Forward Motion: Cultural Memory and Continuity in Mi’gmaq Literature

MÉMOIRE PRÉSENTÉ

par

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ABSTRACT

The Mi’gmaq colonial experience is not unique among North American Native peoples, but being among the earliest in Canada to be colonized by Europeans, who arrived largely from the East, our people have had to contend with over 500 years of colonization and assimilation. The goal of this research is to explore the cultural practices of continuity and cultural memory as applied in selected examples of Mi’gmaq stories/literature, past and present. As a Mi’gmaq woman, having spent most of my life in the First Nations community of Listuguj in Quebec, I felt the need to focus my research on Mi’gmaq culture and stories. I believe our culture is rich and interesting in its history, language, and literature; I wish to showcase this in my thesis. By providing an overview of the still emergent literature of the Mi’gmaq Nation in its various forms (storytelling, novel, memoir, autobiography, poetry), I intend to illustrate that the Mi’gmaq people as well as their culture and language have been and still are continuously evolving. The stories presented in this thesis assure cultural continuity by creating and keeping a collective memory in the form of narratives that can be read, expressed, and interpreted many times over.

My own understanding of cultural continuity stems from the Mi’gmaq sense of culture which is made up of three aspects: traditions, consciousness or identity, and language. I identify “continuity” as the forward-motion study of culture and the consistent existence of Mi’gmaq values, knowledge, and stories and how they have continuously evolved. Mi’gmaq culture is in a constant state of renewal while it still upholds a sense of influence from our collective past. Jan Assmann’s theorization of the concept of cultural memory is a way society ensures cultural continuity by transmitting its collective knowledge through generations. In accordance with Assmann’s notion of cultural memories as stores of knowledge from which members of a
community construct their collective and individual identities, my idea of “cultural memory” is deeply related to narrative memory in the sense that story (in its many forms) inevitably preserves, defines, and transmits memories as well as teachings of Mi’gmaq culture and beliefs. Through the (re)interpretation of past stories and the formation of new ones, Mi’gmaq literature constitutes a means of defining our cultural identity for ourselves and for others.

The forward motion of cultural continuity in my study does not idealise a pre-colonial past nor does it encourage leaving our shared history behind, but rather I wish to demonstrate that Mi’gmaq literature re-members and shapes our cultural past as it relates to our ever-evolving present to assist us on our journey towards the future. The goal of my thesis is to show that examples of Mi’gmaq traditional and modern literature and stories depict a Mi’gmaq culture and identity that is not stunted in the past, but rather syncretises cultural memories and visions for the future.

The four chapters in this paper reflect the past, present, and future of Mi’gmaq stories, though not in a strictly linear manner. By means of applied reading of selected texts and exploring the significance of the past in the present and its relationship towards the future, I intend to represent a mixture of linear and cyclical concepts of time. Chapter One will begin in the past with a discussion of the cultural practice and functions of traditional Mi’gmaq storytelling and pre-colonial worldview. This chapter illustrates how Mi’gmaq history and traditional stories are interrelated as stores of cultural memory and knowledge. Chapters Two and Three explore differing patterns present in contemporary Mi’gmaq literary representations. Chapter Two explores the issues of Native cultural authenticity as well as the myths of the “Imaginary Indian” (Daniel Francis) and the “timeless condition” (Anne-Christine Hornborg), which posit Native culture and peoples as relics of the past with no future. Namely by analyzing
two historical novels with Mi’gmaq characters that are written by non-Mi’gmaq authors, *The Deserter* (2010) by Paul Almond and *Cibou* (2008) by Susan Young de Biagi, this chapter presents the importance of questioning and analyzing what we as Mi’gmaq people read about our own culture. Chapter Three depicts Mi’gmaq self-representation in the form of non-fiction residential school Survivor narratives, specifically *Out of the Depths* by Isabelle Knockwood and *Song of Rita Joe* by Rita Joe. Both authors write about the past in order to encourage individual and collective healing, following residential school experience, with a hopeful vision for the future. Having both survived the assimilatory and abusive system of the Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia, Knockwood and Joe depict personal, and sometimes contrasting, views of the residential school legacy. Deena Rymhs’ parallel analysis of residential schools as prisons, how residential schooling caused a significant rupture in cultural continuity by enacting spatial and ideological diaspora as defined by Neal McLeod, as well as Aboriginal resilience and healing are key theorizations in this chapter. Finally, Chapter Four looks at the discourse of the past in the present in examples of Mi’gmaq contemporary literature. The notions of belonging and identity construction are significant in Mi’gmaq literature. In the colonial past (and to an extent still today), Native peoples have not been in control of their own cultural identities. In order to contextualize the current issues surrounding Mi’gmaq/Native identity that are reflected within the narratives in this chapter, Indian\(^1\) Status as a legal identity conferred on Native peoples and its implications on personal and cultural identity as well as community belonging are explored. Keeping in mind the negotiations of both ascribed and self-ascribed cultural identities, *Stones and Switches* by Lorne Simon, *My Mi’kmaq Mother* by Julie Pellissier-Lush, two books for children by Michael James Isaac, as well as selected poetry by Shirley Kiju Kawi, will be analysed with a view to recognizing a modern hybrid Mi’gmaq identity. On the

\(^1\) Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada still uses the term “Indian” in this context.
whole, Mi’gmaq people (and those who wish to learn more about Native and Mi’gmaq people) can always find useful and relevant information in our collective past. Mi’gmaq storytelling and literature, in their multitude of forms, represent viable stores of cultural memories that link both past and present traditions, values, and realities as our culture moves into the future.

**Keywords:** Continuity, Cultural Memory, Mi’gmaq/Mi’kmaq in Canada, Native literature, First Nations.
RÉSUMÉ

Ce travail de recherche vise à explorer les pratiques de continuité et de mémoires culturels en utilisant une variété d'exemples provenant de la littérature Mi’gmaq du passé et du temps présent. L'expérience colonial du peuple des Premières Nations Mi’gmaq n'est pas unique en ce qui concerne les Autochtones d'Amérique du nord mais ils ont cependant été parmi les premières Nations autochtones à être colonisés au Canada par les Européens, qui sont arrivés de l’est, et ont donc eu à vivre avec les effets de plus de 500 ans de colonisation et d'assimilation. En tant que jeune femme Mi’gmaq, ayant vécue la majeure partie de ma vie dans la communauté des Premières Nations de Listuguj, Québec, j'ai senti le besoin de centrer mes recherches sur la culture et les histoires Mi’gmaq. Dans ce mémoire, je souhaite mettre en valeur la richesse de l’histoire, la langue et la littérature de mon peuple. En donnant un aperçu de la littérature encore émergente de la Nation Mi’gmaq sous ses différentes formes (les contes, les romans, les mémoires et biographies, la poésie, etc.), ce projet a pour but d’illustrer que la culture et le peuple Mi’gmaq sont en évolution constante. Les histoires présentées au cours des chapitres suivants s’inscrivent dans une tradition de continuité culturelle car elles créent et entretiennent une mémoire collective sous la forme de récits qui peuvent être lus, exprimés et interprétés à de nombreuses reprises.

Nous définissons le terme "continuité" comme étant l'étude de la culture et de l'existence persistante des valeurs, des connaissances et des histoires Mi’gmaq ainsi que la façon dont ces éléments ont évolués au cours de leur existence. Deux aspects importants de la continuité culturelle sont la littérature et la langue. Dans ma conception de continuité, je m’informe de la définition Mi’gmaq du concept de la culture qui comprend trois aspects : les traditions, l’identité
et la conscience, et la langue. J’identifie la notion de continuité comme étant un mouvement vers l’avant dans l’étude de la culture et de la survie des valeurs, de la connaissance et des histoires Mi’gmaq en relation avec leur évolution dans le temps. Effectivement, la culture Mi’gmaq est en constante état de renouvellement. Sa littérature reflète cette réalité en contribuant à préserver et à rétablir les traditions et les valeurs du passé tout en détenant une vision directrice et encourageante pour l’avenir de notre culture, de notre identité collective. Les exemples de littérature traditionnelle et moderne Mi’gmaq tracent alors une ligne de continuité dans le temps qui avance vers le futur avec l’information culturelle du passé. La culture Mi’gmaq est en état de renouvellement continu et en conservant ses racines dans notre passé collectif. La théorisation du concept de mémoire culturelle par Jan Assmann est une façon pour la société d’assurer une continuité culturelle en transmettant son savoir collectif à travers les générations. Conformément à la notion de mémoires culturelles d'Assmann en tant que réserves de connaissances à partir desquelles les membres d'une communauté construisent leurs identités collectives et individuelles, notre interprétation du terme "mémoire culturelle" est profondément liée à la mémoire narrative, parce qu'une histoire dans toutes ses formes va préserver, définir et transmettre inévitablement les souvenirs, l'histoire, les croyances et les enseignements de la culture Mi’gmaq. Par la réinterprétation des textes traditionnels du passé et la création de nouvelles histoires contemporaines, la littérature Mi’gmaq constitue un moyen de définir notre identité culturelle autant pour nous-mêmes que pour les autres.

La proposition d’un mouvement vers l’avant, vers l’avenir au cœur de notre recherche n'a pas comme but d'idéaliser le passé précolonial ni d'encourager l'abandon de notre histoire partagée, mais de démontrer que la littérature Mi’gmaq commémore et forge notre passé par sa relation avec notre présent en constante évolution pour nous assister dans notre voyage à travers
le temps, vers un futur. L’objectif de ce projet est de démontrer que des exemples de littérature Mi’gmaq (traditionnel et contemporain) mettent en valeur une culture et une identité Mi’gmaq qui n’est pas éclipsé par les ombres de son passé, mais au contraire, s’informe et s’inspire des mémoires culturelles de son passé afin de mieux s’épanouir de manière créative au temps présent et d’assurer sa continuité dans le futur.

Les personnes Mi’gmaq, leur culture et leur langue ont été et sont encore en évolution continuelle. Ces quatre chapitres reflètent le passé, le présent et le futur des histoires Mi’gmaq mais pas nécessairement de façon strictement linéaire. En faisant lecture critique d’une sélection de textes et en explorant la signification du passé pour le présent et sa relation envers le futur, nous avons l’intention de représenter une combinaison d’éléments relatifs aux concepts du temps, d’un point de vue à la fois cyclique et linéaire. Chapitre Un débute dans le passé en étudiant la fonction des histoires traditionnelles Mi’gmaq et la vision précoloniale de celles-ci. Le premier chapitre illustre comment les rapports historiques et les contes traditionnels sont étroitement liés en ce qui concerne leur valeur en mémoire et en connaissance culturelle. Certains aspects de la mythologie/cosmologie traditionnelle Mi’gmaq y ont expliqué à travers deux exemples de contes précoloniaux. De plus, la perspective Mi’gmaq dans certains rapports historiques coloniaux sont explorer. Ensuite, dans les Chapitres Deux et Trois, les diverses représentations littéraires actuelles des histoires Mi’gmaq sont explorées. Le deuxième chapitre examine les grandes questions de l’authenticité culturelle ainsi que les mythes de l’Indien rêvé (Imaginary Indian de Daniel Francis) et de la condition intemporelle (« timeless condition » de Anne-Christine Hornborg) qui positionnent les cultures et les peuples amérindiens comme des vestiges du passé sans avenir. Notamment avec l’analyse de deux romans historiques à propos de personnages Mi’gmaq au 17e siècle écrits par des auteurs non-Mi’gmaq : The Deserter (2010) de Paul
Almond (traduit en français en 2013 sous le titre *Le déserteur*) et *Cibou* (2008) de Susan Young de Biagi, ce chapitre présente l’importance de questionner et analyser ce que nous lisons à propos de notre propre culture. Les deux romans sont le fruit d'une recherche historique détaillé sur l'histoire Mi’gmaq à l'époque de (ou un peu avant) la colonisation. Cependant, la représentation des personnages Mi’gmaq ne va pas au delà du champ d'application limité du passé colonial et perpétue les exemples de stéréotypes qui se retrouvent souvent dans la littérature populaire et romantique à propos de la culture amérindienne d'aujourd'hui.

Le troisième chapitre reflète l'autoreprésentation littéraire Mi’gmaq sous la forme de récit documentaire de survivants de pensionnats indiens, particulièrement *Out of the Depths* de Isabelle Knockwood et *Song of Rita Joe* de Rita Joe. Ayant survécues au système d’assimilation et d’abus du pensionnat indien de Shubenacadie au Nouvelle-Écosse (le seul pensionnat pour enfants autochtones de ce genre à être établi dans les provinces maritimes du Canada), Knockwood et Joe écrivent leur passé (et donnent voix à plusieurs autres survivants et survivantes) dans leurs récits afin de favoriser le processus de guérison et de réconciliation au niveau individuel et collectif en encourageant la voie à un avenir plus prometteur. Par la lecture de ces récits de vie, ce chapitre découvre les blessures physiques et psychologiques infligées aux cultures amérindiennes par le système des pensionnats. L'analyse parallèle de Deena Rymhs sur les pensionnats autochtones en tant que prisons, comment la vie dans les pensionnats autochtones a causé une rupture significative dans la continuité culturelle en promulguant une diaspora idéologique et spatiale comme définie par Neal McLeod ainsi que la résilience et la guérison autochtone sont des éléments clés de la théorisation de ce chapitre.

Finalement, dans le quatrième chapitre, nous explorons les thèmes du passé reliés au présent par des exemples de la littérature Mi’gmaq contemporaine. Les notions d'appartenance et
de construction d'identité sont significatives dans la littérature Mi’gmaq. Durant la période colonial (et dans une certaine mesure, encore aujourd'hui), les Autochtones n'ont pas été en contrôle de leur identité culturelle. Afin de mettre en contexte les problèmes actuels affectant les Mi’gmaq/Autochtones et qui se reflètent dans les histoires qui se retrouvent dans ce chapitre, le statut d'indien en tant qu'identité légale accordée aux Amérindiens et ses implications sur l'identité personnelle et culturelle ainsi que l'appartenance à la communauté amérindienne sont explorées. En gardant à l'esprit les négociations entre l'identité culturelle accordée et l'identité culturelle choisie, le roman Stones and Switches de Lorne Simon, la mémoire My Mi’kmaq Mother de Julie Pellissier-Lush, les deux livres pour enfants écrits par Michael James Isaac ainsi que des sélections de la poésie par Shirley Kiju Kawi seront analysée dans le but d'y reconnaître l'hybridité de la nouvelle identité Mi'gmaq moderne. Dans l'ensemble, les Mi’gmaq, et les gens voulant apprendre à connaître davantage les Autochtones et les Mi’gmaq, peuvent trouver de l'information pertinente dans notre passé collectif. Les histoires et la littérature Mi'gmaq, dans ses multiples formes, représentent des réserves de connaissances viables qui relient les traditions, les valeurs et les réalités du passé et du présent au fur et à mesure que notre culture progresse vers l'avenir.

Mots-clés : Mi’gmaq/Mi’kmaq au Canada, littérature autochtone, continuité, mémoire culturelle, Premières Nations.
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Introduction

People speak their languages and relate their stories not just to tell of subsistence or sovereignty but also to tell of all that is meaningful for understanding ourselves, individually and collectively, as human beings. (Marie Battiste, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, “Introduction”: xxvii)

The above quote by Nova Scotia Mi’gmaq educator and author, Marie Battiste, summarizes what I understand as the vital significance of stories in Mi’gmaq culture and Native culture in general. Stories have many purposes in Native thought and knowledge. They assure continuity of the culture by creating and keeping a collective memory in the form of narratives that can be told and retold, or read, expressed, and interpreted many times over. There are stories that allow us to carry an understanding of the past with us and some that envision the future. There are stories that teach us about the world(s) (both seen and unseen), stories that help us understand ourselves, as well as stories that allow us to portray our thoughts and feelings to teach others about us. Native culture and storytelling go hand in hand; ancient traditional stories as well as contemporary Native literature are not only forms of entertainment and self-expression, but also are important creative and healing tools that shape thought and culture in a forward motion.

However, it was not so long ago that the extent of one’s contact with any Native culture within a rather Eurocentric literary setting was extremely limited. Non-Native people would read and write captivity narratives and novels about explorers and settlers where Native peoples were either a looming unknowable threat, or stoic and predominantly silent members of an inevitably dying race. It goes without saying that these works at the time presented Native culture in a less than flattering light, making the negotiation and construction of positive personal and cultural
identities for Native people quite arduous. A Native person’s literary and cultural role models constituted a long line of silenced characters or stereotypes such as loners, bad guys, and sidekicks. Indeed, as William H. New notes, “the time is not so distant when the ‘Native’ was a conventional figure in Canadian literature—but not a voice (or a figure allowed separate voices). If Native characters spoke, they spoke in archaisms or without articles, in the sham eloquence of florid romance or the muted syllables of deprivation” (New, 4). Native figures in literature were (and are unfortunately sometimes still) generally treated as symbols and stereotypes rather than characters that have dimension, layers, and complexity. Today, however, Native peoples are breaking out of the background of our own country’s history with the help of our own stories, past and present. Without a doubt, it is the recovery of ancient stories as well as the writing of new ones that have contributed to a growing renaissance of Canadian Native literature, culture, identity, and most importantly, the emergence of a distinct Native voice. As Sophie McCall writes in the introduction to First Person Plural: Aboriginal Storytelling and the Ethics of Collaborative Authorship, “‘Voice’ remains a central point of struggle in Aboriginal studies, standing for a range of concepts: from empowerment to appropriation, from individual style to collective identity” (2). The transition of Native peoples from voiceless objects and stereotypical icons to distinct subjects and voices that refuse to go unheard for any longer is still a work in progress. Within the realm of Native literature and studies today, Native writers are finding their voices, sharing their experiences and imaginations, interpreting their own truths. As renowned Mi’gmaq poet, Rita Joe, writes in the introduction to the Mi’kmaq Anthology, “we [Native/Mi’gmaq people] are now creating the writing instead of just being written about” (5). Native writers express pain and joy, outrage and celebration; they write to remember and honour the past, to heal in the present, and to envision the future.
I have been using the term “Native” as an adjective to refer to Canada’s First Nations peoples as a whole. It is common in history, literature, education, law, and other disciplines to treat and study all Native tribes as a collective due to their shared history and colonial experience. This homogenisation can be prescribed—for instance, the certificate of Indian status provided to all registered First Nations people in Canada does not mention tribal affiliation—or it can be self-ascribed, for example, when First Nations people rally together towards a common goal such as the recent Idle No More movement in Canada. Although Native cultures throughout history have lived, suffered, and thrived together and therefore have common goals that promote collectivity, I firmly acknowledge that they are incredibly diverse and culturally unique from one another and their literatures/stories should be read and analysed in terms of specific Nations. So, without denying the positive shared collective identity of First Nations, this research is focused on one particular Nation, the Mi’gmaq of Eastern Canada, for two reasons: first, Canada’s First Nations and their literatures should not always be considered and studied as a homogenous mass. As Penny Petrone states in *Native Literature in Canada:*

> Canada’s native people have created a vast and remarkably diversified body of oral narratives. Each linguistic group has its own particular set that accords with its own regional ecologies, its own values, customs, and tastes, embodying its own religious and philosophical beliefs. As a consequence, tribal literatures are unique and culturally specific. (10)

Petrone mentions the diversity of Native peoples oral narratives; however, as this thesis shows, written narratives are just as culturally specific. The second reason for my focus on Mi’gmaq literature is more personal in the sense that I wish to learn more about my home culture through its literature, a field that I have always been passionate about. As a Native woman of Mi’gmaq
heritage and being raised on the Listuguj First Nation community in Quebec, the focus of much of my university academic research has always been Native/Aboriginal issues and subjects. However, in the past, I was not always comfortable and confident in expressing my Mi’gmaq identity. Being the only First Nations student throughout unilingual French elementary and secondary schools, I deemed it safer and easier to be unassuming about my culture than to have to contend with the questions and treatment of being singled out as different’. I have always been an avid reader, but typical literary heroes did not resemble me; the standard authorial voices did not reflect my experience; the stories did not speak to my reality. I did not ‘discover’ Native literature until university. As I wrote my essays and research papers, I would question the validity of my ideas as a Native person with one foot in each culture: Mi’gmaq and White/English-French Canadian. Like all Native writers and non-Native people choosing to write about Native topics, I have to deal with the recurrent issue of authenticity. But, throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies, I have come to realise that one cannot lay claim to knowledge or expertise about a certain culture and identity solely by the fact of having been born into it, nor can one be completely excluded from this cultural knowledge simply on the grounds of lack of “authenticity.” I decided to focus my research on Mi’gmaq literature before knowing if such an area of study existed. Through my research, I would both discover and recover the works of a still emergent literature. Although there are relatively recent published anthologies of the literature—*The Mi’kmaq Anthology* Volume 1 (1997) edited by Lesley Choyce and Rita Joe, and Volume 2 (2011) edited by Theresa Meuse, Lesley Choyce and Julia Swan, as well as a wealth of information on Mi’gmaq people and culture from social, political, historical, linguistic perspectives—to my knowledge, this thesis is the first full-length critical study of Mi’gmaq
narratives. I accept that I will be a lifelong student of my own culture and I hope that this research project will constitute a significant step on my journey and those of others.

