa per le donne/i popoli indigeni al di là del paradigma patriarcale, antropocentrico e coloniale. Il recupero di queste storie, che insegnano il rispetto per le donne, il femminile e la terra, risulta fondamentale per il processo di risorgenza, che riguarda sia la crescita personale della Simpson come donna, madre e attivista, sia il suo popolo impegnato nella decolonizzazione dei corpi indigeni e nell'autodeterminazione.

Abstract II: This article examines Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* (2011) in light of Indigenous feminist views on gender, refeminization, decolonization and resurgence. In particular, it focuses on how Simpson retrieves the stories of the Nishnaabeg people to envision ways of moulding the present and future of Indigenous women/peoples beyond the anthropocentric, settler-centric and patriarchal paradigm. The retelling of ancestral stories is fundamental both for her personal growth as an Indigenous woman, mother and activist, and for her people in their journey towards decolonizing Indigenous bodies and self-determination that will enable their resurgence by reinstating a respect for women, the feminine and the land.

Keywords: Indigenous, Decolonization, Refeminization, Resurgence, Nishnaabeg stories.

1. Refeminized Resurgence

Resurgence is broadly considered as a movement of regenerative nation-building by the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (i.e., North America). It aims at promoting decolonization by reclaiming and revitalizing Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, cultural practices, and forms of governance, so as to adapt them to the challenges of contemporary times and transmit them to the future generations. It includes challenging colonial structures by

* I acknowledge that I am discussing Anishinaabe culture as a former member of Canada's settler society and take responsibility for any misinterpretations that may be unintentionally the result of my western mindset.

reconnecting with ancestral lands and restoring kin-centric relationships. Mohawk political thinker Taiaiake Alfred claims, for instance, that, having arisen from land dispossession, resurgence hinges on "the restoration of indigenous presences on the land and the revitalization of land-based practices" (Alfred 2009: 56). Most resurgence efforts are thus nation-based, rather than pan-Indigenous, and "community-centered" in order to restore disrupted cultural practices, ceremonies, and human/non-human relations through "daily acts of renewal" (Corntassel 2012: 89).

In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (2011), writer-activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, from Alderville First Nation, near Peterborough, Ontario, articulates her personal understanding of resurgence within the political, legal, intellectual, social and cultural contexts of her people, the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg[1], or Mississaugas, of the broader Anishinaabe nation. Rejecting state-centric discourses of recognition, she states that "resurgence must be Indigenous at its core in order to reclaim and re-politicize the context and the nature of Nishnaabeg thought" (Simpson 2011: 20); it must be theorized "from within" (Simpson 2011: 31) and support the regeneration of Indigenous languages, oral cultures, and traditions of governance (Simpson 2011: 22), without relying on government funding, permission, or state-driven reconciliation initiatives that just "neutralize Indigenous resistance" (Simpson 2011: 24). In her view, for example, the priority of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2007-2015) was to make Canadians feel less guilty of the ongoing colonial subjugation of Indigenous peoples, instead of truly committing to righting the wrongs done to Indigenous nations and establishing respectful relationships with them. The Canadian state, she writes, is like an abusive partner who apologizes but does nothing "to stop the abuse" (Simpson 2011: 21); by allowing the non-consensual trespassing of Indigenous lands and bodies, it upholds settler-colonialism, heteropatriarchy and environmental destruction.

For Simpson, one of the core challenges and the starting point of resurgence is decolonizing gender, which is a key tool of colonization. Defying a certain scepticism towards feminism that still persists among Native women[2], she situates her "radical resurgence theory" (Simpson 2017: 11)[3] in contemporary Indigenous feminism, which recognizes the urgency of addressing gender issues within collective claims to sovereignty and self-determination. Anishinaabe scholar Cheryl Suzack, for instance, defines Indigenous feminism as "a critical paradigm that … focuses on the intersections between colonialism and patriarchy to exam-

[1] Nishnaabeg and Nishnaabe are alternative terms, used by Simpson, for the Anishinaabe or Ojibwe peoples of Turtle Island. The Anishinaabe territory is located in the Great Lakes area and extends from south-eastern Ontario to Manitoba and Saskatchewan and down into Wisconsin and Minnesota. The Michi Saagiig people have their home on the northern shore of Lake Ontario, between Niagara Falls and Ottawa, which is part of the Williams Treaty of 1818.