**Remembering Mi’gmaq Land and Culture**

The Mi’gmaq have been living in the land now called “Atlantic Canada” for possibly over two thousand years and, arguably, were the first North American Native people along with the Beothuk to have encountered European explorers. Yet, Eurocentric written history of this area gives these First Nations peoples little coverage or perspective. As Ruth Holmes Whitehead, renowned researcher and specialist on the Mi’gmaq, states at the beginning of her historical volume, *The Old Man Told Us* (1991):

> There are almost no biographies of Micmac\(^2\) men or women available, and almost nothing to present to the rest of the world their feelings on the matter of the latest five hundred years of their residence here. The bulk of published accounts about this region devote only a few paragraphs to the aboriginal population. The Micmac are treated as a homogenous mass, and presented as statistics. (Holmes Whitehead, “Introduction”)

The above quote depicts the reality of Mi’gmaq historical representation and literature as in 1991. I would argue that this cultural omission or erasure deeply impacts the Mi’gmaq tribal identity to this day. How do we know who we are, where we stand, and where we are headed as a people if we do not know where we come from, if we cannot access the wealth of knowledge of our ancestors? Indeed, since the time of this quote, there has been many works by Mi’gmaq writers published, a number of which constitute the core of this thesis. Accordingly, I intend to

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\(^2\) Outdated spelling that is not commonly used today. Mi’kmaq or Mi’gmaq is preferred. “Micmac” would not have been incorrect when *The Old Man Told Us* was published in 1991.
research, explore, and analyse stories as well as expressions of personal and cultural identity in selected examples of the literature of the Mi’gmaq people of Eastern Canada. Although the Mi’gmaq, like other Native nations, traditionally hold a pan-American identity, I will center my research on the works of Canadian Mi’gmaq since the tribe’s traditional territory, known as Mi’kma’ki, includes today’s Canadian Atlantic Provinces, mainly Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, as well as portions of the Gaspé Peninsula:

In fact, the two thousand years or more of history of the Mi’gmaq people of Atlantic Canada obviously cannot be completely told in just a short section. A rich collection of Mi’gmaq historical information can (and does) fill up many volumes. Since Ruth Holmes Whitehead’s *The Old Man Told Us: Excerpts from Micmac History 1500-1950*, published in 1991, there have been many works written about the history as well as traditional lifestyle and culture of the Mi’gmaq people over the years. Examples range from missionary accounts and records to the works of

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3 It can be argued that the province of Newfoundland is part of the Mi’gmaq territory. Canada had an agreement to form the Qalipu Mi’kmaq First Band in Newfoundland in 2006-2008, a landless band (without a reserve). An enrollment process for status recognition and membership then followed in 2009. Historical and legal debates are still ongoing for the status recognition of some 30-to-60,000 people in this province. For more information on the Qalipu First Nation Band, consult their website, qualipu.ca, and for further reading on the controversy of Mi’gmaq membership and identity in Newfoundland, see Bartels and Friesen.
researchers and experts such as Harald E.L. Prins’ *The Mi’kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival* (1996), and Anne-Christine Hornborg’s *Mi’kmaq Landscapes: From Animism to Sacred Ecology* (2008). Short collections of Mi’gmaq traditional stories and legends are also prevalent. Holmes Whitehead has compiled two such collections entitled *Stories From the Six Worlds: Micmac Legends* (1989) and *Six Mi’kmaq Stories* (1992). In 2007, researcher and folklorist, Marion Robertson, compiled over 20 short Mi’gmaq traditional stories in *Red Earth: Tales of the Mi’kmaq*. These works are all authored or compiled by non-Natives which is common in the field of historical and anthropological research on Native peoples in general. However, there are also examples of histories or, more appropriately, counter-histories written by Native people, such as *We Were Not the Savages: A Mi’kmaq Perspective on the Collision Between European and Native American Civilizations* (2000) written by Daniel N. Paul, Mi’gmaq, author and human rights activist, as well as collections of works such as *The Mi’kmaq Anthology*, Volumes 1 and 2, that are all significant in their efforts to restore a sense of individual and specific experiences and realities to our collective cultural memory. Trudy Sable and Bernie Francis’ exploration of Mi’gmaq history and worldview as expressed in the ancestral language and legends in *The Language of this Land, Mi’kmak* (2012) also constitutes an important work in academic Native writing. Furthermore, as recently as June 2014, two new volumes of local Mi’gmaq history were published by the First Nations Regional Adult Education Centre in my hometown of Listuguj, Quebec. These volumes, entitled “Gmêtginu” and “Astuidâykw”, are written in a textbook format, presenting Mi’gmaq history in a pedagogical way with a view to aid educators and students of the culture. Another category of text that contains Mi’gmaq cultural information includes the sections and chapters on Mi’gmaq people as a tribe in numerous historical, anthropological, and literary anthologies on Native people in
Canada, see namely Grant (1990), Maki (1995), and Schmidt and Marshall (1995) for more information on the Mi’gmaq specifically. There are also two documentary short films on the Mi’kmaq people by Canadian Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, *Incident at Restigouche* (1984) and *Our Nationhood* (2003) which are both available for download or purchase on the National Film Board of Canada web site.

All these works provide meaningful insights into cultural context for Mi’gmaq literature. In other words, they represent historization, which is an important aspect to the contextualisation of Mi’gmaq literary works as a distinct body of literature. On the whole, by exploring Mi’gmaq history, readers can begin to understand an overarching purpose of Mi’gmaq literature in its many forms: creating and upholding a collective Mi’gmaq Story.

The Mi’gmaq colonial experience may not be unique among North American Native peoples, but being among the earliest in Canada to be colonized by Europeans, who entered the nation largely from the East, we, as a people, have had to contend with over 500 years of colonization and assimilation. “Yet, despite the extremity of their colonial experience, the Mi’kmaq⁴ have remained resilient, consistently manifesting a combination of resistance, adaptation, and accommodation that has aided their physical and cultural survival” (McKegney, 110). The Mi’gmaq culture’s resilience, unique adaptation, and continued renewal is represented in our stories. The goal of my thesis is to show that examples of Mi’gmaq traditional and contemporary

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⁴ There are many different orthographies established for the Mi’gmaq language. The orthographies stem from three regional Mi’gmaq centres that have developed or are developing their own writing systems. Due to familiarity, I have chosen to use the phonetically authentic spellings of the name “Mi’gmaq” as well as Mi’gmaq words from the self-designated official orthography of Listuguj, QC or Alphonse Metallic orthography. Other spelling systems are used when quoting or referring to texts that use them (see “Terminology and Spelling”).
literature (stories)\(^5\) are both demonstrations of our cultural survival of colonial rule as well as proof of a thriving, evolving people with a history that did not start with European contact. Mi’gmaq culture and identity is not stunted in the past, but rather syncretises cultural memories and visions for the future to form a modern, hybrid identity and voice.

With this goal in mind, there are three main concerns about the function of stories in the emergence of new forms of Mi’gmaq identity, voice, and belonging that I will to explore throughout this thesis:

- The importance and function of recovered traditional stories and spirituality as cultural practices and in terms of Mi’gmaq historical, cultural, and literary continuity.
- The construction and re-membering of Indigenous knowledge as a form of healing despite the rupture in knowledge due to the effects of colonization and cultural assimilation, such as residential schooling.
- The importance of the past in the present in the construction and negotiation of a contemporary Mi’gmaq identity and in the imagining of future continuity, (for instance, the significance of references to traditional spiritual and cultural aspects or beliefs as well as the use of the Mi’gmaq language in modern literature; how cultural memory shapes and envisions the future).

Generally, in the analyses of Native culture and/or literature, I often perceive a tendency to study in a backwards motion as opposed to a forward motion. In other words, Native culture and literature are studied in terms of their struggle over the past. In this sense, the post-colonial theories of authenticity, appropriation, hybridity, and nativism will be significant concepts

\(^5\) Throughout my work, I will tend to use the terms “literature” and “story/stories” interchangeably. “Literature” as defined by written works, especially those considered of superior, lasting, artistic merit, is a term that is considered new in terms of Mi’gmaq culture. “Stories” is more evocative of the Mi’gmaq culture and our values and I felt the need to elevate this term to the same level as “literature.”
applied to my analysis and interpretation of Mi’gmaq stories. In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define these terms. Since the works of Mi’gmaq literature are mostly written in English, the notion of appropriation inevitably underlies this research. In the areas of language and textuality, “the dominant language and its discursive forms are appropriated to express widely differing cultural experiences, and to interpolate these experiences into the dominant modes of representation to reach the widest possible audience” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 19). So, although Mi’gmaq stories may be written in English and adopt non-Native forms, such as the novel, I seek to show that these stories still carry significant cultural memories and teachings of Mi’gmaq culture. Actually, many of the works presented in this thesis have elements of the Mi’gmaq language or, in the cases of shorter works like poems and books for children, are even entirely translated into the traditional language.

In reflecting on the issue of authenticity when I sought to define Mi’gmaq literature for the purposes of my research, I decided that, most importantly, I should explore writers who are identified or self-identify as being Mi’gmaq, and who write stories that pertain to Mi’gmaq cultural realities. However, I did not want to fully exclude Eurocentric historical accounts about the Mi’gmaq, transcriptions or interpretations of traditional stories, or appropriations of Mi’gmaq culture in modern narratives, because I believe we can also learn a great deal from these works, which is the reasoning behind my inclusion of works of popular fiction by non-Mi’gmaq authors in Chapter Two. I also find that the meaning of authenticity is often quibbled over at the expense of actually reading and interpreting the literary works. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain that
the problem with [...] claims to cultural authenticity is that they often become entangled in an essentialist cultural position in which fixed practices become iconized as authentically indigenous and others are excluded as hybridized or contaminated. This has as its corollary the danger of ignoring the possibility that cultures may develop and change as their conditions change. (21)

Cultural change connotes something radical, evokes transformation, conversion, and substitution. The concept of change, whether it is welcomed or feared, is the reality of making something different from what it is or what it would have been if left alone. Another interpretation of this notion is that of cultural evolution: “There is no such thing as a culture that has not evolved. Societies are not static. They constantly adapt to changing circumstance, and evolve with each new discovery” (Palmater, 184). Arguably, evolution is also a loaded term in the sense that it signifies an occurrence that is natural, universal, and unavoidable; especially when applied to Indigenous cultures, it can suggest hierarchy and power relations. As a result of these reflections, I decided to use the term “continuity” to depict how Mi’gmaq culture is in a constant state of renewal towards the future while upholding a sense of influence from and of commitment to our shared past.

Understanding the Role of Language in Continuity

In my thesis, I want to move in a forward motion and distinguish between the idealisation of a fixed past and the flexible notion of continuity of the past in the present and how it inevitably evolves into a future vision. Simply put, cultural continuity is the persistence and adaptation of cultural elements and practices though time. This definition bears the question of “what are cultural elements?” and subsequently, “what is culture?” As a system of shared values,
practices, and history, an understanding of culture gives a sense of meaning and coherence to a group. In their work for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Kirmayer and colleagues stress the importance of the concept of cultural continuity for Aboriginal people as a basis for collective identity. They explain the interdependence of an understanding of the terms culture and continuity:

Cultural continuity can be expressed in many ways, but all depend on a notion of culture as something that is potentially enduring or continuously linked through processes of historical transformation with an identifiable past of tradition. However, contemporary anthropological understandings of culture emphasize the fluidity and negotiated nature of cultural realities. (Kirmayer et al., 77)

Kirmayer and colleagues focus their theorization of cultural continuity as it is linked to collective identity and mental health as well as to the protection of vulnerable Aboriginal youth from suicide (80). A strong sense of cultural continuity is a significant factor in Aboriginal resilience and healing (see also: Tousignant and Sioui, 2009). Overall, culture is a constantly theorized, and perhaps over-theorized term and concept. The English word "culture" connotes a multitude of practices and realities. Having a singular word defining the notion of "culture" in order to explain continuity is a strange process, especially when Indigenous thought is taken into account. When the Mi’gmaq language is examined, the abstract term of culture is broken down into clear aspects of reality. In Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage, Battiste states:

We can find no notion similar to "culture" in Algonquian⁶ thought. There are several sounds in Mi’kmaq that could refer to this notion. How we maintain

⁶ Language family to which Mi’gmaq belongs.
contact with our traditions is said as *telilnusimk*. How we maintain our consciousness is said as *telilnuo ‘Iti’k*. How we maintain our language is said as *tilnuita ‘sim*.

(48)

Through the inherently detailed structure of the Mi’gmaq language, we can discern exactly what culture means to our people and how each aspect relates to continuity in time: maintaining contact with our traditions (connection to the past), constructing a collective consciousness (how we view ourselves in the present), and upholding our original language (perpetuation of our cultural practices into the future). In this regard, Mi’gmaq stories and literature are efficient means of cultural continuity since they are informed by our people’s shared history and traditions, and they are both a product of a collective cultural thought and, at the same time, bring into being Indigenous knowledge to be shared with others. Although the majority of Mi’gmaq writing today is produced in English, the traditional language is still a recurring element within stories, in the form of titles, names, dialogue, glossaries, etc. I would also argue that Mi’gmaq cultural values and worldview that stem from the traditional language and culture are still upheld in contemporary stories even though they are predominantly written in English.

Anthropologist Trudy Sable and Mi’gmaq linguist Bernie Francis have co-written *The Language of this Land, Mi’kma’ki* (2012) which constitutes an exploration of the Mi’gmaq worldview as expressed namely through the ancestral language. Trudy Sable’s work primarily focuses on inter-generational and community-based education and research. As Director of the Office of Aboriginal and Northern Research at the Gorsebrook Research Institute, Saint Mary’s University and an adjunct professor of Anthropology, her research projects seek to bring Western views and science into dialogue with Indigenous knowledge and thought (Sable and Francis, “About the Authors”). Her colleague, Bernie Francis, originally from Maupeltu (Membertou)
First Nation in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, is the Francis of the Smith/Francis orthography of the Mi’gmaq language. After working a number of years as Director of the Court Worker Program for the federal court system, “a program that ensures fair and proper treatment of Mi’kmaw people,” (Sable and Francis, “About the Authors”) Francis developed the orthography in partnership with linguist Doug Smith and it is the officially-recognised writing system for the language in Nova Scotia. In Language of this Land Mi’kma’ki, Sable and Francis illustrate the fluid nature of reality inherent in the expression of the Mi’gmaq language in their book through analysis of language structure/grammar, sounds and patterns, legends and songs. I will focus on three aspects that I believe illustrate key concepts in Mi’gmaq culture: the highly descriptive, verb-focused, and relational natures of the language.

“All languages shape and cut up reality differently” (Sable and Francis, 30). As opposed to English and French where meaning is conveyed with many words in a particular order, in the descriptive Mi’gmaq language, word order is not essential to understanding since the words themselves, through an elegant system of prefixes, suffixes, and inflections, carry unambiguous meaning. Mi’gmaq is holophrastic, expressing complex ideas in a single word or phrase: “In English, it might take a whole clause to describe an image, using different parts of speech, each of which has its placement within the grammatical structure” (Sable and Francis 29). In Mi’gmaq, the specific meanings of the morphemes that make up a word encapsulate this effect. In this sense, “[o]ne word in Mi’kmaw can encapsulate and create a whole picture” (29). In linguistics, this structure is described as polysynthetic, where the word parts carry detailed independent meaning, but may not always be able to stand alone. This Mi’gmaq structure that allows for very long words to form, coupled with the relatively free word order in sentences, is quite daunting to a language learner who is used to the stricter syntax of English or French.
Mi’gmaq is also verb-focused as opposed to English that focuses on nouns to carry meaning: “the verb is where everything happens; it is the focus of the language with prefixes, infixes and suffixes added to determine gender, tense, plurality, animacy and inanimacy. [...] allows for extraordinary breadth and creativity of expression” (Sable and Francis 29). Knowing the differing grammatical focal points of English and Mi’gmaq contributes to explaining and understanding cultural differences. English, being noun-based, expresses a thing-oriented culture and society. English, like other Indo-European languages, literally objectifies the world through word by depicting the world as objects rather than movements. On the other hand, the verb-like quality of Mi’gmaq reflects the traditional worldview of perceiving the worlds we live in as fluid and dynamic. How the Mi’gmaq people traditionally view the world can be likened to perceiving movement and continuity through a video camera rather than just static photographs (Sable and Francis, 30). Sequences, patterns, movement are depicted as continuous with little to no disruption.

The relational aspect of Mi’gmaq is also a fundamental quality of a traditional worldview that is articulated in the language. For instance, in English, there are words that can be associative and relational, but can also stand alone as abstract concepts, such as the words “father” and “mother”, etc. We can easily associate these words with others by the use of pronouns (my father, your mother, etc.), just as we can treat them as concepts (Father to designate a priest, a mother’s love, etc.). In Mi’gmaq language and thought, nothing can exist in isolation, without some form of relationship or connection. For example, there is no independent word for “father”. This notion must be related to another being to be understood. If one had to translate the word “father” into Mi’gmaq, one needs the context and relationship (indicated by a possessive pronominal marker) because the word used would differ, for example, nujj= my
father, gujj = your father, etc. In this sense, at its core, the Mi’gmaq language upholds the significance of relationships, connectedness, and being part of a whole.

Moreover, another core difference between the Mi’gmaq language and most Western languages is the placement of the self within the language structure. In Mi’gmaq language and, therefore according to Mi’gmaq worldview, the self is not the central feature, the dominant focus: “In fact, there is no distinct, separate word for self. It is only inferred by the inflectional ending added to the verb implying that the self is part of a web of ever-changing relationships” (Sable and Francis, 36). I realised this in my first Mi’gmaq language lesson when we had to introduce ourselves. The word for “my/I” is “ni’n”, so to express “my name is Blair,” a student would say “ni’n teluisi Blair.” The interesting thing is that in any context “ni’n” is never essential in the sentence since the inflection of the verb already implies that the one and only person that can be uttering this sentence is “I”, therefore the pronoun can be omitted in utterances. This structure indicates that the self is present and expressed in the world, but it is not placed in the forefront of anything. This inherently contrasts with the non-Native, Western form of writing with its focus on individualism and the self. As a student of the Mi’gmaq language, I always found it interesting how the contrasts between the two languages provide insight into distinct worldviews. Today, the reality is that our lives, as Mi’gmaq people, are informed by both by European/White/mainstream culture and traditional Aboriginal culture. Our traditional language values our collectivity and our relationships in the name of cultural survival and continuity.

In summary, the Mi’gmaq language is holophrastic (describing whole images or stories in a single word), verb-based (where the verb tells all the story and meaning you need), and relational (illustrates the interconnectivity and wholeness of the world). Perhaps these concepts
ingrained into our language since time immemorial are why storytelling comes so easily to our people, or maybe storytelling was such a significant aspect of our culture that the language structure emerged from it. The ways in which we, as Mi’gmaq people, maintain a connection to our language, or *tlı́nuita ‘sim*, are important to discuss especially considering the present state of Indigenous languages in Canada.

Across the country, the devastating and, in some places, near total loss of Native language and traditional understanding can be directly linked to the effects of colonization as well as the legacy of residential schools. A Mi’gmaq residential school Survivor, Isabelle Knockwood writes: “The punishment for speaking Mi’kmaw began on our first day of school, but the punishment has continued all our lives as we try to piece together who we are and what the world means to us with a language many of us have had to re-learn as adults” (100). The tenuous survival of our traditional language is both a consequence and a cause of disconnect with traditional cultural thought and practices. Residential schools forced a rupture between generations of Native peoples by psychologically and physically beating the language and culture out of children, resulting in a mass of Native people that could never go home in a physical nor ideological sense. Most would have completely forgotten their first language or would have developed psychological blocks against ‘remembering’ it. Today, the off-reserve public school system, although less harsh, is also detrimental to the survival of Native languages in our homes and in our communities. The reality is that the majority of reservations do not have their own community-run schools where Indigenous language can be taught, and even in those communities lucky enough to have a school such as Listuguj, past grade eight, children have no choice but to enter the mainstream school system in either English or French. Inadvertently, these public schools have succeeded in creating generations of Mi’gmaq people who did/do not
know their ancestral language. The reality is that if a child does not learn and use Mi’gmaq in the home, he or she will most likely not become a fluent speaker. Furthermore, society’s preferred language bias (mostly towards English and in places like Quebec, French) affects parents’ decisions in language teaching. Often parents would encourage children to learn one or both of these official languages, the supposed languages of success. This bias arguably has its roots again in residential schools where “[...] speaking Mi’gmaw was not permitted [...] because it held children back in the classroom in reading, pronouncing and writing English” (Knockwood, 28). Knockwood’s parents, like many parents of the time, only intended for their children to succeed in school and in society. A similar motive drives contemporary Mi’gmaq parents, like my own, to encourage their children to learn English and/or French to be better integrated within mainstream society as well as to open up options for the future. Although, my home community of Listuguj has recently established Mi’gmaq immersion classes within the local school curriculum, the unsettling reality remains that these students do not often pursue their linguistic learning outside the classroom. Therein also lies the distinction between language loss and language shift: two realities that affect contemporary Mi’gmaq language, and consequently, identity. The authors of *Reclaiming the Gift: Indigenous Youth Counter-Narratives on Native Language Loss and Revitalization* explain that language loss – a term that is most commonly heard in reference to traditional Native languages, is “the attrition of specific language skills such as knowledge of grammar and vocabulary or more general ‘frustration and/or loss of ease with the language’” (McCarty, Romero, and Zepeda, 32). Language shift is defined as follows:

[...] the process whereby intergenerational continuity of the heritage language is proceeding negatively, with fewer ‘speakers, readers, writers, and even understanders’ every generation (Fishman 1991, 1). Language shift denotes a
community-wide process involving the displacement and replacement of the heritage language by a dominant language over a period of time (McCarty, Romero, and Zepeda, 32).

All these factors have lead to the current situation of Mi’gmaq being one of only approximately 50 surviving Indigenous languages in Canada\(^7\) that are usually not considered to be viable into the next century. Only Cree, and Ojibwa (central Algonquian languages) and Inuktitut presently have enough younger speakers to provide a critical mass for long-term survival (Sarkar and Metallic). In hopes of rectifying this situation and reversing language shift, a new way of teaching Mi’gmaq to adults who are not already fluent speakers has been developed within my home community of Listuguj, Quebec, thus rekindling a new hope for the language. “Teachers in Listuguj have created a structural syllabus that expands on the basic categories found in Mi’gmaq grammar rather than borrowing from methods devised to teach English or French as a second language” (Sarkar and Metallic, “Abstract”); an approach that downplays the written word and focuses on pronunciation from verbal repetition and visual cues. Overall, Native language revitalization is a challenge, but staying hopeful and true to Indigenous knowledge is a key approach to long-term success. The fight for the revitalization of the Mi’gmaq language constitutes proof not only of the failure of residential schools in their goal of cultural assimilation, but also of the continued resilience of the Mi’gmaq people. A whole thesis can be written on language revitalization, or language structure and education. My goal in this section is to give an overview of the significant role of the Mi’gmaq language in cultural continuity and how the essence of the language itself tells a story of Mi’gmaq traditional worldview.

\(^7\) There were many linguistic groups of Indigenous languages that were present in North America prior to contact. The Algonquian language family, to which Mi’gmaq belongs, constituted nearly 30 different languages divided between Eastern and Central Algonquian subgroups. Of the 18 Eastern Algonquian languages, nearly all are now extinct except for Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Delaware, with very few numbers of speakers (less than a hundred) and, Mi’gmaq, with slightly higher number of speakers ranging in the thousands (See Inglis).
I admit that I am not fluent in Mi’gmaq, but I view myself as a lifelong student of my own culture, literature, and language. I am fascinated how cultural views are embedded in a language that so many of us are estranged from. “The Mi’kmaw language has evolved and diversified from Proto-Algonquian over the last 10,000 years, and became linguistically distinct from other Eastern Algonquian languages, such as Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Abenaki and Penobscot, at least 600-700 years ago” (Sable and Francis, 26). In this sense, our Native language truly connects us to the peoples of centuries ago; their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. Like a rope, once thick and robust, now our linguistic ties have withered down to a single thread, barely visible, but the connection is still there. At least for the time being. As Sable and Francis write: “Though postcolonial conditions have significantly changed the Mi’kmaw way of life in Mi’kma’ki, it has not significantly changed the Mi’kmaw sense of being, their sense of cultural continuity or their relationship with the land and its resources” (18). I believe if we continue to learn Mi’gmaq and try to understand the function of Indigenous language in creating cultural memory and continuity, we can build upon the thread that connects us to our shared past and make it stronger.