[2] See Anderson (2010). Some Native women find it unnecessary to address feminism since Indigenous efforts should, in their view, focus collectively on the bigger issues of "[d]ecolonization, healing, sovereignty, and nation-building" (Anderson 2010: 85).

[3] It is radical, she explains, because "[I]t is an unapologetic refusal of colonialism, and a reclamation of the Indigenous life that it refuses. It is thinking and practice that gets to the root of domination and violence and builds otherwise" (Simpson 2022: np).

ine how race and gender systems overlap to create conditions in which Indigenous women are subjected to forms of social disempowerment" (Suzack 2015: 261). Thus, while Simpson aims to build a strong Nishnaabeg nation, she is cognisant that this requires a critical interrogation of the impact of colonialization and heteronormativity on Native women and Two-Spirit people. Indeed, healthy nation-building must acknowledge the persistence of misogynous, sexist, homophobic and transphobic attitudes in contemporary Native communities as an effect of internalized heteropatriarchal ideas; it cannot be achieved without seriously addressing "the political, social, and economic inequalities [still] faced by Indigenous women" (Anderson 2010: 85) or "without taking Two-Spirit experiences into account" (Pyle 2020: 110).

Throughout *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Simpson endorses, in particular, the pioneering feminist call to refeminize Indigenous cultures made by Salish writer Lee Maracle in *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism.* First published in 1988, at a time when second-wave white feminism was advocating social equality, Maracle's seminal work urged Native women to reappropriate their identities by reclaiming their traditional gender roles and ancestral knowledge. Refeminization, Maracle contends, is necessary to counter the denial of Indigenous womanhood and to root out all violence against Native women, who have been persistently racialized, sexualized and gendered, with the ruinous effect of stripping them of their agency and power. The racialization of Native women, for example, has reduced them to "a species of sub-human animal life" (Maracle 1996: 21), ranking them beneath both white women and Native males and rendering them "not fit to be referred to as women" (Maracle 1996: 18). As "the females of the species", she states, we are "'Native', undesirable, non-sensuous beings" whose "wombs bear fruit but are not sweet" (Maracle 1996: 20). This dehumanization of Native women has resulted in a negation of their femininity and sexuality which upholds both their commodification to sex objects for white males, as well as intimate partner violence within their own communities. At the same time, by marking their offspring as undesired and "not sweet", it has justified the erasure of Indigenous motherhood through sterilization campaigns, residential schooling, and child-welfare systems that remove Indigenous children from their mothers and communities, in name of the genocidal colonial dictate to eradicate species deemed 'inferior'. Equally, the sexualized framing of Native women within patriarchal binaries, like those of princess and squaw, has disempowered them as clan mothers, who engaged in domestic economy, child-rearing and agricultural activities, as well as in tribal governance, treaty negotiations and trade.

Like *I Am Woman*, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* is Simpson's personal effort to assert Indigenous womanhood, following her pivotal experience with motherhood, her interactions with Elders, and her involvement with activism. By charting Simpson's rediscovery of femininity through her birthing and breastfeeding ceremonies and the retrieval of Nishnaabeg stories, it enacts the empowerment of "a Native feminist being" auspicated by Maracle (Maracle 1996: vii). Simpson thus theorizes, I argue, a 'refeminized resurgence' which entails eradicating colonial, patriarchal and heteronormative violence by engaging in a process of decolonization in the feminine that will restore sovereignty to Native women, acknowledge their leading role in preserving and revitalizing Indigenous languages and cultures, re-establish respect for their bodies, and redefine gender beyond male/female categories.

2. Storytelling as Land-based Resurgence

To enact her refeminized resurgence and achieve *Biskaabiiyang*, "a new emergence" (Simpson 2011: 51), Simpson uses Indigenous storytelling as an embodied practice of living – as a way, that is, to live traditions and create new ones. Storytelling is, indeed, a powerful decolonizing tool because it is both "a process of remembering" past traditions and of "visioning and creating a just reality … where [Nishnaabeg] can experience the spaces of freedom and justice" (Simpson 2011: 33). It not only provides the Nishnaabeg with the seeds of resurgence implicit in Nishnaabeg thought that their ancestors passed down through centuries of stoic resistance to colonialism (Simpson 2011: 15), but it also allows them to critique social reality and envision transformed decolonial spaces outside their current existences (Simpson 2011: 33-34). For Nishnaabeg women this means learning about their valuable roles in society and in the resurgence process in order to dismantle internalized patriarchal norms and enable self-actualization.

The retelling of Nishnaabeg creation stories in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* is in itself an act of resurgence because it reconnects Simpson with Nishnaabeg thought, which contains the instructions for decolonization and self-transformation. It thus challenges the neo-assimilationist dictate of cognitive imperialism according to which "Indigenous Peoples were not, and are not, thinking peoples" (Simpson 2011: 32) by revealing the richness of Nishnaabeg culture, values and ways. This richness derives from the deep connection between Nishnaabeg thought and the Michi Saagiig land situated around northern Lake Ontario. As in other Indigenous worldviews, Nishnaabeg knowledge, language, identity and stories are believed to come from the land, which is a constant teacher[4] and shows the way to *Aanji Maajitaawin,* "the art of starting over" and regenerating (Simpson 2011: 20). "Our Nishnaabeg landscape", Simpson writes, "flourishes with our stories of resistance and resurgence" (2011: 18). Everything in the landscape – the maple sugar bushes, the wild rice fields, and the animals, plants and rivers of this part of the Great Lakes – embodies emergence, transformation and regeneration and thus compels the Nishnaabeg to move beyond four hundred years of mere resistance and survival and to regenerate by achieving *mino bimaadiziwin*, "the good life" (Simpson 2011: 13), which means 'the art of living in a good way' by keeping good, balanced relations with both the human and non-human worlds.

Being aligned with the natural world, Nishnaabeg thought prompts a restoring of the Indigenous practice of living in deep relationality with the land, both individually and as a collectivity. This is key to refeminization as it enables Indigenous women to retrieve the sacred identification between their bodies and the body of Mother Earth. As Simpson writes:

> My consciousness as a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg woman, a storyteller and a writer comes from the land because *I am the land*. Nishnaabemowin [the Anishinaabe language] seamlessly joins my body to the body of my first mother; it links my beating heart to the beating river [Otonabee] that flows through my city [Peterborough] (Simpson 2011: 95, emphasis added).

[4] Simpson elaborates on this idea in her article "Land as Pedagogy" (2014), where she advocates the need to reclaim land-based knowledge through Nishnaabeg stories as a decolonizing tool.

Acknowledging her inseparability from the land allows Simpson to imagine both her body and the land as decolonial sites of resilience, resistance and resurgence and thus to counter colonial commodification. The embodied experience of reuniting with her first mother, the Earth, and of merging her heartbeat with the purifying sound of the river enables her to see beyond the colonial abuse of Indigenous women and the land, which is, for instance, symbolized by the concrete hydraulic lift lock in downtown Peterborough. This towering man-made structure reminds her, on one hand, of how the Trent Severn Waterway negatively impacted the Mississaugas' territorial lands and, on the other, of how the medicalization of childbirth disrupted the sacred birthing ceremonies of Native women (Simpson 2008: 206-207). By turning to the land as a teacher of regenerative transformation, Simpson realizes, however, that forced hospitalization during childbirth was yet another colonial tactic aimed at enforcing patriarchy by attacking Indigenous motherhood and disrupting extended family and kin networks that supported, valued and protected women and their children. The goal of her land-based resurgence is thus to start rebuilding these kin-centric relationships as the basis for a healthy and sovereign Nishnaabeg nation.

3. Refeminization through Nishnaabeg Creation Stories

The sacredness of the woman/land connection is a core teaching of the Nishnaabeg creation story of the Seven Fires, which is the starting point of Simpson's personal resurgence process. In this story, the universe is created from the union of intellect (the first thought) and emotion (the first heartbeat) by the ungendered creator Gzhwe Mnidoo, who starts by creating fire (first fire), followed by the sun and moon (second fire), night, day and the seasons (third fire), movement (fourth fire), and birds to spread the seeds of creative energy (fifth fire). In the sixth fire, the creator makes a place in which to grow the seeds and that place is Mother Earth, the most beautiful woman of all, who has the creator's heart and the creative energy to give birth to new life. From her breast come all the animals, plants, trees and seas. Finally, in the seventh fire, after many attempts, the creator takes four parts from the first woman's body – soil, air, water and fire – and lovingly moulds a being, into whom s/he blows his/her spirit and thoughts. The being is then lowered down to the earth to be a child of the great mother (Simpson 2011: 37-39).