It is undeniable that there is a significant connection between Native language and cultural continuity. The Oxford Canadian Dictionary defines “continuity” as “the state of being continuous,” “an unbroken succession” that refers to a reality that is non-stop. “[T]he Mi’kmaw language is a continuous link from pre-European-contact society to contemporary Mi’kmaw culture” (Sable, 28). However, when referring to the continuity of Native culture and especially Native language, it is rarely a completely unbroken succession. Due to the effects of colonialism and residential schooling, many Native peoples were left broken or badly bent in terms of their cultural identities and their ancestral languages.
For modern-day Natives it is especially in these areas of language and identity in which we strive for continuity to ensure a brighter future for our people and to no longer risk being “one generation from extinction” as Ojibway writer, Basil Johnston, writes in his essay by that name. He states that physical continuity does not ensure the survival of the language: “though infants were born to replenish the loss of life, not any one of them will learn the language of their grandfathers or grandmothers to keep it alive and to pass it on to their descendants. Thus language dies” (Johnston, 10). In this sense, Johnston argues that the continuity of Native culture directly depends on the continuity of the traditional language, otherwise Native peoples:

lose not only the ability to express the simplest of daily sentiments and needs, but they can no longer understand the ideas, concepts, insights, attitudes, rituals, ceremonies, institutions brought into being by their ancestors; and, having lost the power to understand, cannot sustain, enrich, or pass on their heritage. No longer will they think Indian or feel Indian. (10)

Johnston also states that in order to fully understand Native culture one must have knowledge of the Native language and that “[o]nly language and literature can restore the ‘Indianness’” (10).

Johnston’s notion of thinking and feeling Native through language and literature can be understood by examining the aspects that make Native heritage languages distinct, in this case the Mi’gmaq language. Being an ancient language, the origins of the Mi’gmaq language are deeply rooted in the history of the land: “[...] the Mi’kmaw language evolved from the sounds of the land, the winds and the waterfalls. As far as we know, there is no other language like it spoken anywhere in the world” (Knockwood, 17).
The authors of *The Language of this Land, Mi’kma’ki* explain the origin of the Mi’gmaq language and its particular relationship to the land and memory with a single Mi’gmaq word in their book:

The Mi’kmaw verb infinitive, weji-sqalia’timk is a concept deeply ingrained within the Mi’kmaw language, a language that grew from within the ancient landscape of Mi’kma’ki. Weji-sqalia’timk expresses the Mi’kmaw understanding of the origin of its people as rooted in the landscape of Eastern North America. The ‘we-exclusive’ form, weji-sqalia’tiek, means ‘we sprouted from’ much like a plant sprouts from the earth. The Mi’kmaq sprouted or emerged from this landscape and nowhere else; their cultural memory resides here (Sable and Francis, 17).

Our traditional language has sprouted and grown from our ancestors’ cultural expressions related to the land, both physically and spiritually. If we can understand and/or learn our language, we can deepen our connection and relationship to our cultural memories; the people of the past as well as the land that we now call home. “By contemplating the nature and structure of the language, and its implicit meanings, we can gain some understanding of another world view, a different filter through which to perceive and conceive of the world than through Indo-European languages” (Sable and Francis, 26). I have already touched upon three main aspects of the traditional Mi’gmaq language: how its structure is holophrastic, verb-focused, and how it illustrates the interconnectivity of the world. In this sense, the Mi’gmaq language embodies teachings on how our culture traditionally related to the world; in other words, it reveals our cultural psyche:
[The Mi’gmaq language’s] descriptive and flexible nature, and its ability to compress a multitude of meanings into a single word, reveals a world Western science has only begun to articulate in the last century. It reflects a world of interdependent relationships, a world in constant motion, metamorphosing and filled with the potential for new patterns, new shapes and a variety of conscious beings with whom one interacts, honours and dances or whom one conquers.

(Sable and Francis, 28)

Native languages have historically been shamed into silence by the colonization process as well as institutions of assimilation such as residential schools, and it is significant that we recover our traditional languages in order to ensure our cultural continuity. However, from this reality has stemmed a particular struggle for identity and belonging that is connected to a growing anxiety about the loss of traditional language and cultural values.

On the whole, according to common usage, cultural continuity is interpreted in this thesis as the desire for a people to maintain core elements of their culture, such as stories, traditional values and language, by adapting to changes over time. The notion that the Mi’gmaq people have maintained their cultural identity while adapting to change is apparent in the uses of traditional worldview, language and cultural memories in the literature. Culture changes over time; constantly evolving and adapting within society and the world. Yet, as culture changes, many vital parts of culture, continue through time. For many, continuity connotes the idea of preservation. However, I view something preserved as akin to being mummified. We preserve things that are old, dead; they may be valuable but fragile and must not be touched for danger of damaging them irreparably. This notion of safekeeping certainly applies to my idea of continuity as a forward-motion, but does not explain the past in the present or how both the past and the
present inform the future. The Mi’gmaq culture is not dead and, in opposition to simple preservation of the past, I believe interaction and engagement with Mi’gmaq cultural elements, such as history, storytelling, language, on our own terms are the keys to continuity. I understand cultural continuity in the Mi’gmaq sense which constitutes maintaining a connection with our shared past and traditions, constructing a collective consciousness and identity for ourselves in the present, and upholding our original language as well as ensuring a distinct voice and place within the world in the future. Ultimately, the Mi’gmaq view of cultural continuity can be summed up as the ability to balance the reclaiming and renewing of cultural memories.

**Understanding Cultural Memory**

In “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” Jan Assmann defines the concept of cultural memory as

[…] the body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilise and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity. (132)

Assmann goes on to explain that cultural memory is distinct from everyday communicative memory by its transcendence: “Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation” (129). In this sense, texts and narratives (literature and stories) are effective means of cultural formation. Assmann focuses his theorization of cultural memories on a number of characteristics, two of which are: “the concretion of identity” and “its capacity to reconstruct” (130). The first aspect is, in other words, cultural memories as they
relate to a specific group. The cultural memories constitute a “store of knowledge” (130) from which members of that particular group construct their collective and individual identities, by defining who we are and who we are not. In her introduction “‘Double Take: The Uses of Cultural Memory,” Roxanne Rimstead problematises this notion of concretion of identity by reflecting on how groups use the past (cultural memories) to constitute their sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (‘self’ and ‘other’), and if, in turn, these identities tend to liberate or oppress (2). Concretion of identity through cultural memory is significant in the continuity of a culture, but it is also important to be aware of the pitfall of othering. We use cultural memories to define who we are within this world, but not at the expense and/or demeaning of another group.

Another characteristic of cultural memory according to Assmann is the capacity to reconstruct: “No memory can preserve the past [....] Cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, it always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation” (130). One of the objectives of this thesis is to depict how Mi’gmaq literature/stories do reconstruct the past as it relates to the present with a vision for the future. On the whole, my thesis will focus on how Mi’gmaq identity and voice become “visible to itself and to others” (Assmann, 133) through cultural memory; in other words, through the (re)interpretation of past stories and the formation of present ones. The various ways in which Mi’gmaq literature uses traces of the past to construct the present and envision the future will be explored through the chapters.

Each chapter of my thesis will be linked to one or more concerns proposed in my three-pronged focus: stories and continuity, remembering and healing, and the role of the past in the present. My main approach to researching the function of Mi’gmaq stories/literature in the construction of modern Mi’gmaq identities constitutes three concerns because I was inspired by the fact that time has three aspects: past, present, and future. Each prong relates to a facet of
time; the function of traditional stories and spirituality is associated with the past, the construction of Indigenous knowledge as well as literary representation and self-representation deals with our present, and, finally, the importance of the past in the present in the construction/negotiation of a contemporary Native identity and in the imagining of future continuity expresses the significance of connecting all three to ensure a continuous forward motion in Native cultural and literary analysis. My paradigm of past, present, future may seem to favor a linear time pattern whereas Indigenous time consciousness is commonly described as cyclical. Indeed, according to Sable and Francis, the Mi’gmaq language “has no word for time” (36); however “bringing the past into present consciousness” (37) is an inherent part of traditional Mi’gmaq cultural practices such as storytelling, gatherings, sweat lodges, and smudging ceremonies. During all these instances, our connection with our ancestors and their continued presence is invoked. I would argue my study of forward motion involves the interdependence of the past and the present intrinsic to Mi’gmaq thought and, in addition, engages the role of both the past and the present in the future. This paradigm suggests a certain hybridity between linear and cyclical time consciousness. In “Re-examining American Indian Time Consciousness,” Anderson Rouse problematises the notion that Native culture upholds a cyclical form of time consciousness exclusively and argues that this position is overly simplistic. He states that cyclical time constitutes a reiteration of colonial views and also perpetuates the belief of Native peoples as timeless (6). Rouse goes on to state that “[c]yclical time, or time that is tied with natural cycles, does not exclude linear concept of time” (12). Therefore, a mixture between linear and cyclical views of time is more representative of contemporary Mi’gmaq thought and values.
This concept of forward motion, of bringing the past into the present with a vision for the future, in the construction of Mi’gmaq culture and identity is central to my research because it is extremely relevant to my own experience as a contemporary Mi’gmaq and is a testimony to what I witness in reality within my community. The Mi’gmaq people as well as their culture and language are not relics of the past, nor are they fading away. In reality, they have been and still are continuously evolving. The works and values of Mi’gmaq authors constitute tangible proof of this evolution. However, by highlighting moving in a forward motion, I do not mean nor encourage leaving the past behind, but rather I wish to demonstrate that Mi’gmaq literature remembers and shapes our past as it relates to our present to assist us on our journey towards the future.

Chapter One focuses on the “Power of Stories” in two ways. First, I examine the continuity of Mi’gmaq traditional storytelling, in other words the importance of the cultural memory inherent of these traditional stories in the teaching and continuation of Mi’gmaq cultural values and worldview, especially in relation to the Mi’gmaq mythological concept of “Power.” Second, the ‘story’ within ‘history’ will be analysed, with a view of restoring a sense of ‘humanness’ to the Mi’gmaq people in colonial historical accounts by focusing on the individual/specific as well as acts of cultural (re)definition that resists European imperialism. In this chapter, I selected examples of particular historical narratives that exemplify re-mapping of cultural and physical space, especially through the concept of naming. Then, I also look at examples of traditional narratives (that have been recovered, transcribed and/or collected in written form) for analysis in terms of their function as cultural memory and as means of defining the self as well as community.
Cultural memory is deeply related to narrative memory; constructing and expressing a narrative is inevitably a way of preserving memories, whether they are individual or collective, whether they constitute history or anecdote. Indeed, “it is through our stories and narrative memory that we ‘anchor’ ourselves in the world” ((Ad)dressing Our Words, 9). Mi’gmaq cultural and literary anchoring or grounding, as that of other Native peoples, begins with traditional storytelling and its significance in defining belonging as well as a sense of community in Mi’gmaq culture. Thus, this chapter also briefly explores how traditional stories, which stem from pre-colonial tradition, are not only part of a distant past, but are also relevant in contemporary thought since they still uphold Native traditional beliefs and teachings today.

In Chapter Two, I elaborate on the issue of Native cultural authenticity and myths of representation as well as cultural ambivalence and appropriation, namely by analysing two novels with Mi’gmaq characters that are written by non-Mi’gmaq authors: The Deserter by Paul Almond (2010) and Cibou by Susan Young de Biagi (2008). This second chapter compares and contrasts these novels not necessarily in terms of their accuracy in the representation of Mi’gmaq culture (for both novels are extremely well researched in terms of history), but in terms of how these novels, both set in the 17th century in the wake of European settlement, are representations of the so-called “timeless condition” of the Mi’gmaq/Native peoples. Professor and anthropologist Anne-Christine Hornborg coined this term in her examination of Mi’gmaq culture from historical, anthropological, eco-cosmological standpoints in Mi’kmaq Landscapes: From Animism to Sacred Ecology, offering significant knowledge about historical changes in the life-world of the Mi’gmaq in contrast to the practice of depicting our culture as timeless. Culture and language are not produced in a vacuum; they are formed through constant contact with one another and through shifting contexts of lived experience. Hornborg states that “there is a
tendency to perceive Natives as peoples without history and with a never-changing philosophy” (19). The representation of Native timelessness is commonly perceived as more “authentic” and, consequently, is more popular in non-Native depictions of Native subjects, whether fictional or non-fictional. Although they have both been published within the last decade, the novels written by non-Mi’gmaq authors in this chapter represent a limited scope of the colonial past within which the Mi’gmaq people are portrayed as traditional, original, and ‘authentic’ in terms of non-Native assumptions and expectations; as part of a culture that has not been able to ‘evolve’ without Europeans kick-starting the process. Native cultural authenticity is a concept that will be re-examined in Chapter Four because it affects every single contemporary Native person at one time or another and this is evident in contemporary Native narratives in terms of their struggle for the distant romanticized past or their fight against the demons of the more recent past.

Chapter Three explores a relatively recent demon in Native cultural history: residential schools. The chapter stems from the thought that “The Door to Your Spirit is Through Your Deepest Scar” and will deal with the process of healing the rupture of colonization and residential schooling through narratives. In other words, this chapter studies the power of creative expression (through storytelling and writing) to provide a space for reconciliation and healing.

Colonization and its effects, such as residential schools, constitute a major rupture in Indigenous cultural continuity and a deep scar in Native cultural memory. This chapter compares and contrasts Isabelle Knockwood’s Out of the Depths and Rita Joe’s Song of Rita Joe respective portrayals of the ravages of residential schooling as well as the healing potential of writing. These Mi’gmaq authors write the past from different points of view to rehabilitate the present and with a hopeful vision for the future. The key concepts in this chapter are spatial and
ideological diaspora caused by residential schools (cultural assimilation) as written by Neal McLeod in “Coming Home through Stories” from *(Ad)ressing Our Words: Aboriginal Perspectives on Aboriginal Literatures* as well as the concepts of resilience, healing, and prosocial coping. The collective memories in Knockwood’s and Joe’s narratives can be interpreted as examples of “coming home through stories,” in other words, as trying to locate the place of understanding and cultural healing through writing and sharing their stories.

The fourth and final chapter touches upon the significance of the Mi’gmaq language to its people and within the culture’s worldview. The loss and recovery of the traditional language constitutes a major aspect of Mi’gmaq thought and literature that still affects our cultural identity and personal sense of belonging. This chapter presents contemporary examples of Mi’gmaq storytelling in diverse forms (novel, poetry, memoir, children’s fiction) in order to demonstrate the variety of Mi’gmaq stories as well as how they illustrate the search for identity, belonging, and continuity. Accordingly, this chapter analyses Mi’gmaq literary works from the past two or three decades such as *Stones and Switches* by Lorne Joseph Simon, *My Mi’kmaq Mother* by Julie Pellissier-Lush, selected poetry from Shirley Kiju Kawi, and the books for children written by Michael James Isaac. The goal of this chapter is to look at how these modern Mi’gmaq writers recover, use, re-envision, and sometimes struggle with the past (personal as well as collective) and the Mi’gmaq traditional worldview, language, and spirituality in a future-oriented (forward motion) manner and how they contribute to the construction of a new understanding of contemporary/hybrid Mi’gmaq identity through their storytelling.

**Terminology and Spelling**

There is an inextricable bond between the concepts of culture, language, and storytelling. Therefore, it is important to discuss Native/Mi’gmaq identity and naming by noting the context
of various spellings and designations of the Mi’gmaq tribal name as well as different orthographic systems that are present throughout this research.

Terms to describe Canada’s Indigenous peoples have evolved over the years. Up until the end of the 1970s, the term “Indian” was in general use. Just recently, the federal government department mandated with dealing with the issues of Aboriginal peoples re-named the Department of Indian Affairs to “Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada” yet, legal status is still using the terms “Indian” and “non-Indian.” Even though most Native people in Canada consider the term inaccurate and pejorative, the term “Indian” is still used by modern-day Native people colloquially and as a self-referential term amongst us as a way of reclaiming the name. In general, the preferred terms in use today are either “First Nations,” which is used more often to describe reserve-based communities and the broader terms of “Aboriginal,” “Indigenous” and “Native.” In this sense, terminology is always problematic. Native and non-Native writers alike have to contend with names and designations in terms of what is ‘accurate’, ‘authentic’, or ‘politically correct’. For instance, Thomas King recently wrote about terminology in The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America (2012):

Columbus gets blamed for the term [Indian], but he wasn’t being malicious. He was looking for India and thought he had found it. He was mistaken, of course, and as time went on, various folks and institutions tried to make the matter right. Indians became Amerindians and Aboriginals and Indigenous People and American Indians. Lately, Indians have become First Nations in Canada and Native Americans in the United States, but the fact of the matter is that there has never been a good collective noun because there never was a collective to begin with. (Prologue, xiii)
King is comfortable with the term ‘Indian’ as a general designation that constitutes a “North American default.” Since Native peoples form a group that is diverse and indefinable, every writer tends to have their own preferred term according to their own personal feelings and objectives, either to maintain neutrality or for more radical or political usages. For consistency, I will use in my own research the capitalized term “Native,” when referring to the whole of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples as a collectivity, except, of course, when quoting other writers who have chosen alternate terms.

Since the primary focus of my research is the Mi’gmaq people of Eastern Canada and their literature, it is important to comment on the various spellings of this tribal name and the issue of naming/renaming. There have been variations in spelling in the designation of my people over time. I would like to explain the variation in spelling of the tribal name (main variations are “Mi’gmaq” and “Mi’kmaq”) and of words and phrases from this Native language. “The Mi’kmaq belong to the Algonkian⁸-speaking family and are, with its 25,000 people, the largest Algonkian-speaking group in Eastern Canada” (Hornborg, 3). Traditionally, the Mi’gmaq referred to themselves as lnu⁹, which was a word for “people” or “human beings” that, over time, came to mean “Native,” “Aboriginal,” or “First Nations person.” When Europeans arrived in Eastern Canada, they gave different names to the Native peoples that they encountered. This renaming is a consequence of the “process of discovery” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 31) of colonization, which is that act of the dominant culture “bringing into being” previously ‘undiscovered’ lands and peoples and constitutes a “symbolic and literal act of mastery and control” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 32) over Native cultures. Other than the derogatory term

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⁸ Also “Algonquian” (alternative spelling)
⁹ Pronounced “êll-nu”, variant spelling “nnu.” From what I can observe within my own community, this term is regaining popular and general use.
“savage/sauvage” or the contentious “Indian,” for instance, the early missionary Chrestien Le Clercq named the Mi’gmaq people *gaspesians*, rooting these people within the region of the Gaspé Peninsula. There is a prevalent thought that the designation “Micmac” later stemmed from an English phonetic translation of the word *ni’kmaq*, meaning “my family” or “all my relations,” that was “a greeting word that came to be associated with the tribe during the early seventeenth century” (Hornborg, 3). As stated in *Gmêtginu: Migmaq History 01*, the true origin of the designation of our people “still remains an enigma” (Barnaby, 110) to this day. In *Gmêtginu*, it is explained that a deeper knowledge of the vowel structure of the Mi’gmaq language, which contains long and short vowels that may change the meaning of words that are spelled the same, problematizes the common interpretation of the name: “[...] the term ‘nigmaq’ cannot apply to the description of the term ‘Migmaq’ because it lacks the necessary long vowel” (110). Alternatively, the authors deconstruct the word in order to discern its meaning, namely examining the prefix “Migm”: “[t]his term is often applied to individuals who are obsessed with supernatural ways” (110). However, this explanation is not definitive either, the authors still “welcome all suggestions or interpretations” (110).

From the 1980s onward, more authentically phonetic spellings have been established. Today, there are many different spelling/writing systems established for the Mi’gmaq language. The various orthographies stem from three regional Mi’gmaq centers that have already developed or are in the process of developing their own writing systems: the Smith-Francis orthography developed in Nova Scotia; the Milieu orthography used in Big Cove, New Brunswick; and the Metallic orthography, which is standard in Listuguj, Quebec and neighbouring communities. However, these different spelling systems are not without meaning. Each of these orthographies acknowledges the work of their respective Mi’gmaq community
members. In other words, they all recognize that there are language differences across the Mi’gmaq territory that must be acknowledged by different writing systems. “To get their own spelling legalized was and still is an important step for modern Mi’kmaq in rebuilding their culture” (Hornborg, 3).

There is still much debate over the question of the standardisation of our language systems and the development of a national system, which would presumably allow the Mi’gmaq people as a whole to develop a standard language curriculum. The discussions continue whether or not this is an ultimate (and feasible) solution to Native language loss, denial of Native rights, and loss of traditional lands. However, the serious continuous efforts of language preservation and education by each individual Mi’gmaq community are not to be overlooked.

Due to local relevance and kinship, I have chosen to use the phonetic spellings of the name “Mi’gmaq” as well as Mi’gmaq words from the self-designated official orthography of Listuguj, Quebec, the Alphonse Metallic orthography. Other spelling variations are used when quoting or referring to texts that use them (namely the Smith-Francis orthography established by the Nova Scotian Mi’kmaq).

On the whole, especially when it comes to writing about Native peoples and their experiences, it is always important to note why we prefer to use certain terms over others, that we validate our choice of words. The keys ideas here are “validation” and “choice”; these are two concepts that were not always available to Native peoples within the colonial discourse of discovery, mapping, and naming; and especially not within the realms of colonial and assimilatory institutions. Today, the validation and the choice of how to designate our own people is an example of our growing relevance and our gaining more control of discursive space.
Keep in mind that, even though the words “Native” and “Mi’gmaq” speak to me more on a personal and cultural level, I do not impose these terms nor do I devalue the choices of other writers. I agree with Thomas King when he writes: “In the end, I’m not so much concerned with designing a strict vocabulary as I am with crafting a coherent and readable narrative” (The Inconvenient Indian, xiv). Overall, a readable narrative is my main goal in the writing of this thesis. I owe it to myself and to my culture that my parents, my peers, my future children, and anyone seeking to know more about the Mi’gmaq and our stories will be able to read and appreciate my own exploration of the past, present, and future of Mi’gmaq literature.

Chapter One
The Power of Stories

The truth about stories is that that’s all we are. (Thomas King, The Truth about Stories, 2)

I have often told my children that if we recorded our own history through writing, it would have been different. (Rita Joe, The Mi’kmaq Anthology, 8)

Thomas King states that “[m]ost of us think that history is the past. It’s not. History is the stories we tell about the past.” (The Inconvenient Indian, 2). Every story has a beginning. However, the exact beginning of the collective narrative of the Mi’gmaq people is rather nebulous. All we know for certain is that, as Ruth Holmes Whitehead, ethnographer and renowned specialist in Mi’gmaq history and culture, states at the beginning of The Old Man Told Us: “The history of this land [North America/Canada] does not necessarily begin in 1500, with the arrival of the Europeans with their alphabet, their pens and their parchment” (Holmes Whitehead, 1). For centuries before European contact, the Mi’gmaq people had been recording their own history through oral stories and chants, preserved in petroglyphs, hieroglyphs, or other artwork, such as the wampum belt. Indeed, the Mi’gmaq were not at a loss for means of communication and transmission of culture: “[They]…did have very efficient ways of passing information on to following generations—ways of teaching the children of their past and their customs, of how the world worked and the People’s place within that world” (Holmes Whitehead, 5). I will proceed by focusing on two of the means through which cultural information and Indigenous knowledge of the past are transmitted: history and traditional indigenous stories. In my view, both traditions of history and storytelling are profoundly interrelated. In this chapter, I will interpret traditional Mi’gmaq stories as constituting valid Indigenous historical knowledge as well as refer to Mi’gmaq history using the term ‘hi(story)’ or ‘hi(stories)’ to illustrate the interdependence of history and stories in cultural memory. In other
words, I will re-examine documentation of the past (history) as containing stories of individual and collective Mi’gmaq cultural memory.