The meaningfulness of this story is that it teaches the Nishnaabeg that resurgence starts with women because, like Gzhwe Mnidoo, they are creators of new life. As Elder Edna Manitowabi explains[5], it connects Nishnaabeg women to Mother Earth and shows them the importance of pregnancy as a means of replicating the creation story; it tells them that they are sacred and beautiful, that they are the mothers to future generations, and that they have all the creator's intellect and Mother Earth's wisdom to succeed in regenerating their nations (Simpson 2011: 37). In particular, by coming to "understand the Earth as their Mother", they "understand the Earth as themselves" (Simpson 2011: 36), thus learning to cherish the connection with the land as "the umbilical bond to all of Creation" and to "take care of themselves" and their nations by modelling themselves after the Earth (Simpson

[5] Elder Edna Manitowabi retells Simpson this story during her first pregnancy and guides her through her life-giving ceremonies thus allowing her to accept her new identity as a mother.

2011: 37). The teachings held in this story are thus fundamental to decolonize and refeminize the sexualized self-image that young Nishnaabeg women have of themselves and thus to empower them. In contrast with the patriarchal view of women as inferior upheld by the Christian story of Adam and Eve, the Seven Fires of Creation re-instates the importance and agency of women as life-givers, nurturers, and generators of nations. It thereby legitimizes the reclaiming of Indigenous motherhood which "was the source of Indigenous female authority in the family and in the government of [Indigenous] pre-colonial nations" (Anderson 2010: 86).

On a personal level, experiencing motherhood allows Simpson to grasp the full meaning and personal implications of the creation story and to uncover the deep ethical principles implicit in Nishnaabeg thought, which is based on "non-authoritarian leadership, non-hierarchical ways of being, non-interference, and non-essentialism" (Simpson 2011: 18). Carrying, giving birth to, and nurturing her two children are transformative experiences that grant her access to what Métis/Cree scholar Kim Anderson calls "the emotional intelligence of mothering" (Anderson 2010: 83) – an intelligence that brings her back to the foundational life-affirming principles of her culture which were attacked by colonialism. Thus, when her birthing ceremonies disclose the power and sacredness of creating a new life, which is "an extension of ourselves" and of the creator (Simpson 2011: 39), Simpson is able to debunk the heteropatriarchal commodification of women as mothers which serves to relegate them to the domestic sphere and ensure the continuity of a male-dominated society. By reclaiming Indigenous motherhood through her creation story, she acknowledges, instead, women as indispensable in the life-cycle and creates a decolonial space that celebrates the female body, feminine qualities, and women's roles as complementary to those of men.

The retrieval of breastfeeding ceremonies (in contrast to colonially-imposed bottle feeding) is, equally, a decolonial act of refeminization that releases Simpson from the shame Native women have developed towards their sexualized bodies and allows her to reclaim the importance of nurturing not only as an act of nourishing but also as an act of establishing treaty relationships. It thus elicits a reclamation of women's traditional roles in connection with both child-rearing and treaty-making, thereby repositioning them at the centre of the domestic and public spheres. Breastfeeding is, indeed, a reciprocal relationship based on sharing between a mother and a child, which is beneficial to the health and well-being of both and requires commitment, patience, and constant negotiating as occurs with political treaties between nations (Simpson 2011: 107). Being "the very first treaty" (Simpson 2011: 106) that a child learns, it plays a significant role in educating youngsters about Nishnaabeg political culture and the importance of maintaining good relations with other human, animal and plant nations. In particular, it teaches that treaties are "sacred relationships between independent and sovereign nations" (Simpson 2011: 109) based on consent, respect and diplomacy.

The political relevance of breastfeeding as treaty is encoded in the creation story of Wenonah, which Simpson retells following the recounting made by Elder Doug Williams:

> Before there were humans on earth, a female spirit being came to the earth. Her name was Wenonah, which means the first breast feeder – *nonah* is to breastfeed; *we* is 'the one who'. Wenonah took the responsibility of creating humans on earth. She came

> to earth, and with struggle, eventually created humans. Nishnaabeg people are her descendants. We exist today because she united with w-bngishmog (the west wind) and created the first humans. She created and then nourished us by nursing us. When women breastfeed, they are aligning themselves with this sacred story, engaging in the act of creating a new life. Breastfeeding was so important in this Creation Story that Wenonah carries it as her name. To me, this means that as a people, Nishnaabeg have a great deal to learn by being breastfed, by breastfeeding and by supporting and honouring breastfeeding women (Simpson 2011: 108).

In her typical narrative aesthetics, which reproduces the spontaneous simplicity and the repetitive, almost incantatory, qualities of Indigenous orature, Simpson intermingles the act of storytelling with her personal interpretation of the story, so as to summon her people to acknowledge the fundamental role that Nishnaabeg culture has always attributed to women as creators and breast feeders/nurturers. The use of the pronouns 'we/us' signals that the story of Wenonah serves to remind the Nishnaabeg of women's central place in Nishnaabeg governance, which, Simpson claims, starts at home, at the breasts of mothers, because "the family is the microcosm for the nation" (Simpson 2011: 122). Like this female spirit being who mated with west wind to generate the first humans and nursed them to ensure their survival, Nishnaabeg women nurture their families and nations by modelling leadership through their actions. They, for instance, teach children the non-authoritarian and non-hierarchical principles of Nishnaabeg political culture both through storytelling and a return to non-coercive parenting methods based on non-interference and respect for the right of children to follow their visions and abilities (Simpson 2011: 108). Equally, they play a key role in revitalizing Indigenous languages by teaching Nishnaabemowin to future generations – an endeavour Simpson also undertakes in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* by extensively introducing Nishnaabeg words into the text and explaining their meaning and etymology in English (as she does for Wenonah's name in the passage quoted above), so as to undermine the authority of the colonial tongue and expose its inadequacy in translating the complex conceptual meanings of Nishnaabeg words and worldviews[6]. Indeed, Simpson's effort at refeminization entails decolonizing the patriarchal mindset engrained in and transmitted through the English language by retrieving Nishnaabemowin and the more gender-balanced view it upholds.

Simpson's decolonization of breastfeeding reinstates the centrality of Nishnaabeg women as leaders and acknowledges their daily commitment to family and community as the basis of nation-building. As part of her refeminized resurgence, she aims to restore "a Native feminist ethics of leadership … that emphasizes the role of culture and community and a shared sense of responsibility" (Tsosie 2010: 38) towards responding to the needs of this and future generations. This involves embracing the Indigenous understanding of lead-

[6] Simpson considers herself a language learner and relies on her Elders to reach a deep understanding of Nishnaabeg words and the concepts they express. Throughout the book, she takes great care to explain core concepts like the Grandmother teachings to her (Indigenous) readers through a meticulous linguistic analysis. Her use of Nishnaabeg terms often followed by the English explanation or translation in brackets aims to decenter the settler status of English.

ership as relationship. Indeed, in Nishnaabeg societies, leadership is not about being the head of a political party or nation, but is based on shared power. Leaders emerge as needed in society and humbly divest themselves of their own authority and power to generate consensus cooperatively; they are individuals who inspire, encourage, bring out the best in others, and empower youth to self-actualize (Simpson 2011: 119).

By acknowledging breastfeeding as treaty-making Simpson also decolonizes her view of the William Treaty of 1818, which, from a Nishnaabeg viewpoint, was not an act of surrendering the land to the British Crown and the Canadian state, but rather an agreement between sovereign nations to mutually maintain peace and share responsibilities in stewarding Mother Earth. This understanding deconstructs the colonial premises of Indigenous-Canadian treaty relations which marked the beginning of Native women's removal from decision-making in their societies and reclaims their right to restore this decisional power.