1.1. Traditional Indigenous Stories: Finding the Self in Community

If history in North America as recorded by the Europeans is not the true beginning, then where does the Mi’gmaq cultural story and experience start? With Mi’gmaq culture as with most Indigenous cultures, we can only go so far back into the past as history, in the dictionary sense of the word, the formal written account, permits us. Even our traditional Mi’gmaq stories that hold valuable pre-colonial teachings have been tainted with colonial bias, been filtered by the very acts of translation and transcription. Nevertheless, in my view, Indigenous information and knowledge was, and as I will argue still is, transmitted through traditional Indigenous storytelling.

Before history, there was just story. Native writers such as Thomas King and Tomson Highway theorize the significance of storytelling and mythology in the expression and construction of cultural identity and belonging. Renowned Native Cree playwright and novelist, Tomson Highway, lectures on the discourse of mythology in *Comparing Mythologies*. In his introduction, he states: “I am here to talk about mythology because I believe that if the consciousness of a people has its roots anywhere, then that’s where those roots lie” (Highway 17). The exploration of the mythology of a culture is essential to the understanding of that culture’s social views and how a community chooses to construct its beliefs. It is my belief that Mi’gmaq historical, cultural, and literary continuity resides in the importance and function of recovered traditional indigenous stories and spirituality.
Within the realm of traditional Indigenous stories, the Native sense of cultural belonging and community are defined. One of the most significant ways of teaching is through storytelling. Although dramatic, poetic, and told with a careful attention to language, the function of these stories, passed down through generations by word of mouth, were not solely aesthetic. These mythological stories constituted a tapestry in which important life lessons were interwoven with wonder and a shared experience. The visions and images brought to life through storytelling had both a cultural education aspect as well as recreational sharing. By analysing the significant cultural teachings articulated within these traditional indigenous stories, contemporary Mi’gmaq people can determine a deeper understanding of their own cultural continuity and sense of collectivity.

In this sense, recently, there has not only been a growing interest in as well as a prominence of contemporary Native writing; but also, there is also a growing need to effectively interpret and understand “the traditional literature from which it springs and which has been largely misunderstood by the non-native community” (New, n.p). Interestingly, traditional Indigenous stories give insight into the ways of life of Mi’gmaq people and how their values and sense of community have been upheld: “these stories enable us to have fleeting glimpses not only of how the People lived but what was important to them and of how they saw the world” (Holmes Whitehead, 7). Traditional oral stories that have been collected into volumes over the years by missionaries, historians, ethnographers, and other researchers, as well as authors themselves can still be read and studied today for their significant discourses of identity and belonging. Keeping in mind the challenges existing in the translation, transcription and collection of oral stories, I have selected two for analysis: “The Boy Who Visited Muini’skw” and “Jenu” from the collection entitled *Six Mi’kmaq Stories* by Ruth Holmes Whitehead. My focus is upon
the analysis of the content found within these stories. I have selected these narratives because of their underlying themes of lost identity and found community that speak to me as a contemporary Mi’gmaq person. These struggles for identity and community are significant since they are both very old and very current. These stories contain notions of traditional Mi’gmaq spirituality and mythology and can be read as belonging to the past, but the story arcs of the characters can be simultaneously interpreted as present-day struggles that Native people like myself continuously face.

The first story is about a relatively uncared for orphan boy who, upon wandering into the forest alone, meets an inviting and caring Muini’skw (Bear Woman) and decides to stay with her. The boy lives peacefully with Bear Woman and her cubs for some time, and begins to take the form of a bear. This transformation is not just a magical occurrence or an interesting creative device. In Mi’gmaq traditional tales, human beings perceiving animals as persons as well as humans transforming into animals, developing relationships with animals or adopting animal-like characteristics are all events that exemplify Native “ontological perspectivism” (Hornborg 37). In other words, in the Mi’gmaq cosmology or worldview, all beings, not just human beings are depicted as ‘persons’ that have similar life experiences. Therefore, “the unity of all beings that experienced the world as persons” and the fact that “both entities [human and animal] experience their own species as persons” (Hornborg 42) explains corporeal transformations and interspecies communication that occur in traditional tales. This worldview can be related to animism, in the sense that Mi’gmaq traditional storytelling depicts the existence of individual spirits that inhabit humans, animals, natural objects, and phenomena. Mi’gmaq mythology/cosmology as represented in traditional indigenous stories illustrates “an integrated
universe, where the actions of different ‘persons’ (animals as well as humans) functioned as an integrating force” (Hornborg, 16).

Stories that were focused on animal Persons\textsuperscript{10} had, and arguably still have, a function of teaching important lessons to the Mi’gmaq which differed from European perspective on animal folk or fairy tales: “If in a Western ontology only humans are persons, tales will anthropomorphize animals as persons. Mi’kmaq tales, however, deal with the ‘real’ landscape and ‘real’ animals’ lives….” (Hornborg 38). Indeed, animals as Persons do not solely have the function of commenting metaphorically or allegorically on human life and society, but Mi’gmaq animal Persons as presented in Mi’gmaq traditional storytelling illustrate the fact that animals live and act in societies just like humans. For instance, a male bear (or loon, or beaver, etc.) experiences his female companion as a wife and mother to his children just as an ordinary human husband would, and animal natural dwellings are parallel to the Mi’gmaq wigwams. Also, each species has its own perspective on what is appropriate and natural in terms of food; the beaver may feast on tree bark while humans find equal sustenance in meat. However, the fact that each species is sharing the experience of fulfilling a basic need is what correlates them: “the common referential point is not human as a species, but humanity as a condition” (Hornborg, 35). Thus, stories like “The Boy Who Visited Muini’skw” teach us the importance of switching perspectives which is a way of respecting and “knowing the worldviews of other beings” (Hornborg, 38) in relation to our own worldviews and how “at a deeper level…with the help of animals, [humans] can attain powerful knowledge” (42). This mythological and ontological concept from which the tale springs constitutes an important teaching in itself.

\textsuperscript{10} The words “Person(s)” and “Power” are capitalized differing from Standard English usage in the quoted source texts in order to distinctly note their conceptual and mythological usage in Mi’gmaq traditional stories and beliefs. When I refer to these concepts in my own text, I will retain the capitalized versions to distinguish the words as concepts that differ from their dictionary definition.
In “The Boy Who Visited Muini’skw,” however, the human hunters find him, in time, and he is “rescued.” Bear Woman tells the boy that she has given him shelter so now he must protect her and must ask the human hunters not to kill her. The boy, upon returning to camp, is slowly transformed back into a human and is given a new name “Muin” (bear). Furthermore, he and his descendants will forever have a special connection to the Power\textsuperscript{11} of the Bear. Power as viewed in Mi’kmaq belief can be compared to the modern scientific belief that all matter is energy; Power is the essence of the universe. There are many words that have been used to describe this aspect of Mi’gmaq cosmology. In *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, Marie Battiste uses the Aboriginal term “mntu’k.” (90), but explains that the English approximations to this concept include “force,” “dignity,” “and “power” and that “working in combination, these English words approximate a unified Algonquian thought” (93). Power can be omnipresent and transcendent and can also manifest itself within the worlds into conscious and concrete beings: human, animal and natural Persons. The story of “The Boy Who Visited Muini’skw” illustrates what it means to belong to a community and what happens when the group does not care for all its members adequately. In other words, whichever community you choose to live in will eventually shape who you are as an individual and this is literally and metaphorically represented in the story by the boy’s physical transformation. In addition, when the orphan boy does not find care in his home camp, he moves on to a different group (the Bear Persons) and this constitutes a loss for the Mi’gmaq community: “this is a loss, as any skills or powers he might develop will no longer be used for the good of the group” (Holmes Whitehead, 16). Only when the people of the tribe realise their loss and the significance of the boy’s Power, can they reclaim him. However, his bond with the Bears is forever, that is to say that his personal identity is formed by the most nurturing and accepting community. On the whole, this story

\textsuperscript{11} See Note 5.
depicts how it is “inconceivable to a Mi’kmaw that a human being could exist without a family or a kinship regulation” (Battiste, 68).

The story of “Jenu’ also “underline[s] how important it is to have friends, to have alliances, to be related, to be part of a group” (Holmes Whitehead, 15), but in a different way. This tale is about a family of Mi’gmaq who encounter a mythical being called a Jenu (Cannibal Giant) disguised as a travelling old man. When the mother of the family realises the true identity of the old traveler, she devises a clever plan in a desperate attempt to save her family from being eaten: she treats the Jenu with utmost kindness acting as though he was her long-lost father and instructs her husband to do the same. After days of living with such kindness, the sullen and fierce Jenu becomes attached to this family and even protects them by fighting off another Jenu. It is believed that the Jenu were once of the People\textsuperscript{12} but have been transformed from their human forms and ways, possibly by isolation. In this sense, the story is about what it means to be human, to be of the People. The Jenu are the representation of the antithesis of the Mi’gmaq traditional ways of life. For instance, the Jenu are isolated beings while the Mi’gmaq live in groups. Jenu eat human flesh which is a taboo for the Mi’gmaq and are “full of ice” so they crave coldness instead of the warmth of a wigwam; they are also capable of travelling great distances on foot instead of by canoe.

Both stories share the representation of characters who are lost. The tamed Jenu in this story represents a character that is lost—lost to the human world and lost to himself, and the tribe loses the boy in “The Boy Who Visited Muini’skw.” Since the Jenu did not have any access to nurturing and community like Muin the boy, they have transformed into these monsters that the

\textsuperscript{12} “People” here is capitalized to refer to the Mi’gmaq Native People. As explained in the Introduction, the Mi’gmaq people refer to themselves as “Inu.” The original meaning of the word simply referred “people” or “human beings” and over time came to designate “First Nations People” or “Mi’gmaq Native” specifically.
Mi’gmaq learned to fear. However, “this Jenu can be changed back into one of the People by kindness, by being made part of a social group, a family, with all the comforts and customs of humans” (Holmes Whitehead, 53).

A story is a gift that can bring group members together and often points out life lessons and experiences that the Mi’gmaq have in common:

Stories are enfolding lessons. Not only do they transmit validated experience; they also renew, awaken and honor spiritual forces. Hence, almost every ancient story does not explain; instead it focuses on processes of knowing. Stories discuss how to acquire these relationships on every level, how to properly use them, how to lose them. They also discuss the consequences attendant on these relationships. One is said to be lost without allies, and stories about allies are guides to the unseen as well as to the seen. (Battiste, 92)

The role and function of stories as teachings is a common notion from an Indigenous standpoint. This strategy for traditional teaching through storytelling values the responsibility and power of the listener or reader as equal to that of the storyteller. At their core, traditional Indigenous stories deal with basic human situations and emotions: growing up, leaving home, finding out who you are and how you relate to other people, and exploring the world. As they are read and interpreted today, these examples of “ancient stories handed down provide insight into a way of looking at the world that differs greatly from messages we receive on TV, in the newspapers and from our political leaders” (Joe and Choyce, 11). They transport the listener or reader to a time before European contact and colonization, a time when Native community and belonging were
more easily defined. If they were to be misunderstood or lost, that sense of unwavering identity can be just as easily found again.

1.2. Hi(stories) of Othering and Resistance Among the Mi’gmaq

Written history, although not THE beginning, is an authorized standpoint from which to gather information about Native cultures; however, most historical accounts of Native peoples are written by non-Natives and many are culturally biased and incomplete in the sense that much of the Indigenous presence and/or perspective has been omitted or silenced in the recording of these events by the dominant culture. A prevailing argument is that history as it stands in narratives by explorers, settlers, and missionaries is mostly fiction, a fabrication or manipulation of events with a particular goal in mind. Whether it was unconscious or deliberate, colonial historical discourse represents Native peoples in a light that serves the colonizers’ account of the ‘process of discovery’:

The fictionality of the narratives of such processes of ‘discovery’… is emphasized by the role of the native guide in such explorations, who leads the explorer to the interior. The prior knowledge of the land that this dramatized, and which cannot be wholly silenced in the written accounts of these explorations, is ignored, and literally silenced by the act of mapping, since the indigenous people have no voice or even presence that can be heard in the new discourse. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 32-33)

There were many strategies that colonizers employed to rationalize the need for discovery, colonization, as well as conversion and assimilation practices in the “new” land. In fact, in order to support the myth of “uncharted” and “empty” lands in North America, the point of view and
prior knowledge and occupation of the land by the Mi’gmaq and other Native populations would have to be erased. This is what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin mean by the “fictionality” of historical narratives. However, the erasure and cultural bias present in Eurocentric historical accounts can be counteracted by attempting to uncover and interpret the voices of the original occupants of the land, the Native peoples who “cannot be wholly silenced” and that still exist within these colonial texts.

As Cree scholar Neal McLeod states in “Coming Home Through Stories”: “Often when one group becomes dominated by another, the dominated group tends to lose some of its narratives; history shows that the dominator imposes its narratives upon the dominated group” (18). In this sense, oral tradition and traditional indigenous stories were not viewed by the dominant culture as valid forms of history. In the context of recent land claims disputes, one of the indications of this devaluation of oral culture is the fate of oral agreements and oral history in courts of law, where they were often discounted in treaty disputes while primacy was given to the written word. Much scholarship is dealing with these disputes, but this chapter will elaborate on the ways in which traditional indigenous stories and history impact on contemporary Native culture and memory. Central to this debate is the issue of interpretation. Contemporary Native peoples are challenging discontinuity by interpreting or reinterpreting history from an Indigenous point of view. “The antidote to […] historical erasure is an analytical approach to history and cultural memory that goes beyond mere historicizing and considers our own accountability regarding remembering and forgetting (Rimstead, 3). We, as Native and non-Native readers, are responsible for our own thoughts and interpretations of history. There is a responsibility to remember that written history, although steeped in fact, can still be viewed as a story, a narrative that contains two points of view: the colonizers’ and the Native peoples’.”
In keeping with the idea that history is an act of storytelling, I have decided to refer to Mi’gmaq history in the context of this chapter as hi(story) or hi(stories) to illustrate the interdependence of history and stories. Hi(story) constitutes analysing historical accounts as conveying indigenous perspectives and voices despite the intention of the colonizer by not losing sight of cultural biases in recorded Eurocentric history. The way I view it is that, while both history and stories are forms of storytelling, history presents itself as relying on fact while story can present itself as relying on feeling. Hi(story) is a way of looking at the underlying views, values, perspectives of a culture that can be inferred within recorded histories. This fresh way of looking at the notion of history as intertwined with storytelling is important to my vision of forward-motion analysis of Mi’gmaq literature. Lived history always remains in the realm of the past; the lived past is fixed and cannot be changed. In the present, we have the choice and power to interpret the past in many different ways or to discover new understandings that may alter our perception of the past. There is a shift from ‘you must study the past because it is true’ to ‘I study the past to discover my own truths’.

Contemporary historical volumes on the Mi’gmaq people, like the ones mentioned in my Introduction, more often than not stem from the notion of ‘righting the wrong’ by writing the ‘right’. In other words, these accounts tend to rehash or present mostly Eurocentric historical accounts in a way that levels the discourse field between Native and non-Native, between Mi’gmaq and European views. For example, on one hand, Daniel N. Paul’s re-examination of historical records in We Were Not the Savages constitutes an exposure of European colonization of the Mi’gmaq people: “As a person who has no such reluctance to expose the crimes against humanity committed by the English, I wrote this book. It details a chronicle of man’s inhumanity to man which has few, if any, equals in human history” (9). Paul writes that “Canada has kept the
horrors committed against the First Nations resident within its borders under wraps for centuries” (7). He goes on to state that “[t]he atrocities recounted in [his] book have not been placed [there] to engender pity. They have been retold to persuade people of the majority society to use whatever power they have to see that Canada makes meaningful amends for the horrifying wrongs of the past” (Paul, 7). On the other hand, Ruth Holmes Whitehead’s, The Old Man Told Us, is presented as “an attempt to counterbalance such works [European historical records], by restoring to our collective memory—whether we are Micmac or not—a sense of the individual and specific. It is also an attempt to show, where possible, the Micmac view of events” (“Introduction”). Paul calls for justice and action, Holmes Whitehead stands for balance and truth; both tell the story, the ‘hi(story),’ that has previously been silenced or discounted. In other words, Mi’gmaq hi(stories) are the personal, specific stories that constitute cultural memory; they are instances where Mi’gmaq voices can be heard.

Certainly, history, as it was understood and recorded by the dominant culture, was largely fictionalized in favour of the colonizer, his missions, and his ideals: heroic acts by explorers were embellished; atrocities against Native peoples were downplayed. In this history, some voices were written louder than others and, unfortunately, the voices of Native peoples were muffled in the background: “the dominance of writing in perpetuating European cultural assumptions and Eurocentric notions of civilization as well as the view of writing as the vehicle of authority and truth, led to an undervaluing of oral culture…” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 166). This expressed not only the idea of silencing the voices of the colonized, but also the privileging written records in a scriptocentric culture and thus silencing oral histories as well.

In recent times, however, “[p]ost-colonial cultural studies have led to a general re-evaluation of the importance of orality and oral cultures” (165) as well as orature as culturally
significant vehicles of transmitting Indigenous knowledge. For instance, *The Old Man Told Us* constitutes a great work in the validation of Mi’gmaq traditional/oral stories as a form of human history. Holmes Whitehead conveys that “one cannot change history, but one can moderate the events by presenting the other side or by giving the Micmac a sense of ‘humanness’” (“Foreword”). Holmes Whitehead does this by cleverly juxtaposing written Eurocentric historical excerpts with recorded oral Mi’gmaq history. The majority of the Mi’gmaq oral accounts in this collection are still recorded by outsiders, French and English writers, and, more often than not, these writers did not speak the Mi’gmaq language, did not share the same worldview and, consequently, almost universally perceived themselves as culturally superior. European bias of the time is usually evident in documented history. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that, for the most part, the Mi’gmaq did not speak either fluent English or French, nor did they share the worldview of the people documenting them. It is fair to assume from both colonizers’ and Mi’gmaq accounts, instances of which I will discuss shortly, that the Mi’gmaq may have also regarded their own way of life as superior to the newly arrived Europeans’, their own cultural others. In imperial discourse, “the other is the excluded or ‘mastered’ subject created by the discourse of power. Othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 171). Generally, “the colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ through discourses such as primitivism…as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 169). Othering is defining and validating the cultural Self by positioning the cultural Other as different or inferior: “The existence of others is crucial in defining what is ‘normal’ and in locating one’s own place in the world” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 169). Othering is defining one’s Self by
first determining what one is not, and the notion of “what one is not” (or should not be or desire to be) is embodied by the Other. When two differing cultures come into contact (like the Europeans and the Mi’gmaq), othering is bound to happen from both standpoints and constitutes a power struggle; each culture views the ‘normalcy’ of their own ways while defining the ‘strangeness’ of the other.

The cultural practice of the colonized culture ‘othering’ the dominant culture is illustrated in some excerpts of *The Old Man Told Us*. For instance, in the accounts of Chrestien Le Clercq, récollet missionary to the Mi’gmaq on the Gaspé region (1675-1683), this perspective on othering in historical records ranges from colonizers noting small differences in cultural norms and practices: “[The Micmac] find the use of our handkerchiefs ridiculous; they mock at us and say that it is placing excrements in our pockets” (Le Clercq in Holmes Whitehead, 54), to comments by Mi’gmaq people on significant differences between two ways of life:

I am greatly astonished that the French have so little cleverness, as they seem to exhibit in the matter of which thou hast just told me on their behalf, in the effort to persuade us to convert our poles, our barks, and our wigwams into those houses of stone and of wood which are tall and lofty, according to their account, as these trees. Very well! But why now…do men of five to six feet in height need houses which are sixty to eighty? For in fact, as thou knowest very well thyself, Patriarch—do we not find in our own all the conveniences and the advantages that you have with yours, such as reposing, drinking, sleeping, eating, and amusing ourselves with our friends when we wish?

Another example of othering involves an essential component of the colonizer’s discourse of power: religion. In one historical excerpt from missionary Chrestien Le Clercq from *New Relation of Gaspesia* (originally published in 1691 in French)\(^{13}\), for instance, in 1677, a Mi’gmaq guide questions a missionary on the practicality of his religion and whether his close relationship to God provides him with insight into future events:

The Indian, who was acting as guide, becoming impatient because I remained so long a time kneeling in a place removed from the bustle of the camp, approached me, and, believing that I had some revelation, or had received the gift of prophecy, begged me in all seriousness to predict to him that which would happen to us during the day. ‘Thou speakest to God,’ said he to me, ‘thou teachest the way of the sun, thou art Patriarch, thou art clever, and it must be believed that he who has made everything will have granted thy prayer. Tell me then, whether today we shall kill many moose and beavers with which to feast thee after the many fatigues and miseries which thou hast suffered up to this time.’ [He] was not yet baptised although he was fifty to sixty years old…. (Le Clercq, quoted in Holmes Whitehead, 57)

Although the writings of Le Clercq do include both European and Mi’gmaq perspectives, these anecdotes would most likely have been read at the time as representations of the uncivilised Native otherness. The Mi’gmaq people in these excerpts could have been interpreted as too

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\(^{13}\) Holmes Whitehead quotes the 1968 editing and translation by William F. Ganong, which contains a reprint of the original work
simple to understand the use of handkerchiefs, too ignorant to the advantages of European-style lodging, or (if the Native person was not baptised) oblivious to the dominant culture’s religion. In the previous excerpts, the Mi’gmaq people can be read as colonized subjects due to their cultural difference, but, if the gaze is shifted, from the Mi’gmaq perspective these stories can also be interpreted as acts of resistance, as affirmations of Native culture despite the imposition of Eurocentric practices and beliefs.

Arguably, the Mi’gmaq questioned and contested the power and civility of the Europeans, just as the colonizers attempted to devalue their indigenous ways. This resistance is more evident in other passages of Mi’gmaq hi(story). For instance, there is a story told by an anonymous Mi’gmaq person to Silas Rand\textsuperscript{14} recounting the experience of one of the first Mi’gmaq men to be brought to France as a “curiosity” or commodity for an exhibition where this captive Native was instructed to demonstrate the “Indian mode of killing and curing game” to the European public (Rand quoted in Holmes Whitehead, \textit{The Old Man Told Us}, 15). Enclosed within a roped-off area, the Mi’gmaq man was provided with an animal and the tools necessary and “multitudes were gathered to witness the butchering operations of the savage” (15). The man complied with this exploitation by showing every step of the expected hunting process: “He shot the animal with a bow, bled him, skinned and dressed him, sliced up the meat, and spread it out on flakes to dry; he then cooked a portion and ate it…” (15). However, at the end of the exhibition, the story ends on a note of defiance: “in order to exhibit the whole process, and then take a mischievous revenge upon them for making an exhibition of him, he went into a corner of the yard and eased himself before them all” (15).