4. Regendering Nishnaabeg Culture

Through mothering Simpson develops a refeminized/feminist consciousness which is, in Barker's words, "critically sovereign" (Barker 2017: 1) because it empowers a self-actualized female identity while problematizing the framing of Indigenous womanhood exclusively within the rhetoric of motherhood. While Simpson finds strength in her birthing and mothering experiences for her self-determination, she refrains from offering an essentialized view of motherhood as the sole and primary gender role available to Indigenous women. Equating Indigenous womanhood with motherhood would, indeed, limit women's options to child-rearing and nurturing and re-instate heteropatriarchal values in Indigenous communities. As Métis/Anishinaabe scholar Kai Pyle observes, the equation not only erases Native women's other historical and contemporary roles "as traders, diplomats, leaders, healers, warriors, artists and more", but also "posits a biological link between women's bodies and their social roles, which ignores women who cannot give birth or do not wish to, as well as people who can give birth but do not identify with womanhood" (Pyle 2020: 114).

Simpson's radical resurgence theory is, instead, gender-inclusive and envisions Nishnaabeg gender and sexual orientation "along a spectrum of variance" (Simpson 2017: 131) to counter the sexualized images of Indigenous womanhood/femininity and manhood/masculinity that uphold colonial imperialist ideas of indigeneity. Indeed, in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* she invokes a return to a "fluidity around gender in terms of responsibilities and roles" (Simpson 2011: 60) beyond the male/female binary, which was typical of many pre-contact Indigenous societies, including her own. As Lenape scholar Joanne Barker explains, many Indigenous cultures have "multiple (not merely *third* genders or *two*-spirits) identificatory categories of gender and sexuality", within which "male, man, and masculine and female, woman, and feminine are not necessarily equated or predetermined by anatomical sex; thus, neither are social identity, desire, or pleasure" (Barker 2017: 13). Traditionally, therefore, one's position in society was not determined by gender, but was, Simpson says, often linked to "one's name, clan affiliation, ability and individual self-determination" (Simpson 2011: 60). Accordingly, in the past, Nishnaabeg societies normalized queerness

and gender difference/variance and accepted all members of the community regardless of gender or sexual orientation[7].

Following the Nishnaabeg creation story of the Seven Fires which teaches that each person contributes to society on the basis of their individual gifts and skills, Simpson counters the current marginalization of Two-Spirit, gender-diverse and queer people from community activities and ceremonies and, conversely, acknowledges their indispensable role in the resurgence process. As she explains, it is necessary to centre Two-Spirit-queer people in resurgent nation-building because queer bodies house powerful relationships such as "consent, diversity, variance, spiritual power, community, respect, reciprocity, love, attachment" which "generate a wealth of theory and critical analysis regarding settler colonialism that straight bodies cannot" (Simpson 2017: 126-127). She thus challenges heteronormative tendencies present in contemporary Indigenous communities like the practice of skirting, i.e., the custom of "forcing female-bodied people to wear skirts in ceremony and making them leave if they do not" (Fiola 2020: 147)[8]. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* she remarks that while she sometimes complies to wearing a skirt to show respect to Elders and honour women's intimate power as life-givers, she also feels angered and irritated by this required attire which "maintains the rigid boundaries in a two-gendered system" imposed through colonialism and Christianity, while also obfuscating other roles, such as trapping, that Native women performed (Simpson 2011: 60-61). Moreover, she feels ethically compelled to challenge the exclusionary nature of this dress code that upholds gender violence against non-conforming people because her creation story teaches her that she is unconditionally loved by the creator because of who she is, even when this includes embracing or supporting fluid gender identifications. Deliberately breaking the convention is thus a decolonial way to honour one's personal relationship with spirituality and to signal respect for body sovereignty and acceptance of diversity as necessary premises for collective resurgence.

The regendering of Nishnaabeg culture that Simpson advocates also has important implications for decolonizing Indigenous masculinities which centre cis-gendered straight men above everyone else. For refeminization to be successful in escaping the rigidity of colonial gender binaries and the resulting gender violence against Native women and queer people, it is necessary, she asserts, to critically reflect on how women can contrast colonial boy-culture and redefine masculinity away from patriarchal stereotypes, so that Indigenous boys can grow up to honour gentleness with the land, women and children, as it once was in Nishnaabeg communities. This involves decolonizing the sexualized images of Indigenous men as warriors and chiefs so as to allow Native boys to share multiple roles and responsibilities with women in both the domestic and public spheres, including land stewardship and sovereign nation-building, and thereby become "agents of Biskaabiiyang" (Simpson 2011: 60).