\textsuperscript{14} Silas Tertius Rand (1810-1889) was a Baptist clergyman, missionary, philologist, and ethnologist who had a great interest in the Mi’gmaq people and language. (See entry in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography for more information: \url{http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/rand_silas_tertius_11E.html})
Another example is a documented speech from an unnamed Mi’gmaq elder speaking to a group of Frenchmen, with Chrestien Le Clercq interpreting, relates “the real feelings which our Indians have towards thy country and towards all thy nation….” (quoted in Holmes Whitehead, 55). The elder begins his speech by stating that the Frenchmen “very inappropriately” describe the Mi’gmaq country as “a little hell in contrast with France” and that they perceive the Native people of this land as “the most miserable and unhappy of all men, living without religion, without manners, without honour, without social order and, in a word, without any rules, like the beasts in our woods and our forests” (54). The speaker goes on to describe how Indigenous knowledge contributes greatly to the happiness of the Mi’gmaq people as well as the subsistence of the French:

As to us, we find all our riches and all our conveniences among ourselves, without trouble and without exposing our lives to the dangers in which you find yourselves constantly through your long voyages. […] We see also that all your people live, as a rule, only upon cod which you catch among us. It is everlastingly nothing but cod […] until things come to such a pass that if you wish some good morsels, it is at our expense; and you are obliged to have recourse to the Indians, whom you despise so much, and to beg them to go a-hunting that you may be regaled (quoted in Holmes Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us*, 55).  

This speech depicts that the Mi’gmaq people of the seventeenth century were well aware of the negative assumptions and attitudes the Europeans had towards Native peoples, and furthermore, to what extent these newcomers depended on the Mi’gmaq’s knowledge of the land for their survival. Recognizing their wealth of knowledge and survival skills must have given the Mi’gmaq people a sense of identity that related and was interpreted through their stories.
Although the underlying mission of colonial power and cultural dominance is still evident, these historical records of the seventeenth century written mostly by the French claimed to present “the actual words and thoughts of the [Mi’gmaq] People whom they knew” (Holmes Whitehead, 19). Since many of the French traders, missionaries, and tourists had Mi’gmaq friends, the perception of othering begins to meld in the ways families/communities restructured themselves: “some had children who married Micmac, some were themselves adopted by the Micmac” (Holmes Whitehead, 19). With this reality in mind, it is interesting to note to what extent a Mi’gmaq voice and perspective are preserved in these historical writings in the way Holmes Whitehead has juxtaposed the voices of the colonized and colonizers to create hi(story). As previously stated, the accounts of Europeans were not always negative as illustrated by many history writers such as Marc Lescarbot, who wrote *History of New France* from his experiences living in Acadie from 1606 to 1607: “[if we commonly call them [Native/Mi’gmaq people] Savages, the word is abusive and unmerited, for they are anything but that, as will be proved in the course of this history” (in Holmes Whitehead, 24).

Besides the discourses of cultural difference and Othering, the concept of naming/renaming is also a prevalent feature of colonialism. In terms of cartography and mapping, the function of naming, or more prevalently, the renaming of places and spaces of the Other constituted a strategy to assert control. “In all cases the lands so colonized are literally reinscribed, written over, as the names and languages or the indigenes are replaced by new names, or are corrupted into new and Europeanized forms” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 32). This re/naming of the spatial reality of the colonized Other is also extended to the names of the Native peoples, as outlined in my discussion of the many different names given to the Mi’gmaq historically by Europeans, in the introduction. Moreover, widespread religious conversions and
baptisms of the colonized constituted another way for the dominant culture to assert its control on a spiritual and individual level.

Native names, like Native languages, were generally descriptive and tended to be verb phrases rather than nouns; however, “after Micmac bands began to convert to Catholicism in 1610, the people were given French names at baptism, and introduced to the concept of a first name and a surname” (Holmes Whitehead, “Introduction”). Despite the encouragement/imposition of the colonized subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer in this aspect, there is historical evidence that the Mi’gmaq people resisted European naming conventions to a certain extent: women did not take their husbands’ names at marriage, and children began taking their father’s first Christian name as their last name, “thus, there are many Micmac families with surnames such as Peter, Paul, Joe, Tony, etc., many of whom are not related to others with the same family name” (Holmes Whitehead, “Introduction, n.p.). By appropriating European naming conventions on their own terms, the Mi’gmaq people’s “mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 139). This is illustrated in a particularly humorous oral story told by Mi’gmaq storyteller Isabelle Googoo Morris to anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons about a Native “witch” [shaman] who resisted being baptised:

Old lady [his wife] coaxed him, ‘Better go, get christen’, like the rest.’ At the last he went. ‘What name do you like?’ they asking him. ‘Best name, the Lord.’ The priest said, ‘Nobody can have that name, only one Lord. What other name?’—‘I’ll be named the Devil.’—‘No. You can’t have that name.’—‘Well, I’ll be named Swallow (tum’hatolnes).’—‘No. You can’t have that name.
That’s a bird’s name.’—“I have proposed three names. You refuse them all. I am going home’…. (in Holmes Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us*, 59-60)

This telling crystallises the intellectual strength of the Mi’gmaq people to keep their sense of humour, their pride, to keep faith in their own truths in dealing with the colonizers’ new system of naming.

On the whole, these hi(stories) constitute oral stories that were written down or transcribed. The documentation of oral forms is often contested as being “part of [the] process of undervaluing, helping to convey the impression that the oral was not as socially or aesthetically valuable as the literary” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 166). When hi(stories) are shared, exchanged, transmitted, and told, the oral aspect remains the dominant feature: “[o]ral traditions are fundamentally different from the discourse of evidence or proof. Storytelling is an embodied performance, not an archive of documents” (McCall, 325). Stories and storytelling are not widely accepted as historical evidence of a people because, in most cases, the original context of the story told is lost. The very act of writing the story creates a filter or a bias that may or may not alter the story itself. The lines between fact and fiction may be blurred; however, the content of recorded oral hi(stories) provides articulated glimpses into the minds and hearts of the Mi’gmaq people and their sense of culture and community, which encompasses their very own history.

1.3. Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge

Although “pre-colonial cultural purity can never be fully recovered” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 95) if it ever existed, traditional Indigenous stories like “The Boy Who Visited Muini’skw” and “Jenu” create a space of learning. In this sense, in the past, these “stories show their listeners how to survive in this world, by amassing Power of their own, by treating all with
respect and by acting in a compassionate way” (Holmes Whitehead, 7), but these teachings can and should still be relevant today. Ruth Holmes Whitehead contextualizes the traditional Indigenous stories in her collections in terms of the past in order to show how the stories would have functioned as teachings in the Mi’gmaq tribal community. To make these cultural memories usable, these functional teachings can and should be extended into our present and future as a people.

Exploring historical accounts through the Mi’gmaq perspective in the form of hi(stories), also creates teachings that are relevant to contemporary Native peoples. We do not often think of history as teaching us anything beyond the realm of information about the past; however, history establishes fact while hi(story) reveals narrative lessons and a sense of continuity with the past. In my opinion, it is essential to view these primarily pre-colonial stories and colonial hi(stories) not only as windows onto the past, but also as mirrors that project our individual and collective memories, including complex issues such as lost identity and cultural discontinuity. Since cultural memory is deeply connected to narrative continuity, it is important not to distance ourselves as readers from the mythological stories and hi(stories) of the past, but rather instill them with an evolving meaning and message. In this chapter, I explored how traditional Indigenous stories constitute teachings for the Mi’gmaq on how to survive and live in past and present worlds through the connections and relationships within community. I also explored the idea that Mi’gmaq hi(stories) constitute depictions of Indigenous knowledge in the forms of resistance or Othering in colonial times. In Native literary studies, the cultural past is both a site struggle and a site idealisation. Traditional Indigenous stories present significant knowledge about living within a community that is a part of many communities: human, animal, spiritual, and natural. By shifting the gaze of Othering and by emphasizing Native voices as well as
instances of resistance in Mi’gmaq hi(stories), there is also a lesson on perspective and standpoint that helps us reflect on what constitutes our individual and collective truths as Native people.
Chapter Two

“Imaginary Indians” and the “Timeless Condition” in Non-Native Mi’gmaq Stories

The white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada? (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, Post-colonial Studies Reader, 234)

The white culture can attempt to incorporate the Other, superficially [through looks]… or with much more sophistication [through ideas]…. Conversely, the white culture may reject the indigene: ‘This country really began with the arrival of the whites. (Post-colonial Studies Reader, 234)

In the previous chapter, I explored how gazing at representations of the past with new perspectives reveals significant Mi’gmaq teachings that are still relevant today. Hi(stories) as well as traditional Indigenous storytelling that was transcribed constitute distinct methods of documenting and preserving the past. The discourse of the past is prevalent in Native studies and literature because Native people and writers in particular feel the need to remember our own hi(stories), practice our traditional culture, and preserve our ancestral language. In this sense, contemporary Native Mi’gmaq writers have a tremendous task in the present of writing stories that are at once informed by the past and history while also envisioning a cultural future. Writing the past in the present is not only predominant in literature by Native authors, but also within literature about Native people by non-Native authors. In this chapter, I will elaborate on the interrelated issues of Native cultural authenticity, the myths of the Imaginary Indian, and the concept of the “timeless condition.” As touched upon in the previous chapter, in Mi’kmaq Landscapes, Anne-Christine Hornborg uses the term “timeless condition” as a way pre-colonial Mi’gmaq existence tends to conceptualized. The “timeless condition” also connotes the
prejudicial idea that Native history “started with colonization.” Like Daniel Francis’ “imaginary Indian,” the “timeless condition” is an image attributed to Native cultures, like the Mi’gmaq, but usually constructed in non-Native writing. As will be shown throughout this chapter, these constructed images are not necessarily as negative as they are limiting. They perpetuate the notion that Native peoples are part of a discontinuous history and not part of a living, thriving, modern culture. I will explore these issues of representation as well as cultural ambivalence and appropriation by analysing two novels written by non-Mi’gmaq authors: *The Deserter* by Paul Almond and *Cibou* by Susan Young de Biagi. The intrigues or plots of both novels revolve around the portrayal of Mi’gmaq characters.

*The Deserter*, published in 2010, is the debut novel by Paul Almond, a Canadian former television and motion picture screenwriter, director and producer. This novel is the first installment in a seven-book series entitled *The Alford Saga*, which “covers two hundred years of Quebec, Canadian and world history as seen through the eyes of a settler’s family on the Gaspe coast of Quebec” (www.paulalmond.com). *The Deserter* is a largely fictionalized version of the author’s family history. The story is set on the shores of the Gaspé coast at the beginning of the 19th century. Protagonist Thomas Manning is a young British Naval officer who wants to take a leap of faith and begin a different, more fulfilling life in the New World, so he jumps ship during the night and swims to the Gaspesian shores. The intrigue follows Thomas’ struggle to survive in this new territory, his encounters with French and Loyalist settlers as well as his growing relationship with the Native Mi’gmaq tribe, all the while trying to avoid being caught, branded a deserter, and having to face certain death.

The novel’s popularity and main appeal lies in its richness of local and regional history. As of the writing of this thesis, the first installment of the *Alford Saga* stands at #149,262 in
Amazon.ca’s Bestsellers Rank in the book category and the web site also has an electronic version of the novel available via Kindle. *The Deserter* is ranked # 61,248 in Kindle Store, which indicates that the book is highly popular. To put this into perspective, compared to Mi’gmaq author Lorne Simon’s *Stones and Switches* (1995), also a novel, that stands at # 660,366 in Books (and does not even have an electronic version available), the sales rank of Almond’s non-Native account of the Mi’gmaq is popular fiction of the best-seller sort and is outselling the Mi’gmaq writers’ portrayal of his own people. In terms of publication year, *The Mi’kmaq Anthology Volume 2* (2011) is close to 2010’s *The Deserter*, and is ranked at # 392,979, fairing a bit better on the sales ranking than Simon’s novel, but does not come close to Almond’s novel. Another indication of the marketable aspect of Almond’s romantic novel is its almost immediate translation and publication into French in 2013. It is important to note that the other books in the *Alford Saga* series seem to be selling just as well as the first. However, *The Deserter* is the only book that focuses on relations with the Mi’gmaq people and this is why I chose to analyse it as opposed to the others.

Although not award-winning or not particularly well-known as a ‘literary’ work, *The Deserter* has received praise for its exciting and romantic story as well as for its dynamic and accessible writing style. Seamus Perry, Tutorial fellow in English literature, reviews: “Paul Almond has written a very lively and deftly executed adventure story, with all the right ingredients of danger and oddity and romance, and he keeps the narrative moving at just the right pace” (www.paulalmond.com). From a Mi’gmaq perspective, one reviewer states: “I am Mi’kmaq from the Gaspe region. Paul Almond’s research is impeccable” (“Mrs. Q Book Addict Blog”, qtd. in www.paulalmond.com). Also, Prof. Danielle Cyr, co-author of *The Metallic*...

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15 I realize the limitations of comparing online shopping ranks; however, at a glance, Amazon statistics, while not decisive, are still telling.
"Mi’gmaq Dictionary, quotes: “Chief Claude mentioned [The Deserter] and praised it abundantly, marveling at how well documented it was and at the positive portrait you made of the Mi’gmaq. He said that every Mi’gmaq should read it!” (www.paulalmond.com). I am not contesting the validity of Almond’s historical research, but I wish to explore the implications of the constant portrayal of the Mi’gmaq people and culture in the colonial past and argue that, even positive representations can be limiting.

As for the author of Cibou, Susan Young de Biagi “is originally from Cape Breton and has written or co-written several books as well as writing for multimedia and newspapers. She holds a master's degree in history from the University of New Brunswick” (“Susan Young de Biagi”, cbup.ca). Cibou (2008) by Susan Young de Biagi is set in a more distant past than The Deserter, in 17th century Mi’kmaq territory in Eastern Canada. Also differing from the Paul Almond novel, the narrator/protagonist of Cibou is a young Mi’kmaq woman named Mouse (“apukji’j” in Mi’kmaq) as opposed to a young White man. However, she is the blue-eyed daughter of a Mi’kmaq widow and a French fisherman. This mixed-race characteristic positions Mouse on the fringes of her Native village of Cibou, a fictional location imagined by the author. When French Jesuit missionary, Antoine Daniel, and his brother, Captain Charles Daniel, come to Cibou, Mouse develops different yet equally life-changing relationships with both men, as the novel’s opening passage illustrates: “Into the land of Kluskap came two brothers. One was saintly, the other worldly. One coveted men’s souls; the other their fortunes. One I knew as completely as a woman can know a man. The other? I have not touched even the hem of his garment” (Biagi, 7). As an outsider in her tribe, Mouse spends more time with these French men, she learns their language as well as their Christian stories, and she eventually serves as the ideal bridge between the two cultures as a translator and storyteller.
The novel was shortlisted for two Atlantic Book Awards: Darmouth Book Award (fiction) and the Atlantic Book Award for Historical Writing. In general, like The Deserter, Cibou also has positive reviews, has a Kindle version available, and stands at #355,140 on Amazon’s Best Seller Rank in Books. To my knowledge, however, Cibou has not yet been translated into French. As for the representation of the Mi’gmaq people and culture in the story, Cibou is described as “[s]ensitive and enlightening” (“Cibou”, cpub.ca) and as “truly [capturing] the voice of Mouse and her people [the 17th-century Mi’gmaq]” (Way). Particularly interesting about Cibou is that the author did not originally intend for the story to be told from a Mi’gmaq/Native perspective. “It was supposed a swashbuckler [sic],” Young de Biagi states about her novel (qtd. in Chisholm). Although the story is drawn on real dramatic history, Young de Biagi comments on the fictional narrator of Cibou, a young Mi’gmaq woman: “Mouse just appeared. I tried to take her out, but it was impossible to tell the story without her” (qtd. in Chisholm). The author declares that the young Mi’gmaq woman who narrates her story came to her through some sort of creative destiny: “I didn’t choose Mouse, she chose me […] Mouse introduced herself to me very early in the process and kind of took over the telling of the story. In many ways, I was just a fascinated observer” (Young de Biagi qtd. in Way, “The Koala Bear Writer”). Like Almond’s The Deserter, the historical research for Cibou is in depth; the book contains a glossary of Mi’gmaq words and approximate pronunciations, a source reference list, and also acknowledges the assistance of the Mi’kmaq Resource Centre and the Mi’kmaq College Institute, at Cape Breton University as advisory contributors to the novel.

I was first reluctant to include a chapter focusing on novels about Mi’gmaq characters written by non-Mi’gmaq and non-Native authors since the goal of my thesis is predominantly to explore and promote Mi’gmaq literary voices. However, I find it interesting that these two novels
constitute some of more current works of fiction representing Mi’gmaq people and culture. It appears from the online sales statistics from Amazon.ca, for instance, the two novels analysed in this chapter are more popular (or at least more marketable) than, for example, *Stones and Switches* (1994) by Mi’gmaq author Lorne Simon or both volumes of *The Mi’kmaq Anthology* (1997 and 2011).

Non-Native authors writing about Native culture and history constitute a present and undeniable reality. The ensuing discussion about cultural identity and authenticity is significant in order to problematize these representations. As I have previously stated, I am less interested in debating the accuracy or validity of these novels, whether or not non-Native authors should write Native stories, than questioning and analysing these narratives in terms of their implications for current Native self-representations and the construction of Native identity, specifically Mi’gmaq identity. Through critical analysis of the representations of Mi’gmaq people in these novels, I wish to reflect on and bring awareness to questions of cultural representation and identity. How is Native cultural authenticity defined within these narratives? And what is the appeal of the Native past to non-Native writers and readers? What are the implications of such novels in terms of the representations of Natives/Mi’gmaq past and present? How do these narratives affect Native/Mi’gmaq cultural continuity? I would argue that novels such as these actually stunt the forward-motion of Mi’gmaq continuity of culture since they define Mi’gmaq identity solely in terms of the past, specifically the colonial times of the 17th century. As noted in *Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Identity* (2011), “Ancestral factors can contribute to Indigenous identity, but they cannot be the entire basis of it, otherwise these identities would be frozen in time” (Palmater, 180).
Through my reading and analysis, three ideological elements of these two historical novels emerged. Although both novels are enriched by historical research and even contribution from Mi’gmaq people and organizations, the novels are only representative of the Mi’gmaq people to a certain extent; in other words, the Mi’gmaq characters are represented solely as they function within their limited colonized images and roles of the past. Thomas King sums up these myths in *The Inconvenient Indian*:

A pervasive myth in North America supposes that Native people and Native culture are trapped in a state of stasis. Those who subscribe to it imagine that, like Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*, Natives were unable to move forward along the linear continuum of civilization, that we were waiting for someone to come along and lead us in the right direction. To free us from ourselves. (78-79)

These representations will be deconstructed as follows: the discourse of nature versus culture, the representation of different facets of the “Imaginary Indian” (Francis) and the subconscious perpetuation of notions of timelessness (Hornborg) and cultural superiority towards a colonized culture.

2.1. Mi’gmaq of the Past: Nature versus Culture

*The Deserter* opens with the main character’s deep longing for discovery and renewal: “For years he had dreamed of this New World where there were no more lashings, no summary British Justice, just the land itself and what you could make of it” (Almond, 9). Near the shores of the New World, Thomas Manning, the narrator, has the opportunity for a literal and metaphorical new beginning and jumps ship to swim the icy waters with nothing but the clothes
on his back and a bag with a few supplies. One of his first experiences in this New Land is his encounter with a Mi’gmaq Native tribe. There are many different aspects of the novel’s depictions of Thomas’ interactions with the Mi’gmaq people and, upon first contact, it is apparent that the Native people in this narrative will be represented as “one with nature”. The first instance when Thomas sees a Mi’gmaq person, he appears to Thomas as a vision that blends into the forest: “[…] through cedars forty feet away, he saw a face. Bronzed, broad features, dark eyes. An Indian. Shivers shook his spine. In an instant, the face has disappeared. Nothing. He listened. No sound. Was it a mirage? Should he go search the ground, the dead leaves and moss, for a footprint?” (Almond, 19). In Mi’kmaq Landscapes, Hornborg elaborates on the dichotomy of nature versus culture that is so often related to Native representations:

The limit that was drawn between nature and culture did not only function as a description of the world and society, it also comprised a power relation. The wilderness was the condition nature offered if a human hand did not cultivate the land. The Natives, being part of nature, were classified as wilderness, a raw material that demanded civilization for their liberation. (13-14)

In this sense, Native people are portrayed as more in tune with nature than non-Natives by virtue of their upbringing in an untamed land. When Thomas is “captured” by some Native men and brought back to their camp “[he] noted how effortlessly [the Mi’gmaq] travelled, placing each foot down deliberately but with speed, avoiding thickets, ducking under dead trees” (Almond, 22). There are many instances in the narrative when Thomas emphasizes the apparently innate relationship between the Mi’gmaq people and the land: “Would the Indians have dogs? Fool, he thought, Indians need no help in following a trail. […] But even of this carpet of old leaves and moss, just one disturbance of leaf or twig would betray him. If they wanted to track him, they’d
find him” (Almond, 19). Thomas’ impressions of the Mi’gmaq constitute a form of Othering. In other words, the narrator is defining the Mi’gmaq in opposition to what he knows and is. In post-colonial thought, “the existence of others is crucial in defining what is ‘normal’ and in locating one’s own place in the world” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 169). Thomas is attempting to make sense of the Mi’gmaq people by noticing the differences between how they interact with nature differing from what he knows about his own culture. This reasoning stems from the dichotomy of culture vs. nature in which the worldview of the non-Native is defined as “culture” while the Native’s perceived lack of culture results in them being part of nature. As a result of this very human need to compartmentalize, it is easy just to say if you are not part of one category, you must be part of the other. Hornborg states that this thought process can be deceptive and short-sighted:

To apply polarized concepts like nature and culture when describing the traditional lifeworlds of hunters and gatherers can thus be highly misleading, since the worldview of the group in question is colonized by a model into which it does not fit. A confusion of the two schemes could explain why traditional hunting societies have been Romanticized. If the worldview of the hunter is interpreted in terms of the Western model of nature (as an antithesis to culture), the former, by virtue of its integration of everyday practice, spirituality and ethics, may give the impression of ‘oneness with nature’ rather than conveying its true complexity. (Hornborg, 19)

Indeed, the ways which Mi’gmaq are represented in The Deserter does not reflect the complexity of the traditional culture: “instead of embedding the ‘spiritual’ evocations of ‘nature’ in a hunter’s lifeworld, such confusion of categories transforms them into an abstract idea of
nature worship” (Hornborg, 19). This concept of Native people as an embodiment of nature culminates in the narrative when Thomas finally makes love to his Mi’gmaq bride, Little Birch:

As the two became one, he felt he was embracing the embodiment of all natural things, all creatures born that inhabited this wilderness world, she was for him every brook and shimmering wave and churning rapid, the brilliant stars and shafts of sunlight, as the two of them moved in great waves on the bearskin covering. She was the happiness bird, the wolves and caribou, big game and small game, all the landscape of this wide sprawling New World, and for her part, she accepted him as her new partner, explorer and adventurer, a mystical embrace, man coming from the sunrise and woman facing sunrise, in a song of the earth, a union that bore so much promise. (Almond, 218)

There are many implications in this highly-romanticized passage and its meaning can be deconstructed in different ways. The most obvious interpretation is that the narrator is romanticizing nature to such an extent that he conflates the Mi’gmaq woman and nature; in other words, embracing the woman is equal to embracing nature. Furthermore, the physical union of this man and woman can also be interpreted as a metaphor for colonization. The Mi’gmaq woman accepting the White man into her bed and into her body is symbolic of the European explorer possessing the new land and its peoples. The union is described as bearing “much promise” (218), but for whom?

Overall, these passages are part of a work of romantic historical fiction and, are set within the context of the past; it is not surprising that a young White man such as Thomas Manning has
ambivalent views of Native peoples. The novel came out in 2010 and, although the novel is set at the beginning of the 19th century, “[as] Roger (Pelletier, director of the Micmac Interpretation Centre near Gaspe Town) pointed out, my [Almond’s] Port Daniel band is slightly less Europeanized than were many Micmac [sic] in the early 1800s, but we both preferred to show how they lived not so long before” (Almond, 271). This implies that portraying the Mi’gmaq people/culture in this way was a deliberate authorial choice. Why? Because it is more romantic? I understand the significance of nostalgia to the genre of historical fiction; however, when a modern Mi’gmaq person, like myself, reads a narrative like this, there are questions that come to mind. How much do the characters represent a historic faithfulness that I can believe in and relate to, and how much do they constitute a yearning for (and, subsequently, a perpetuation of) an imagined past and “authenticity”? In “Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature,” Margery Fee writes how even the use of intentionally positive images of Native peoples and culture function hegemonically: “[the] writers’ main purpose is neither to abolish the myths nor to alter the political situation of the Native people….“ (16). In the case of The Deserter, “the functional importance of the Native characters” (Fee, 16) is to be “authentic” and “less Europeanized” in order to provide a more distinct foil for the colonizers, and, by virtue of their intimate relationship to the land/nature, a more noble model for Thomas to strive to imitate.

In Cibou, the dichotomy of nature vs. culture is treated in a different way; instead of nature being embodied by the land and the Natives’ relationship with it, it is illustrated via the discourse of animals vs. human beings. In contrast to The Deserter, Native people are not depicted as “nature,” although they do have a close relationship with it. The Mi’gmaq in Cibou are representative of a culture with its own views and values and it is interesting how this culture
views the European as Other, as even animal. The novel opens with Mouse, the narrator, explaining the circumstances of her birth. Her mother, being a widow and having lost two male children, was already marginalized in the village and no man of the tribe would take her as a wife. Mouse’s father was a French fisherman that went to her mother late at night and “left just as the boats were leaving the shore” (Young de Biagi, 8). Mouse explains that her mother “felt uneasy when [the fisherman] looked at her with the blue eyes of a young cougar. She wondered if, in his land, the people had completely transformed into humans. In the Long Ago, said Bright Eyes, humans and animals formed a single people, with a single language. Even today, it is whispered, some of us remain more animal than human” (Young de Biagi, 8). In this case, it is the Europeans that are perceived as being less civilized than the Mi’gmaq people and having more animal characteristics: “[Mother] said it was good to have a man again, even one who was covered with hair and who could not speak as a civilized person” (8). Given the cultural significance of animals as explored in traditional storytelling and mythology in the previous chapter, the people of Cibou’s binary views of animal vs. human can be argued as inauthentic. Young de Biagi illustration of these perceived prejudicial views of the Mi’gmaq towards Europeans and other Native tribes is more of a mirror inversion of European biases and discourses rather than grounded in traditional Mi’gmaq cultural and worldview. Mouse states that the misfortune of being born with her French father’s blue eyes solidified her and her mother’s position on the fringes of their own community. People of the village would “suddenly remember” that Mouse’s mother’s family did not originally come from Cibou and “perhaps there too, people whispered, the transformation from animal to human had not been entirely complete” (9).
Namely through the symbol of eye colour, Mouse’s destiny unfolds: “I wondered too why Antoine had chosen me out of all the people on the beach. I did not know then, that he had chosen me for the same reason I had once been rejected: my blue eyes” (Young de Biagi, 11). Throughout the story, the colour of a character’s eyes is illustrated as being symbolic of either the characters’ proof of humanity or their danger of being more animal. This belief feeds the narrator’s insecurity, which culminates when Mouse gives birth to child: “Most mothers, I am told, examine their son’s hands and feet, to ensure they are whole and complete. But I sought out my son’s eyes, plunging with relief into their brown depths […] I was indeed gazing into a human soul” (Young de Biagi, 242). Mouse shows signs of having internalized the fear and shame of having ‘animal blood’. She feels as though she does not deserve happiness, love, and a place/role within her community. It is Antoine who reassures Mouse of her humanity and helps her feel fulfilled through the stories and faith of Christianity.

There are many other references where Mouse and the Europeans are associated with animals. For instance, when a sickness plagues the Mi’gmaq village, “[of] all the people, only Antoine and I [Mouse] escaped the sickness completely. No one was surprised that I prevailed—I of animal blood. The dogs, they said, also remained healthy (Young de Biagi, 33). Also, the narrator describes the European explorers in terms of animal characteristics: “As engaging as bear cubs, they could be both comic and harmless, as they struggled with the simplest aspects of daily life. Yet, like bear cubs, they too were trailed by a lumbering shadow of death and danger” (33). In this sense, to a reader, the Mi’gmaq characters in Cibou can seem more ‘authentic’ than the tribe in The Deserter. After all, one narrative is shown through the eyes of the ‘insider’, a young Mi’gmaq woman and the other is told through the perspective of the colonizer. However, we must remember as readers that cultural authenticity is a myth. These stories do not reflect the
real views and contexts that Mi’gmaq of the lived past as much as they more accurately represent authors creating a story of two different cultures interacting in a contact zone. My concern is the tendency to portray Native peoples in limited roles in mainstream literature and society.

2.2. Cultural Ambivalence and the “Imaginary Indian”: Noble and/or Savage?

Thomas King states in *The Inconvenient Indian* that “[if] you wanted to, you could break down the Indian roles that Indians get to play into two categories: historical Indians and contemporary Indians (49). Obviously, in these two works of historical fiction we are dealing with the notion of “historical Indian.” King also designates the historical Indian of the past as “Dead Indian”: “They are the stereotypes and clichés that North America has conjured up out of experience and out of its collective imaginings and fears” (King, *The Inconvenient Indian*, 53). King’s concept of the “Dead” or “historical” Native constitutes an image about the First Nations culture that has been constructed over time; in other words, of how “Indians come to represent what is past, lost, almost forgotten” (Fee, 25). If Native peoples’ representations have been limited in the collective imagination, this cultural practice inherently limited and still limits the roles Native people are permitted to play within this cultural mindset. In this sense, the definition of the self, of one’s cultural identity is determined by external, arguably imaginary, factors: if a character or person is Native, they must step into one of these pre-conceived roles. This brings to mind Daniel Francis’ notion of the “Imaginary Indian” in Native representations in literature, art, and mainstream culture. In *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, Francis explains how unrepresentative and stereotypical images of Native peoples came to be. He argues that the “Indian” is not only a figment of White imagination, but is also completely manipulated by the fears and attractions of Whites. The “Imaginary Indian” actually encompasses two opposing visions or constructions that non-Natives project onto Native people:
the Noble Savage and the “uncivilized” savage. Both *The Deserter* and *Cibou* resemble these representations through their characters’ cultural ambivalence. Ambivalence in this sense describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In other words, the colonized subject and the colonizer are “never simply and completely opposed” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 12). The ambivalent relationship is complex through the push and pull of resistance and compliance. Notably, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin also describe cultural ambivalence as “also characterize[ing] the way in which colonial discourse relates to the colonized subject, for it may be both exploitative and nurturing, or represent itself as nurturing, at the same time” (13).

Initially in *The Deserter*, Thomas’ views of the Mi’gmaq are fueled by scary tales and his own imagination: “Tales of terrifying tortures by savages were traded below decks in the evening, one more horrific than another: they’d cut a man’s entrails out and drape them round his neck as he hung in front of a fire, or eat his heart out in front of him as he died” (Almond, 1-2). Despite his fear of encountering the imagined savage, Thomas still chooses to venture into this New Land. The attraction of discovery, renewal, and the purity of nature trumps the danger in his head. Until he actually sees that face in the woods: “Oddly enough, he was far more afraid of that one face than a boatload of Wicketts” (Almond, 19), Wickett being his captain on the boat, who would surely kill him for desertion if he were captured. Capture by savages, however, is what Thomas describes as “the moment he feared most” (Almond, 21). By witnessing the Mi’gmaq, Thomas tries to make sense of the conflicting perceptions between the ‘idea’ of the “savage” that he feared and the actual people: “No words were spoken. He wracked his brain for ideas that might save him. Would they skin him alive? Roast him? Torture him? Bizarre thoughts from shipboard romances, sailors’ tales he wished he’d never heard, jostled his sanity. Stop, he told
himself sternly, who trusted sailors’ yarns?” (Almond, 22) and “He studied their attitudes as they stood talking, and for the life of him, he could not discern the hostility that characterized the savages in his overheard yarns of brutal torture” (32). Overall, Thomas’ first interactions with the Mi’gmaq people show negative preconceptions and Othering: “The people to be othered are homogenized into a collective ‘they,’ …in a timeless present tense, which characterizes anything [‘they’ do] as a particular historical event but as an instance of a pregiven custom or trait.” (Pratt quoted in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 172-173). In this sense, the brutishness and cannibalism that Thomas expects are traits of the “savage Indian,” a projection that is contested when he meets the Mi’gmaq: “So far he had not heard about the beauty of these people. Thinking back to yesterday, most of them were fairly attractive, certainly not ugly brutes by any means” (Almond, 39) and “His views of these Indians, coming from the Navy, were radically changing. Here he was among primitive savages, supposedly not worth twopence, and Tongue could speak three languages” (84). By portraying its protagonist as ambivalent towards the Mi’gmaq people, the novel itself is also ambivalent in the ways it reinscribes stereotypical images and questions them as well.

As for Thomas, his views actually shift from negative and fear-based to positive and aspirational; by observing the hardiness of the Mi’gmaq men as they travel on foot and paddle their canoes tirelessly, Thomas vows to one day be just as strong and resilient (Almond, 79). He attributes qualities and characteristics to the Mi’gmaq that he desires for himself: “‘Dear God, help me through this. Be near me at my hour of need. Protect me from cowardice. Give me strength to be a man, to be an Indian, for they are the strongest, help me be like them. Help me, Lord’” (224-225). His perspective shifts from expecting the behaviour of the “Savage” to viewing the Mi’gmaq as possessing “Noble” traits of strength, bravery, and oneness with nature:
“Thomas stayed awake for a long time, absorbing the gentility and reverence that the Micmac bestowed on the game which fed and clothed them. He determined he would do the same” (176). This movement from one end of the Native representation spectrum to the other can be seen as a positive re-evaluation from untruth to truth, inauthentic to authentic. In reality, however, it is just replacing one “Imaginary Indian” by another:

Attributing to the Indian a character that the constructor himself or herself sees as desirable has a historical explanation. Francis (1992) examines this in The Imaginary Indian noting how, when the Industrial Revolution showed its unpleasant sides [….] The idea arose that the Indian character might have something to teach the Europeans about freedom, health and a way of living in harmony with nature …. A positive re-evaluation of nature thus also meant a positive re-evaluation of the ‘Indian.’ (Hornborg, 51)

In The Deserter as well as Cibou, both modern-day novels set in the past, this positive construction of Mi’gmaq people and culture is depicted. However, a fixed cultural stereotype, although apparently positive, still remains limiting and masks the real complexity and depth of Native characters as well as their culture.

In both stories, the Mi’gmaq culture is appropriated on different levels. Appropriation is a term in post-colonial thought that “is sometimes used to describe the strategy by which the dominant imperial power incorporates as its own the territory or culture that it surveys and invades (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 19). On one level, in The Deserter, Thomas Manning adopts and appropriates certain qualities of the Mi’gmaq that he views as virtuous (such as strength and bravery) while distancing himself from other characteristics (such as nomadism) that he deems
primitive. On another level, in *Cibou*, the relationship between Antoine and Mouse/Marie-Ange demonstrates how the missionary appropriates aspects of Mi’gmaq culture such as storytelling to convey his religious messages and eventually convert members of the village.

2.3. The Native ‘Timeless Condition’ and the White Hero

Thomas King states that “this idea, that Native people were waiting for Europeans to lead us to civilization, is just a variation on the old savagism versus civilization dichotomy” (*The Inconvenient Indian*, 79). The Native peoples, whether imagined as savage or noble, were depicted without history or civilization, with a never-changing philosophy, and as part of a disappearing or dying culture. In *The Imaginary Indian*, Francis writes about artists, writers, and missionaries or “image-makers,” as he designates them, who all projected that “the future did not include the Indian” (Francis, 48) and that “in order to save themselves as individuals, they must give up everything that described them as a people” (52). This concept goes hand in hand with the issue of Native timelessness; Native peoples and culture are portrayed as relics of the past without a future. Still today, the often-represented image of “Indian” is not modernized. “While White society was/is allowed to change, evolve, without losing its defining culture, ethnic and racial characteristics” (Francis, 59), the primitive, timeless Native is depicted in stasis; a perpetual vignette of virtues and/or fears of the past, until the “White hero” shows and allows the Native “to move forward along the linear continuum of civilization” (King, 79).

In *The Deserter*, the myth is perpetuated in the subtle ways in which Thomas takes it upon himself to educate, possess, and save the Mi’gmaq people. This is evident as soon as he meets members of the tribe when he discovers that the Native people are more curious about the European newcomer than hostile: “Thomas began to realize that their quest, that this trial, might
not be so much the discovery of his guilt or innocence, but rather a hunger for more knowledge” (Almond, 31-32). Although, through cultural ambivalence, Thomas holds certain Native cultural qualities in high regard, he still envisions himself as the hero overall. Whether consciously or subconsciously, Thomas renames/claims the Mi’gmaq of the New World, and thus constructs them with secondary roles as sidekicks or people to be rescued. Early on in the novel, “Thomas decided to give them all nicknames, not being able to remember the complex series of sounds that signified their Micmac names” (Almond, 46) and refers to the people of the tribe as “my Micmacs” (139). Furthermore, concerning Thomas’ romantic relationship with the young Mi’gmaq woman named Little Birch, he wishes to marry her and ultimately take her away from a “dangerous” nomadic life outside of civilisation: “Not really the life he’d seen for himself, he grumbled, nor for Little Birch. If only he could have taken her off to a better life in his soon to be shipshape cabin” (Almond, 178) and “he wanted to rescue Little Birch from this precarious, though enriching, life with the tribe” (197-198).

In Cibou, another aspect of the imaginary timeless Noble Savage is depicted: the contamination of a pure, natural culture. Before the arrival of the European explorers, the Mi’gmaq of the fictional village of Cibou are represented as peaceful, wise, spiritual, practical yet, in many ways, static and unchanging. The Mi’gmaq of Cibou are set in their ways, until, French fishermen along with the brothers, Captain Charles and missionary Antoine, set foot on their shores. This myth of Europeans kick-starting the evolutionary process in Native peoples is apparent at the beginning of the novel where the narrator defines herself in terms of the changes she has experienced at the will of another culture:

My name is Marie-Ange and I have lived here below the sacred mountain since my birth. Until they came, I was named Apukji’j, in the way of our people, for
In Cibou, Mouse/Marie-Ange’s story is recalled in terms of “before and after,” in terms of change: “After so many changes, it is difficult to remember that other life, before they [the European brothers] came and changed my world forever” (8). In other words, any change, if not all changes, to the Mi’gmaq views and way of life occur after the arrival of the Europeans. The discourse of change is significant in the novel, ranging from the fear or suspicion of change to the growth of change and its power to alter destiny. The elder storyteller and Mouse’s only friend, Bright Eyes, foreshadows the effects the Europeans will have on the Mi’gmaq: “They are planning to change us, Bright Eyes, into something we are not.’ The old man was serene. ‘Yes, they will change us. It is the fate we accepted in the same moment we turned our faces toward them. And we will change them, though it may take many generations. You and I will watch from the Land of the Ancestors.’” (Young de Biagi, 83). The interesting aspect of Bright Eyes’ story is that he soothes Mouse’s fear of change by warning the danger of running away from it like the Beothuk16 who “when the strangers came…turned their faces from the sea and disappeared into the forests, never to return” “because they could not face the changes that would come.” Presumably, the Beothuk sought out a place where change could not find them (Young de Biagi, 81). In this sense, change is to be accepted courageously by a people or they could be

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16 The Beothuk are an Aboriginal people of the Island of Newfoundland widely believed to have become extinct with the death of a Beothuk woman in 1829. Although no longer a distinct cultural group, oral accounts indicate that there were some survivors still living on the island, in Labrador, elsewhere in North America, or they may joined other Native groups such as the Mi’gmaq. Bright Eyes’ story is possibly a reference to such oral evidence. Bright Eyes cleverly speaks of the Beothuk’s disappearance as a result of having gone into hiding rather than dying out. For more information on the Beothuk: [http://www.heritage.nf.ca/aboriginal/beothuk.html](http://www.heritage.nf.ca/aboriginal/beothuk.html)
doomed to disappear forever. Again, these thoughts can be summarized by the notion of the imaginary dying Indian in which “the ‘Indian’ [is] depicted as someone who has deep bonds to nature, never changes, and is, thus in modern society doomed to either extermination or assimilation (Hornborg, 51). The novel is set in earlier times of colonization when the Native population was indeed decreasing due to European encroachment and epidemics. However, in many ways, in contemporary times, the myth of the Vanishing Indian has been proven false, for Native populations are continually increasing, due to a high birth rate, and asserting themselves strongly. However, Francis writes that the image “was perhaps just too convenient to give up” (57). And conveniently, the myth evolved and persisted in the sense that Natives as a physical race have survived, but their traditional lifestyles and culture have not.

Whatever the intention of the authors, the subtle implication of novels such as The Deserter and Cibou is that the only real “Indian” worth writing about is the traditional Native of the past. There are a couple instances in Cibou in which Charles blames Mouse for changing her name and worldview: “Antoine’s invention! He took you – my child of the forest, my teller of tales – and tried to turn you into…what? A wife!” (209).

“Why not remain as you are, Mouse?’
I could have asked the same of him. Why not remain in France, he and his fishermen? And yet they came, driven by a force even they did not understand – the same force that drives us all. Did he expect us to be any less courageous, any less adventurous in the face of it? Or were we mere sand to him, meant only to receive the imprint of his boot?” (Young de Biagi, 217-218)
In the previous quote, Charles does not fully realise that he and his people are responsible for the change he resents in Mouse. Her conversion transforms her into a more common and Europeanized Native person instead of the exotic “child of the forest” he loved. Charles actually confronts and accuses his missionary brother for changing his beloved pure and ‘noble savage’: “By what right? By what right did you take her? She was mine!” “She was never yours. She belongs to the Lord” (Young de Biagi, 210). Although Mouse/Marie-Ange is the novel’s protagonist, she is not fully portrayed as having agency. She is subject to change executed by others rather than portrayed as owning her own decisions.

The discourse of change in *Cibou* is also deeply related to religion. The narrative is telling the story of the threshold of colonization; the French and the English are struggling for conquest of the land and its peoples while the Mi’gmaq are balancing good relations with the French, wariness of the English and conserving their traditional lifestyle. Mouse embodies these struggles as a liminal character between European and Mi’gmaq cultures. Her liminality in terms of spirituality is illustrated in a dream sequence in which she witnesses the two gods (the Mi’gmaq spiritual hero of Kluscap and the Christian God) playing a game of waltes (traditional Mi’gmaq dice game) while their respective followers looked on: “I myself stood silently between the two groups. I knew I would have to make my choice soon, before the game ended and the winner declared. I wished to join Antoine, yet each time I decided to make a move, I felt the silent plea of my ancestors willing me to cross to their side” (Young de Biagi, 22). In her dream, Mouse does not see which god wins nor does she choose a side. In her waking life, however, circumstances lead her to choose conversion to Christianity. Following her decision to let go her self-hatred and accept God, she thinks: “And that is how Mouse, a poor child of the most humble status, became Marie-Ange, child of a king” (Young de Biagi, 154). This elevation
of the character’s status through religious conversion constitutes a resolution of her ambivalence. In many ways, missionary Antoine is the actual hero of the story; without his influence Mouse would not have become Marie-Ange and she would not have found her voice as the final line of the novel reveals: “And in that moment, I found my voice” (247). Nevertheless, her story and her voice is a mere transplantation of Father Antoine’s mission and narrative: “Long ago, the Lord gave me [Antoine] a vision. I have been given a small, precious store of seeds that must be carefully planted, one by one, over a vast field. One of those seeds was planted in your heart, Marie-Ange. It is only a fragile shoot now, but it will grow” (Young de Biagi, 235). In the novel, Father Antoine admits that he will not live to see the harvest of his seeds. This alludes to the fact that historical figure of Father Antoine was later posted to Huronia where he met a violent end and martyrdom as Saint Anthony Daniel. Antoine assures Marie-Ange that she will see the harvest and that “the fields will be white with it” (Young de Biagi, 235). He also makes her promise to take his place within the tribe and to continue to “sit at the fireside telling…all the children who ask, the story about Mali’s son and the path to freedom (235).

It is important to question and analyse what we, as Mi’gmaq people, read about our own culture; namely by interpreting how “outsiders” represent us, we can hope to take a step back from notions of cultural essentialism, authenticity, and timelessness, and begin the see the bigger picture that “Native cultures aren’t static. They’re dynamic, adaptive, and flexible, and for many of us, the modern variations of older tribal traditions continue to provide order, satisfaction, identity, and value in our lives (King, The Inconvenient Indian, 265). Non-Native authors writing about Native culture, sometimes even adopting a Native stance or voice, is not only a controversy but also a reality. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias in “Stop Stealing Native Stories” states: “Stories, you see, are not just entertainment. Stories are power. They reflect the deepest, the most
intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture, thinks. Such wonderful offerings are seldom reproduced by outsiders” (71). I agree with this statement in part. After all, the power of Native Mi’gmaq stories is central to my thesis. However, I do not believe that Native stories have an essence that can be “stolen”. Both *The Deserter* and *Cibou*, despite their appropriation of Mi’gmaq content, form their own personal stories of historical fiction: a romantic exploration of family and local history and an idealistic Christian parable about the time of colonization.

Ultimately, it is not by contesting or denying the existence of these non-Native narratives that we will reclaim our power; the importance is being aware of the contexts, the preconceived notions, the stereotypical representations that may exist in these stories. “If nothing else, an examination of the past—and of the present, for that matter—can be instructive. It shows us that there is little shelter and little gain for Native peoples in doing nothing” (King, 265). Hopefully this will lead to more critical readers who question and analyse, as well as more confident and empowered writers who create and share in the name of our Mi’gmaq Native culture’s memory and continuity.
Chapter Three

“The Door to Your Spirit is Through Your Deepest Scar”: Healing the Rupture of Residential School through Narratives

One day, it just dawned on me that something had to be done. ‘We have to tell our lot,’ I said. ‘We have to be the ones to record our words. (Rita Joe, Song of Rita Joe)

How can you forget your past? It’s part of your thoughts every day. This is our history and now we’re talking about it. (Rita Howe, quoted in Knockwood’s Out of the Depths)

A scar tells two stories. First, a scar tells the story of a wound, cut so deeply that our being bears the symbol of this pain and rupture forever etched into our existence. The scar also tells the story of healing; the scar may be a constant reminder of our wound, but it is also a testimony to resilience and survival. Scars can be formed by either physical, psychological, or spiritual wounds, and I would like to argue that when a scar is created on a cultural level, it harbours memories of all types of wounds. The residential school system caused one such cultural scar, a rupture in Indigenous knowledge and Native cultural memory/continuity, which is still fresh and in the process of healing. Out of “histories of generational trauma” (Ty, 5) emerge communal wounds, and therefore, communal memories, which eventually lead to communal healing. In Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory, Eleanor Ty and Cynthia Sugars state that “[o]ne of the richest areas in current Canadian writing includes Indigenous treatments of buried memory, witnessing, and recuperative healing […] about the lifting of repressed memories related to the residential school legacy” (10).