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[7] Simpson discusses queerness as normally accepted in Nishnaabeg societies in the chapter "Indigenous Queer Normativity" from *As We Have Always Done*. She, for instance, writes: "my sense is that my Ancestors lived in a society where what I know as "queer", particularly in terms of social organization, was so normal it didn't have a name" (Simpson 2017: 129).

[8] Skirting is a controversial issue in many Indigenous communities, including the Nishnaabeg. Fiola explains that while some argue that the ceremonial practice of wearing long skirts was traditional, others argue instead that "it is a contemporary phenomenon influenced by heteropatriarchal Christianity" (Fiola 2020: 147).

5. Resurgence as Visioning: Turtle Island Recreation Story

A final instruction for resurgence found in Nishnaabeg stories is that it requires visioning, dreaming and connecting with the spiritual world. The recreation story about Waynabozhoo and the Great Flood, for example, tells about the recreation of Turtle Island after the great flood that had been brought to the land by Gzhwe Mnidoo "not as a punitive act, but as purification" (Simpson 2011: 68) to help the Nishnaabeg re-align with the good path, after having embraced an imbalanced life permeated with violence and conflict. As Simpson recounts, during the flood

> Waynabozhoo managed to save himself by finding a large log floating in the vast expanse of water. In time, more and more animals joined him on the log. Floating aimlessly in the ocean of floodwater, Waynabozhoo decided that something must be done. He decided to dive down in the water and grab a handful of earth. Waynabozhoo dived down into the depths and was gone for a very long time, returning without the earth. In turn, a number of animals – loon, helldiver, turtle, otter, and mink – all tried and failed. Finally, Zhaashkoonh (muskrat) tried. Zhaashkoonh was gone forever, and eventually floated to the surface, dead. Waynabozhoo picked the muskrat out of the water and found a handful of mud in Zhaashkoonh's paw.
>
> Mikinaag (turtle) volunteered to bear the weight of the earth on her back and Waynabozhoo placed the earth there. Waynabozhoo began to sing. The animals danced in a clockwise circular fashion and the winds blew, creating a huge and widening circle. Eventually, they created the huge island on which we live, North America (Simpson 2011: 68-69).

This story, which instructs about the cyclical process of creation-destruction-recreation, metaphorically reveals that "resurgence is dancing on our turtle's back; it is visioning and dancing new realities and worlds into existence" (Simpson 2011: 70) beyond the anthropocentric, settler-centric and patriarchal paradigm that still oppresses Indigenous lives[9]. As Edna Manitowabi points out, on a deeper conceptual level, the story also emphasizes that resurgence is an infinitely plausible and ongoing process that requires the personal and collective engagement and presence of every Indigenous person, who has to dive down and search for their own handful of earth, bring it to the surface, and share it with the community to engage in the process of starting over. Moreover, resurgence must be achieved in cooperation with and respect of the natural world and all the plant, animal and non-human nations, as it was in the origin stories.

Simpson's ongoing effort to refeminize and queer resurgence is indeed a powerful act of visioning and dreaming a new gender-inclusive Nishnaabeg nation into existence. Challenging the multitude of patriarchal and heteronormative tendencies that are still engrained in Indigenous societies, she bravely endorses her battle against Windigo, the monster-like cannibalistic creature in Nishnaabeg stories who embodies imbalance and

[9] While the image inspires the book's English title, Simpson subverts the hierarchy between English and Nishnaabemowin in the title of Chapter Four: "Nimtoowaad Mikinaag Gijiying Bakonaan (Dancing on Our Turtle's Back): Aandisokaanan and Resurgence".

unhealthy relationships, and, through the precious teachings contained in her people's stories and in the Nishnaabeg language, she envisions a new world where all Nishnaabeg women, men and gender-diverse people can dance together in a circle and achieve *mino bimaadiziwin*.

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Deborah Saidero is Lecturer of English Language and Translation at the University of Udine, Italy. She holds a PhD in Literatures and Cultures of the English-Speaking World from the University of Bologna. Her main research areas include feminist, gender and partnership studies, transculturalism and translingualism, Canadian literature, Indigenous writers, and migrant writing, translation studies and self-translation, English for Special Purposes, and teaching English as a foreign language. She has published numerous articles and has edited and co-edited critical volumes, including a collection of essays on feminist translation. She has also authored a book on teaching English phonics to young Italian learners.
deborah.saidero@uniud.it