The residential school legacy is by no means a solely Mi’gmaq experience; it touches all Native, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Nevertheless, one cannot hope to understand the Mi’gmaq
people without recognizing the chronicles of residential school Survivors\textsuperscript{17}. A wound is considered collective when it is inflicted, and subsequently shared in healing, among many individuals in similar, yet personal ways. As in the art of pointillism, where small dots are applied to form an image, the similar nature of the dots does not make their specific role any less vital in the greater picture. Thus, the first sections in this chapter will examine, in particular, the Mi’gmaq Survivor narratives of Isabelle Knockwood’s *Out of the Depths* and Rita Joe’s *Song of Rita Joe* in terms of their respective portrayals of residential school and the healing potential of writing. Joe’s life story as well as Knockwood’s book have become significant works in the canon of Native literature in Canada. It is important to note that, as I mentioned in my Introduction, being Mi’gmaq, Rita Joe’s and Isabelle Knockwood’s ancestors had to contend with European settlers for nearly 500 years prior to the implementation of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, in Nova Scotia and, “as such, had developed many diverse ways of resisting oppression while also assimilating many practical and cultural implements from those with whom they lived in such close quarters” (McKegney, 47). Both authors write the past to re-establish the present and with a hopeful vision for the future.

Both works describe life in the same institution, the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie, around the same time period (late 30s and 40s). Thus, their residential school narratives constitute memories of the past, but they are not solely about the past. These Survivor narratives are also about resilience and healing in the present and in the future, as part of a forward motion in Native writing. A respected Elder of the Mi’gmaq Nation, Isabelle Knockwood was born in 1931 in Wolfville, Nova Scotia and attended the residential school in

\textsuperscript{17} The choice to capitalize this word is to ascribe power to it; to distinguish it as an experience unique to Native peoples. In this chapter, the term “Survivor” refers to former students of residential schools and therefore will be capitalized.
Shubenacadie from 1936 to 1947. A mother and grandmother, at fifty-eight years of age, Knockwood enrolled at Saint-Mary’s University in Halifax where she completed her bachelor’s degree in anthropology and in English in 1992. The first edition of Knockwood’s *Out of the Depths* and has been reprinted a number of times over the years. The new and extended third edition (2001) is the one referenced in this chapter. *Out of the Depths* is not only the account of the author’s life and experience within residential school, but also this work sheds more light on life at Shubenacadie through the personal remembrances and interviews with other Survivors. Knockwood’s work on what would become *Out of the Depths* was a long and difficult process that began with interviews in 1985, but Knockwood describes choosing a path for her life as a writer only following the death of her husband in 1989. Reflecting on what made her unique and wanting to be remembered compelled Knockwood to write: “I had this pencil in my hand and I thought, the only thing I know how to use is this pencil. This is the only tool I know how to use” (164). With her new goal of writing of the Indian Residential School, Knockwood decided to finish her education and, consequently, developed a partnership with Professor Gillian Thomas. Part of their discussions about the process which brought the book into being is included at the end of the book. *Out of the Depths* is a collaborative work not only between Knockwood and Thomas, but also with all the Survivors, her peers, whom she interviewed over the years. The book constitutes an autobiography of Knockwood’s own experience at residential school, and also gives voice to many other Mi’gmaq Survivors, and protects the memories of those who did not survive.

Renowned Mi’gmaq poet, Rita Joe (1932-2007) was born in Whycocomagh, Cape Breton Island. She lived most of her childhood with foster families after her mother passed away when Joe was five years old. Differing from Knockwood’s experience of being brought to residential
school by her parents when she was very young, while Joe, at twelve years old, made the decision to leave the foster system and enroll in the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. She attended the school until the age of sixteen. Joe had ten children, including adopting two sons. In her autobiography *Song of Rita Joe* (2011), Joe states that she first began writing in her thirties and that writing, which addressed her personal past and her present as well as the situation of her children and the Mi’gmaq people, was “like therapy” for her (90). Joe affirms that she started writing with her children in mind; she was disheartened by the negative and stereotypical portrayal of Native peoples in the material her children were learning in school (90-91). Joe would later write three collections of poetry: *Poems of Rita Joe* (1978), *Song of Eskasoni: More Poems of Rita Joe* (1989), followed by *Lnu and Indians We’re Called* (1991). The entry about her in the *Canadian Encyclopedia* online states that “[h]er poems cover a wide range of subjects, from the domestic to the spiritual. Her language is blunt but lyrical, and she captures both the anguish and elation of life.”

Rita Joe’s poetry is widely anthologized, read, and studied. Unlike Knockwood, whose personal experiences as a child, and later as a writer, are written in relation to a history of residential schools, Joe focuses her life writing on many aspects of her life. Her autobiography is divided into chronological chapters that represent different stages of her life: “Song of my Girlhood,” “Song of my Youth,” “Song of My Talk.” Only a short section in “Girlhood” speaks of her experience at the Shubenacadie residential school. The rest of the book tells the stories of her parents, her siblings, and her many families before residential school. Then, after leaving Shubenacadie, her story continues with her trying to make a living for herself with the limited education and resources provided by the residential school. Joe’s tumultuous marriage with
Frank Joe as well as the raising of and devotion to her children are main aspects of her life writing.

A significant aspect of life-writing is how the subject is constructed and positioned. In the case of *Out of the Depths*, Knockwood places herself as both victim and Survivor. In terms of cultural memory and continuity, Knockwood focuses on harsh memories, the rupture in Indigenous knowledge caused by residential school and, therefore, the need to crack the code of silence and share the children’s own stories as opposed to “official” history. In her own words, Knockwood admits “[i]f I had never attended the Indian Residential School and had based this book on material in libraries and archives, rather than on the students’ own experiences, I would have told a quite different story” (143). In contrast, Joe devotes less narrative attention to negative and traumatic personal experiences in school, and focuses on her descriptions of life lessons, survival and practical skills learned, and her connection to Mi’gmaq culture and spirituality.

The authors’ respective representations of the institution at Shubenacadie will be analysed in terms of 1) forced confinement as imprisonment, according to Deena Rymhs’ theory paralleling residential schools to prisons, 2) examples of what Neal McLeod refers to as “coming home through stories” following what he defines as Native diaspora, and 3) literary evidence of Native personal and cultural resilience, with reference to Sam McKegney’s work on narrative as healing.
3.1 The Wounds of Residential Schools: Imprisonment, Spatial and Ideological Diaspora

It is neither a secret nor a myth that the residential schools in Canada were the cause of a very dark time and space in our collective history. Their impact on our society is still being felt today: their intergenerational legacy is borne on the shoulders of almost every Native person alive today, either directly or indirectly; and these institutions of confinement and abuse will forever be viewed as a stain on our Government’s record despite official apologies. It remains a reality that, from the mid-19th century to the late 20th century, there were over 150 residential schools operating across Canada and that many thousands of Aboriginal children were taken from their homes and families to be placed in the residential school system over the past 100 years. As recently as 1998, even after the schools’ were closed, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has evaluated that close to 13 percent of our country’s Aboriginal population were residential school Survivors; in 2003, there were approximately 93,000 former students still living (Where are the Children?, 59). Specifically for the Mi’gmaq, “[f]rom Feb. 5, 1930, until June 26, 1966, over 1000 Mi’kmaw children from Atlantic Canada attended the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School” (Cape Breton University, Web). According to AANDC (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) List of Recognized Institutions, which lists Indian residential schools by province, Shubenacadie was the only institution not only in Nova Scotia, but in all the Atlantic provinces:

By 1883, industrial and residential schools began to appear in virtually every Canadian province, with the exception of most of the Atlantic Provinces. The government felt that most Aboriginals in the Maritimes, except Nova Scotia,
had been sufficiently assimilated into Canadian society, so these schools were not needed there. ("Aboriginal Residential Schools")

Geographically-speaking, therefore, the Shubenacadie Residential School was mainly intended for Mi’gmaq and Maliseet children from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.¹⁸ These children were taken from their communities and transported to the school—“sometimes without the consent or knowledge of their families” ("The Evolution of Mi’kmaw Education", 29).

According to Madeleine Dion Stout, researcher, writer, and lecturer on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis health, “[r]egardless of the precise number of children involved, Aboriginal people across the country have paid a high price, both individually and collectively, for the government’s misguided experiment in cultural assimilation” (Stout, 30). While many now recognize the goal and the effect of the schools to be a form of cultural genocide¹⁹, the purpose of these institutions, and therefore legitimizing their power and prevalence, was, in the words of the government, to spearhead the extensive system in which the government was “operating towards the civilization of our native races,” according to the 1897 Sessional Report from the Indian Commissioner. The report goes on to state that

having its beginning in small things—the first step being the establishment of reserve day-schools of limited scope and influence, the first forward step was the founding of boarding-schools both on and off the reserves. The beneficent effect of these becoming at once apparent, an impetus was thus given to the movement in the direction of Industrial training, which was at once entered upon the

¹⁸ According to the recently published Indian School Road: Legacies of the Shubenacadie Residential School (2014) by Chris Benjamin, almost all of the children who attended Shubenacadie were Mi’gmaq with a much smaller number of Wolastoqiyik (or Maliseet) students, and even fewer Passamaquoddy and other First Nations children.

¹⁹ Cultural genocide refers to the systematic devaluing, suppression, and elimination/assimilation of Native cultures and peoples.
establishment of our earlier industrial institutions...until to-day the Dominion has had at its command a system which provides for its Indian wards a practical course of industrial training, fitting for useful citizenship the youth of a people who one generation past were practically unrestrained savages. (A.E. Forget, Indian Commissioner, 291, “1897 Sessional Report” qtd. in Where are the Children?, 17)

The expressions I would like to emphasize are when the Commissioner refers to Native peoples as “wards” and “unrestrained savages.” These words are loaded with prejudice and racism; they blatantly articulate the state of mind of the legislators, politicians, clergy, and school officials of the dominant culture that created this system of assimilation. Racist views and language were perpetuated in the schools under the guise of education, as Knockwood writes: “we were called derogatory names such as ‘savage,’ ‘heathen,’ ‘pagan,’ and ‘wild Indian’ by some of the nuns” (52). In this sense, the Mi’gmaq children were constantly being reminded of their racial difference and being put in a place of inferiority and servitude. The residential school system that targeted Aboriginal children between the ages of three to eighteen and, later, mandatory school attendance for Native children between the ages of seven and fifteen was implemented as a way to deal with Canada’s “Indian problem.” Native peoples had already survived the brunt of European colonization, with numbers diminished and isolated on reservations, but we were still here. Thus, Native peoples were equivalent to unwanted children in need of education, the

20 “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill.” (Dr. Duncan Campbell Scott – 1920) Source: http://www.danielnpaul.com/IndianResidentialSchools.html
uncivilized in need of guidance, the soulless in need of saving. It is as the old adage goes “if you can’t beat them, join them” except with an important power reversal of forcing ‘them’ to join ‘you’. The Government came to the conclusion that “[one] of the most effective means a society possesses to acculturate a group of people is to take control over the knowledge transmission to children” (Hornborg, 121). Out of this thought process stemmed the residential school system; boarding schools for specifically Aboriginal children, mainly run by the clergy, where “the physical separation of students and their families was merely the first step in a more generalized attempt to sever any connection children had with their culture and history” (Stout, 31). In many ways, in retrospect, this program of social engineering has been characterized as ethnocide: “the deliberate attempt to eradicate the culture or way of life of a people [that] depends on the use of political power to force relatively powerless people to give up their culture” (Dictionary of Anthropology qtd. in Where are the Children?, 18).

3.1.1. Imprisonment: Correlations between Residential Schools and Prison

It was not merely the ideas behind the implementation of this system that resulted in its infamous legacy, but the ways in which the process of forced and cruel recruitment, the harsh discipline, and the institutional instruction were carried out. Historic information and personal accounts from Survivors all characterize residential schools as more akin to prison institutions than places of education. The regimental and rigid aspects of daily life within the schools, the complete and total control the authority figures had over the children, as well as the unpredictable and extreme nature of the discipline administered in residential schools contributed to a generalized climate of fear and imprisonment within the student body. In From the Iron House: Imprisonment in First Nations Writing, Deena Rymhs explains the strong correlation between residential schools and prisons:
These institutions played a regulatory and punitive function that instilled a similar sense of cultural guilt. While their intrusion into the lives of their occupants was not the result of individual violations of the Criminal Code, their operations resembled those of prisons. Children entering residential schools were typically stripped of their personal effects, clothed in uniforms, and renamed or assigned numbers. These practices instilled institutional order and docility in the occupants and at the same time effaced their prior identity. (Rymhs, Intro 2)

Indeed, in Isabelle Knockwood’s account of her experience in the Shubenacadie Residential School, *Out of the Depths*, the author draws this comparison between the school and a prison. She explains how upon entry into the school, students were stripped of their prior possessions and identities, given uniforms and haircuts: “Much later I discovered that this was almost identical to the prison garb of the time. We were also given numbers” (Knockwood, 30). So began what Knockwood refers to as “institutionalized education” (50). Both authors, Isabelle Knockwood and Rita Joe, are Survivors of the same establishment and, although the tone and atmosphere of their respective stories are quite different, they both recall the inflexible and restrictive aspect of daily life in the school. Knockwood remembers the bells and how they regulated every moment of their waking hours: “Nine bells each day” (50), while Joe admitted that this over-regulation contributed to “bad things [happening] while I was there. You can’t help having a chip on your shoulder if you are told, military style, when to go to the bathroom, when to eat, when to do this and that, when to pray. We were even told when to yawn and cough” (Joe, 42). In this sense, children were treated more like inmates than students.

The punitive aspect of the residential schools also reveals the association with prisons. Knockwood devotes a whole chapter of her book to “Rewards and Punishments” where she
gathers her own memories and gives voice to other Survivors’ accounts of their sentences in Shubenacadie. She recalls how the students were often silenced and repressed by a cruel combination of physical violence, psychological intimidation, and assumed guilt. Perhaps to ensure that the truth about residential schools would never leave the walls of the institution, the nuns enforced what Knockwood call “the code of silence.” One of Knockwood vivid memories was her and two other girls being threatened by a nun as small children against lying. In this instance, the nun mimicked cutting off one of the girl’s tongue with the warning of “that’s what I’m going to do if anybody lies to me” (9), even if the children did not yet comprehend what a “lie” was.

The physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, in the form of beatings, shaving heads, forced feedings, strapping, ear pulling, inappropriate touching, as well as threats and humiliation, which were carried out by the priests and the nuns constitute the most unforgettable feature of the residential school legacy. This abuse coupled with some students’ persistent attempts to run away and escape from the school solidified its similarities with a prison. Running away from residential school was actually treated as a crime. Knockwood describes how runaways would be brought back in police cars and then punished by having their heads shaved, strapped and locked into solitary confinement “in the dark broom and soap closet, sometimes for several days and nights” (88). Yet, despite the punishments, children continued to take risks in attempting to escape the school. The “ingenious ways to get out” employed by runaways, as Knockwood recounts, included jumping out of windows, tying sheets together and climbing down walls or fire escapes, fashioning makeshift keys and leaving in the middle of the night (123). These children, who faced the dangers of the elements (frostbite and other wounds) and were aware of the inevitable beatings if/when they were caught, were not deterred from running away. Children
risking their lives for freedom rather than having to live in the conditions of residential schools suggests the unbearable cruelty of these prison-like schools. Rymhs explains that “[the] prison evolved from the belief that the individual’s removal could be a means of spiritual and moral transformation; the residential school functioned as a similar place of containment and hoped-for conversion and absorption into “normative,” dominant culture” (85). Treated as prisoners, these innocent children internalized fear as the lines between education and imprisonment blurred to such a point that residential school conflated with the idea of punishment, “[the] very name of the school...evoked associations with miscreants and criminals” (Rymhs, 84). Knockwood states that “[by] the early 1950s the school’s reputation had spread throughout the Native community, so that on many reserves, ‘Don’t do that or you’ll be sent to Shubie,’ was a standard threat to children. The school was so strongly associated with punishment in children’s minds that those who were [sent there] as a result of their family circumstances constantly wondered what crime they had committed” (88). Therein lies the main distinction between residential schools and prison; the sentencing may be due to guilt, not of a crime, but predicated on race. In this system, there is no way for a child to prove his or her innocence where guilt is preassigned (Ryhms, 84).

Therefore, the root of the confusion and trauma often recounted by Survivors was that the school actively sought to instill guilt into the children, into all aspects of their lives, even though their only “crimes” were having been born Mi’gmaq and speaking their language: “students were made to feel guilty simply for who they were” (Rymhs, 84). Knockwood speaks to these injustices and wounds in Out of the Depths, where she gathers testimonies from former students:

“Talk about misery! I’m telling you. It was terrible—like a prison or a concentration camp” (Betsey Paul, quoted in Knockwood, 39);

“I remember those horrifying years as if it were yesterday” (Imelda Brooks quoted in 83);
“I have to think really hard to remember the rewards” (Rita Joe quoted in Knockwood, 84);

“Day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year for seven, eight, nine or ten years [...] an atmosphere of fear of the unknown, the unexpected, and the reality that you could be next” (Knockwood, 47);

There are far too many significant, harrowing stories in *Out of the Depths* to even attempt to honour them all in this chapter, where Knockwood accomplished this so well. With this project, at once personal and communal, she is giving discursive space to Survivors of years and years of systematic cultural silencing, in the name of justice and healing.

Furthermore, if the residential school functioned like a “well-oiled machine”, it was not only due to the regimented schedule and swift punishments, but also to the hard manual labour of the children. Knockwood states that “much of the day-to-day activity of the school revolved around manual rather than academic work” (57) and Joe states: “I didn’t mind the teaching I received in that school, I just wish there had been more of it” (44). As the children grew older, especially the boys, they were assigned to physical duties that contributed to the function of the school and its complete farming operation, with less and less time devoted to academic pursuits. Boys worked in the barn and in the furnace room and seldom attended classes: “because so much time was spent in hard physical labour, few of the boys developed more than minimal educational skills” (Knockwood, 57). While “full-time barn and furnace boys worked fifteen hours a day, seven days a week” (60), the girls’ main duties were in the kitchen and laundry room: “When a girl reached grade five, regardless of her age, she was assigned to one month of kitchen duty...[some] were more or less permanently assigned to kitchen duties” (60). This
division of duties and tasks were not only a form of servitude and free labour, but also had the function of reinforcing strict European gender roles on generations of Native children.

Furthermore, the focus on chores, household tasks, manual and menial work instead of formal education illustrates the fact that the Native children were more readily perceived as a workforce and treated as indentured servants rather than educated to their full potential. I would like to refer again to the Indian Commissioner’s Report of 1897 to emphasize that the underlying purpose of Residential School system was not to educate but to prepare and ensure these children a life as assimilated second-class citizens: “a system which provides for its Indian wards a practical course of industrial training, fitting for useful citizenship” (A.E. Forget quoted in Where are the Children?, 17). Subordination and servitude reigned in the residential schools because of the Eurocentric held belief that the role and potential of Native peoples in society were not significant. This discrimination was perpetuated by the shame associated with this Eurocentric education and the worldview that developed it. Knockwood states that “[...] the school had taught us racism long before we even knew the word. The nuns left us in no doubt about our place in the world by the different ways we saw them treat light-complexioned or white children” (140). What were the children in residential schools expected to make of themselves when the history and catechism learned each day depicted their culture as “savage,” “heathen,” and “pagan”?

“Yet Aboriginal children did not enter these schools uneducated: rather they were re-educated to fit a European model” (Where are the Children?, 17); a model that did not speak to these children in terms of their own cultural traditions, spirituality, and language, but rather served to alienate them from their past as well as their future. “Given this context, it is not surprising that the pursuit of education has become an important vehicle for many Survivors on their healing journey. This pursuit has allowed Survivors to channel their energies toward a
positive goal while reclaiming, as adults, what was denied to them as children” (Stout, 49). For example, many Survivors have pursued writing and higher education, connecting with their cultural history, as well as gaining practical knowledge and skills, namely Native language learning. In Finding My Talk: How Fourteen Canadian Women Native Women Reclaimed Their Lives After Residential School (2004), Agnes Grant admits that many of the women Survivors went on to find occupations as writers and educators, partly because education, along with nursing and stenography, were the only acceptable occupations that women were trained for at the time. However, Grant explains a deeper reason why these women, like Joe and Knockwood, focus their energies on sharing their stories and education: “There is a fierce undercurrent of determination. Never again will people from outside the culture determine how First Nations children will be educated. Never again will people from outside the culture be given the opportunity to destroy what the people themselves value” (Grant, “Introduction”).

3.1.2. Spatial and Ideological Diaspora

Residential schools constitute a significant rupture in Native cultural continuity. Its main impacts are spatial and ideological diaspora that lead to a loss of connectedness to Native culture, languages, and traditions. As defined by Neal McLeod in “Coming Home Through Stories”, “spatial diaspora” is “the removal of an Indigenous group […] from their land” (19). In my research the Indigenous group in question is the Mi’gmaq. As for “ideological diaspora”, McLeod applies this term to the “alienation from one’s stories” (19). This notion constitutes the process of being separated from the collective memory of our people, or the removal from the voices, teachings, and security of our families and ancestors. This reality stems from an attempt to destroy the Aboriginal collective consciousness. Note that the Native children sent away to residential schools were “enrolled on the pretext that they would receive a ‘Christian’ education
and be protected from their parents’ ‘backward’ influence” (Stout, iv). Thus, the physical separation from their families and communities constituted an effective initial strategy in recreating the children’s identities by altering their cultural education and behaviour. The deliberate removal of these Native groups from their land and their homes constitutes spatial diaspora: “We were being forcibly disconnected from everything our parents and elders had taught us, and everything new was learned in an atmosphere of fear” (Knockwood, 52). In this sense, spatial diaspora was both a condition and a consequence of residential school institutionalisation.

But the wounds run even deeper than physical removal and isolation, the ideological diaspora as a result of residential schools is still felt in Native communities to this day. Like throwing a stone into a clear pond, the impact disturbs the peaceful surface and its effects ripple through generations. In Magic Weapons, an analysis of the significance of Native writings in recreating community, Sam McKegney states that “the vigour with which the goal of separating children from their cultural, spiritual, and linguistic heritages was pursued ensured that most of the children would experience a profound sense of disconnection from family, culture, and community upon re-entering Aboriginal society” (28). This disconnection is what Neal McLeod refers to as “ideological diaspora” in “Coming Home Through Stories”; it is defined as being alienated from one’s own cultural stories. McLeod further states that “[the] effects of going to [residential] school have to be understood as a radical separation with the past, as a disjunction in the daily experience of the people” (31). Residential school students were boarded in the school year round, with visits from families discouraged, and rarely allowed to go back home for holidays or in the summer. Moreover, upon entry into the school, children were separated by gender, split up from siblings for long periods of time: “[Christmas] was the one day in the
school year when we were allowed to be with our brothers and sisters” (Knockwood, 40), of course speaking in Mi’gmaq as well as noticeable physical displays of affection were still prohibited. So not only were these children forcibly detached from their parents but, if they happened to have siblings of the opposite gender, all family ties were cut in the name of “education.” It left a number of children who questioned the hatred and suffering they were subjected to: “Why was our culture and language such a threat that it had to be taken away from us with such vengeance?” (Knockwood, 83). These children later grew into adults who have internalized the process of ideological diaspora and were left to contend with their experiences on their own by adopting coping strategies, which were more often than not negative:

Instead of being taught by the old people in the traditional context, children were being taught in an alien environment which stripped them of their dignity; it was a process of cultural genocide and spiritual exile. Once put away in both an ideological and spatial sense, many children never came ‘home’: instead they spent their lives ensnared in alcoholism and other destructive behaviours. (McLeod, 28)

The majority of students felt disconnected or no longer accepted in their past home and also felt lost and aimless in a future that they were not prepared for, entering into a world that sought to eradicate them: “Nearly everyone had many difficulties when they left the school finding an identity and a place in the world” (Knockwood, 158). The interrelatedness of spatial and ideological diaspora, in other words, the struggle of not being able to “come home” physically, psychologically, or culturally is manifested in the stories told by the Survivors. Although residential school Survivor narratives constitute declarations of injustice, victimhood, and racism, the underlying message of these stories is one of healing and resilience, on an individual
and communal level. (Re)collecting cultural memories of rupture and trauma, albeit a negative experience, plays a significant role in healing the rupture of the residential school legacy, in order to move forward.

3.2 Healing Through Stories: Resilience and Passing the Talking Stick

In *Magic Weapons*, McKegney theorizes the use of cultural memories of the past, specifically in relation to Native residential school narratives, “to gauge their impact on the future of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit of Canada” (7). A popular way to view and teach much of Native literature is in terms of protest writing in which authors employ their storytelling talents toward awakening the public to personal and cultural injustices:

Much of Native writing ...whether blunt or subtle, is protest literature in that it speaks to the process of our colonization: dispossession, objectification, marginalization, and that constant struggle for cultural survival expressed in the movement for structural and psychological self-determination. (Emma LaRocque quoted in Rymhs, 7)

McKegney defines the tradition of Native protest writing as seeking “[...] to address, among other things, the historical criminalization of indigenous people and the use of institutions such as prisons [and residential schools] to wear away at their cultural identity” (7). In many ways, analysing residential-school-Survivor narratives solely as protest writing limits our perspective in the sense that it may narrow our vision by focusing primarily on negative aspects. Narrow forms of protest may be limited to criticism, an objection, and a deliberate declaration of disapproval and expression of disagreement. Certain forms of protest are inherently reactive against
something or someone, rooted in the past or in the present. My view of forms of narrow protest is similar to McKegney’s issue towards the process of narrow historicization:

Narrow historicization won’t reverse the system’s corrosive social and political effects unless harnessed to a clear vision for the future and mobilized in the service of Indigenous empowerment. Perceived over the past two decades as the principal vehicle for engaging the residential school issue, historicization (alone) dangerously orients our thinking away from the present and future, binding us in a reactive manner to the power dynamics of the past. (6)

Whereas narrow historicization narrates what sometimes happened, protest reacts against what happened. In my opinion, in this sequence of narrow historicization to reactive protest, there is a step or element that is often overlooked: the discourse of resilience. From a social and psychological viewpoint, resilience is the ability or process of an individual (or a whole culture) to properly adapt to stress and adversity. Psychological, physical, and cultural resilience is manifested in Survivor narratives since they are “stories of marginalized individuals and groups, whose intelligence, perseverance and good humour allowed them to achieve success or win a great victory despite all the odds being stacked against them” (Stout, 5). In this sense, resilience can actually be precursor to protest: the fact that protest writing even exists is partly due to the resilience of its authors. However, focusing on the resilience inherent to Survivor narratives examines “not only the author’s depiction of [or reaction against] residential school, but also how she or he re-envisages identity, culture, spirituality, and politics in the aftermath of institutionalization” (McKegney, 7) as well as how sharing a personal story can encourage healing in and action by others.
In *Aboriginal People, Resilience and the Residential School Legacy* part of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series, written by Madeleine Dion Stout and Gregory D. Kipling, psychological resilience is noted as the main factor contributing to the overall success and happiness of Survivors. In other words, “breaking with the past and disrupting negative chain reactions” (Stout, iii) allows people like Rita Joe and Isabelle Knockwood to share their stories of trauma and abuse in a safe and enriching way. Again, according to this research, resilience is carried out through pro-social coping strategies: thoughts and actions that are positive, helpful, and intended to promote acceptance and community. Both *Out of the Depths* and *Song of Rita Joe*, autobiographical in nature, are results as well as examples of pro-social coping on behalf of their authors:

Basing her findings on research with survivors of child abuse or neglect, Gilgun asserts that pro-social coping usually involves one or more of the following: seeking comfort and affirmation from caring adults and peers; talking about hurt and confusion; engaging in behaviours which soothe emotional pain; and re-interpreting the meanings of abuse (Stout, 15).

In other words, “pro-social” refers to the voluntary action of coping with trauma and struggle with a view of personal benefit as well as benefits for other people and community as a whole. Both Rita Joe and Isabelle Knockwood ‘talk’ about their hurt and confusion towards their residential school experience through their writing with the common goal of healing and bringing awareness. Healing is a widely and generally used term with no single meaning; in reference to Aboriginal peoples and communities; it can denote physical, psychological, and community healing. In 1994, Marcia B. Krawll, while under a contract with the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada, wrote a report in order to develop a common understanding of
“healing” among Native community members and non-Native government representatives. “The report is based on in-depth interviews with Aboriginal community members in five communities across Canada, together with similar interviews with federal and provincial government representatives” (Krawll, i). The concept of healing, in the Native sense of the word illustrated in this report, carries with it the connotation of a healthy community: a community defined by its positive teachings of involvement, trust, caring, sharing, openness and communication. The Native concept of healing represents more a process than a state and its meaning is more holistic than its standard definition:

There are two different ways of looking at the definition of healing. The Anglo-Saxon terms it as healing of a wound the repairing of damage to the body (sic). We tend to look at healing as a surface heal. From an Aboriginal perspective it goes much deeper. Healing in that context is not only healing of the body but the healing of the spirit, emotional healing, psychological healing that encompasses the total being rather than just at the surface (Krawll, 22).

Joe writes about her life story in her poetry and prose as a way to heal her past, re-envisioning her harsh life of foster homes, residential schooling, and difficult relationships. When Joe’s stories are read, a deeper understanding and awareness of the journey from suffering to resilience is felt. A painful memory is “like a bird of prey, until it is written” (Introduction, Joe); it has a looming, menacing presence and a power to consume you. But if you write it and work with it, then you do not let the memory have negative power over you and the healing process begins. The process of healing is a movement from within that unfolds, “[starting] within the individual or with the self. From the individual, healing expands into the family. Finally, to heal as a community, the process moves from the individual and family to the community as a
whole” (Krawll, 24). In this sense, the writing/storytelling process mirrors the healing process. Residential school Survivors write from the self, reach out to their families and friends for support, publish/share their stories to connect whole communities with these cultural memories.

Often the readers feel inspired and encouraged to write and share their own stories. Knockwood also shares a journey of resilience that has a goal of inspiring communal healing: “I hope that the act of writing it down will help me and others to come up with some answers” (7). By giving public voice to her and other Survivors’ experiences of trauma, Knockwood endeavours to heal on an individual and communal level. Indeed, “survivors of residential school abuse are encouraged to confront and vocalize their traumatic experiences in the service of personal and communal healing” (McKegney, 121), with the notion in mind that a shared burden lessens its load. “Healing is an interdependent process and the more persons involved, the greater the opportunities for change” (Krawll, 25). Storytelling is also significant in how it overcomes what Knockwood refers to as the “code of silence” that “[...] was enforced with a combination of physical intimidation and psychological manipulation which produced terror and confusion” (9). The code of silence was ingrained into the children through intimidation and abuse and proved difficult to overcome even as adults. There is a passage in the preface to the third edition of Out of the Depths when Knockwood meets with her professor and writing partner, Gillian Thomas, which illustrates this:

It was just too painful to write anymore. I was sitting in Gillian’s office doubled over with stomach cramps from the tension. I said ‘Oh I can’t do this anymore. I don’t think I can go on. It’s too painful.’ ‘Okay,’ said Gillian, ‘We won’t do this anymore.’ Then she didn’t say anything for a few minutes until she said, ‘So they
won.’ ‘Who?’ I asked. ‘Father Mackey and the nuns. They told you not to talk and you’re not talking.’ That really woke me up. (Knockwood, 13)

This passage is interesting in the sense that it points out an apparent paradox that writing can be difficult and painful even though it can also be cathartic and liberating. Fortunately, Knockwood chose to continue her work; the truth of voice trumped silence. Cultural silencing is a longstanding result of colonization and surmounting it through storytelling and writing is an important way to view and analyse Native literature. “The result of being colonized is the internalization of the need to remain invisible [and unheard]. The colonizers erase you, not easily, but with shame and brutality. Eventually you want to stay that way. Being a writer is getting up there and writing yourself onto everyone’s blackboard” (Lee Maracle quoted in McKegney, 51). In this sense, we can understand the act of writing here as a form of pro-social coping as well as pro-social protest (in opposition to narrow, reactive protest) that leads to resilience, healing, and social action in the future.

On the whole, the act of writing, “of vocalizing feelings and exploring the past jointly with others who faced similar challenges” (Stout, 49) constitutes a pro-social form of coping with pain and trauma that promotes resilience and healing for Survivors. Pro-social coping also involves adopting behaviours which soothe pain and defy abuse. In the context of residential schools, student resistance was prevalent and, arguably, essential to survival and sanity. There are many forms of resistance: physical (running away, physically fighting back or defending others) and psychological (emotional composure, refusal to give in or give up, and emotional solidarity). Resistance gives a sense of control to the individual while contributing to an overall feeling of solidarity with peers who are also resisting. Typically, running away and fighting are neither positive nor pro-social in nature; especially since, while still under the authority of the
school, these actions usually engendered harsher punishments. However, Knockwood illustrates how the children were able to undermine the nuns’ unjust authority through language despite the fact that speaking Mi’gmaq was completely forbidden, namely by developing nicknames for the nuns in their own language, most of them insulting: “She was known as Wikew which means ‘fatty’” (34). Linguistic resistance proved to be very pro-social for the children since they resisted together; even the so-called ‘pets’ or ‘squealers’ never told the nuns what the students’ called them in private. Composure as well as imagination were also important forms of internal resistance: “Perhaps the most important form of resistance was inside our heads, even though it produced little outward sign at the time” (Knockwood, 127).

Re-interpretation of trauma and abuse in the form of rationalization and positive outlook proves to be an efficient coping strategy. Re-interpretation in the creative approach is a precursor to the Survivor autobiography. In order to write down their stories, the authors have to journey into their past and work out their memories to share with others and therefore heal the pain. Re-interpretation allows the Survivor to choose how much power they want to give these memories. Rita Joe’s accounts of her decision leading up to her attendance at the Shubenacadie Residential School as well as her experience as a student are not given much discursive place in Song of Rita Joe (barely taking up 16 pages), which constitutes an interesting authorial choice. Joe’s tendency to downplay negative aspects of her life story in her work arguably defines her overall literary style. When describing the situations that first compelled her to write poetry, Joe affirms that part of the “therapy” of the creative process was to write about the negative, but she also “looked for beauty—even if it came out of a negative or hated structure” (92). McKegney refers to Joe’s authorial stance as “affirmatism”: “Joe’s literary creations are affirmations not only of the power of the positive, but also of the crucial role of the Native author in engaging history and rendering
it fruitful in the struggle toward empowerment” (107). Joe’s philosophy as a person as well as a writer is often characterized by her positivity; a positive outlook or attitude that accepts the world as it is: “It is like that with everything in my life. I look for an honourable image to create. Sometimes—with many things that happened at [residential] school—I have had to search for a long time, but when I find it, it is good” (47). This exemplifies what the study of resilience defines as re-interpretation, in other words, consciously taking control of stress and painful memories in thought and subsequently in these cases through writing, in ways that accentuated positive or hopeful elements (Stout, 43). Joe has been criticized for her positive re-interpretation of residential schooling. It is important to note the contextual complexity that characterises Joe’s Survivor experience in the sense that no one forced her to attend residential school. After living in a string of foster homes, young Rita Joe took matters into her own hands and made arrangements to go to residential school: “That’s when I wrote a letter to the Indian Agent in Shubenacadie, Mr. H.C. Rice. I asked him to please come next Wednesday and take me to Residential School, because that was the day my foster mother would be away picking mayflowers” (36). She recalls her excitement when the Indian Agent finally comes to take her away to Shubenacadie: “I was fit to be tied, I was so excited” (37). The fact that Joe personally enrolled herself into the residential school constituted a coping strategy as well as a way out of the foster system and towards independence: “she entered a harsh environment, which so many have come to lament, compelled by personal anguish and fear rather than authoritarian decree” (McKegney, 119). Joe’s positive outlook in life, as well as her writing, is rooted in healing: firmly believing that if one wishes to be healed, one should dwell on the positive and be willing to downplay the negative. However, criticism of her style stems from the impression that Joe may be silencing herself within her own story. In other words, her self-censoring can be
interpreted as playing “into the hands of dominance” (McKegney, 123). Is it appropriate or
accurate for a Native author to write about residential school in this fashion? “Is Joe’s positivity
not a form of historical erasure, marginalizing suffering, sweeping criminal behaviour under the
carpet, and offering an incomplete picture of the oppressive forces of government and church?”
(McKegney, 123). McKegney notes a significant distinction between Joe’s affirmatist literary
methodology and simple optimism or positivism: “[it is] not a negation of the negative but a
creation of the positive through strategic attention and artistry” (107).

I believe that both Joe’s and Knockwood’s writings are empowered and empowering in
the sense that their stories come from a place of resilience and healing. Whereas Knockwood
chooses a style of testimony, gritty realism, full exposure and disclosure of past trauma with
more focus on open protest, Joe reinterprets the experience and focuses on positive aspects of her
life and education in general as a means of resilience. On one hand, Knockwood and the
Survivors quoted in her book bare their scars for the world to see and understand their suffering
and survival. Indeed there is a palpable anger and outrage woven through the narrative of Out of
the Depths, a ghostly sense of betrayal that found minimal symbolic justice when the
Shubenacadie school was burnt and demolished:

The crowd watching from the bottom of the hill cheered, “Hurray!” There was no
sadness, no tears at seeing the building finally being punished and beaten for
having robbed so many Indian children of the natural wonders and simple
pleasures of growing up and the joys of being alive and being Native. In a strange
way, the building had taken on an identity all its own. (Knockwood, 134)
In Knockwood’s story, the residential school “identity” is characterized as “haunted,” “cursed,” “racist,” an “atmosphere of fear,” and a “pit of oppression.” On the other hand, Joe chooses to conceal her wounds in order to heal them. However, just because Joe does not explicitly write about her suffering as much as Knockwood does not mean she does not write *through* and/or *beyond* her suffering. Despite their disparate strategies, I would argue that both authors work towards to same goal of personal and collective healing and sharing. Both works are examples of resilience achieved through pro-social coping strategies. The very act of writing and publicly sharing a personal story is pro-social at its core. Neither author writes in a void, both use history and cultural memory in their life writing as vehicles for change and for forward motion by focusing on the future, as a way to inspire Survivors and readers to sharing and healing.

Knockwood uses the concept of the Talking Stick to introduce *Out of the Depths*. The Talking Stick is a token that is traditionally part of a ceremony or practice called a Talking Circle that is a strategy of fair and equal communication adopted by many Native cultures, which “gives people who were once silenced an opportunity to say what is on their minds in the language they choose” (8). Knockwood refers to the Talking Stick metaphorically to introduce her Survivor narrative and also to conclude her work: “I pass the Talking Stick to you” (161). Knockwood is inviting the readers to share their own stories and views, if they choose.

Although the Mi’gmaq people collectively bear the scars of the residential school legacy, the interpersonal resiliency of Mi’gmaq individuals such as Isabelle Knockwood, Rita Joe as well as others depicted in their works contributes to resilience on a cultural level. In other words, a person adopts a pro-social coping strategy such as sharing their life story through writing, depicting their own resilience and Survival, thus promoting resilience in others. McLeod describes this concept as “coming home through stories”: “There are many levels to the stories,
and many functions to them: to link the past to the present and allow the possibility of cultural transmission and of ‘coming home’ in an ideological sense” (31). Following the spatial and ideological diaspora of residential schooling, Survivor narratives constitute cultural memories (although often painful) that are worked through on the journey towards healing and continuity, to feeling and being “home,” meaning “to dwell within the landscape of the familiar, a landscape of collective memories” (McLeod, 17). Survivor narratives not only bring awareness of the Residential School Legacy to insiders and outsiders alike, but also render personal and memorable stories of real people that arouse strong feelings in readers, from anger to understanding, sympathy and hope, etc. “Intrinsic to the study of this literature is the dialogue it attempts to engage us in. It is a literature of confrontation: direct, naked, desperately committed. There can be no passive reader, no indifferent listener” (Michael Hogan quoted in Rymhs, 128). In this sense, Survivor life stories tend to engage a particular readership that wishes to understand harsh realities while seeking inspiration and hope:

Autobiography, for residential school survivors, is reciprocal. It is borne out of a specific reality, [the residential school experience] and it, in turn, affects that reality [the Survivor experience]. It documents the attempted suffocation of a particular identity, but, through such documentation, revitalizes and so recreates, performs, and displays that identity anew, while establishing spaces of introspection in which readers can conduct similar examinations of their own experiences. (McKegney, 52)

Evidently, the wounds of Residential schools will never truly be forgotten, but the more faces, names and memories we can associate with this reality in the name of cultural resilience, the better we can honour the past while looking towards a hopeful future. The residential school
legacy “maintains a shadow presence, an unspoken antagonism that threatens community through its very silence” (McKegney, 11). If Survivors choose sharing over silence, then the residential school system and the racist ideologies from which it stemmed have truly failed:

These stories evidence the traumatic effects of Canada’s most prolonged and legislatively codified attempted genocide, but, perhaps more importantly, they scream its failure. They declare and enact the survival of the Native cultures and identities the residential school system sought to suffocate. (McKegney, 182)

Residential schools sought to break Native cultural continuity and it will still be many years before the damage inflicted on generations of children can be healed. Survivors and their descendants are still dealing with the psychological, physical, and spiritual scars, but the authors and storytellers who define themselves in their writing are proof of the healing power of memories and the assurance of cultural resilience and continuity in the future.
Chapter Four

Belonging and Identity in Contemporary Mi’gmaq Writing

The time has come now to take back our inheritance of taking care of our children and our children’s education for the better. We want to take back our education and teach our history, our language and our culture. We have begun to tell our story—our history—and we want to tell it in our own words to the world. (Where Are the Children?, 50)

Every time a story is told, every time one word of an Indigenous language is spoken, we are resisting the destruction of our collective memory. (Neal McLeod, “Coming Home Through Stories,” 66)

In Native literature, following the communal wounds caused by the Residential School Legacy, there emerges a collective sense of struggle and aspiration, a journey from loss and rupture to belonging and continuity. Sam McKegney states that “[t]he residential school haunts Native literature in Canada: as subject matter, as setting, as repressed (communal or individual) memory, as source of anger, shame, pain, and violence, and as unspoken backdrop to conditions of authorship”(11). The previous chapter examined the communal negative impacts of residential schools, namely feelings of imprisonment and alienation from home and culture. Also, the Mi’gmaq Survivor narratives in Chapter Three touched upon the subjects of cultural identity and belonging in the sense that these writings are defined as acts of resilience and of “coming home through stories.” This chapter will further explore the ideas of belonging and identity in relation to contemporary Mi’gmaq culture and literature. The metaphor of a collective journey may seem like a generalisation or an oversimplification; however, the way I view it is that Native peoples all follow our own individual paths, but we are moving communally in the same direction, in a forward motion. We are all dealing with the past: some struggle against it, others honour it. Significant aspects of the Mi’gmaq cultural past are represented today in the many forms of its literature from novels and children’s books, to poetry and memoirs. I have selected a range of
examples of contemporary Mi’gmaq literature as an overview in this chapter to illustrate that present Mi’gmaq writing exists in many forms and expresses the sentiments of identity and belonging in ways that relate to contemporary Mi’gmaq peoples. Lorne Simon’s Megwadesk in Stones and Switches (1994), facing moral and spiritual dilemmas, asks “[h]ow much [...] of the past is good to keep anyway?” (73); while Julie Pellissier-Lush in her memoir, My Mi’kmaq Mother (2009), seeks to collect stories from her family’s past as a means to connect with her deceased mother. The examples of poetry by Shirley Kiju Kawi express a poetic journey from fear and anxiety towards the past to spiritual belonging. The books for children by Michael James Isaac, How the Cougar Came to Be Called the Ghost Cat (2010) and The Lost Teachings (2013) depict Mi’gmaq teachings and values in a form that mirrors pre-colonial animal stories. All these texts try to express and remember the past, but are not stunted in the past; the relationships toward the past expressed in these works are coupled with a message of hope—a vision for the future. The works syncretise cultural memories and visions for the future in order to form a modern, hybrid Mi’gmaq identity and voice.

4.1 Identities Past and Present: Definitions of Contemporary Mi’gmaq Identity

In order to contextualize the current issues surrounding Mi’gmaq/Native identity that are reflected within the narratives in this chapter, we must first examine the definitions of both ascribed and self-ascribed identities. Today, “[i]n Canada,…state policy is a factor in the construction of certain ethnic boundaries” (Bartels, 250). In other words, Native status in Canada is conferred legally through the meeting of criteria established by the Indian Act, based on lineal descent from Native ancestors. There are two key terms to retain in the legal definition of Mi’gmaq or Native identity: status and membership. First, the important aspect of Indian Status is that it is a legal definition: “Status Indians are persons who, under the Indian Act are registered
or are entitled to be registered as Indians. All registered Indians have their names on the Indian
roll, which is administered by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)”
(âpihtawikosisân). The whole concept of Indian/Native status according to the Indian Act in
Canada is incredibly detailed and can be daunting. One of the principal reasons for this confusion
is the fact that since it was first passed in 1876, the legislation has been amended numerous
times, the most significant amendment being the Bill C-31 of 1985:

Bill C-31 added new categories to the Indian Act, defining who is a Status
Indian, and who will be a Status Indian in the future. The legislation does not
specifically refer to any sort of blood quantum, therefore there is
no official policy that would take into account half or quarter Indian ancestry.
Nonetheless, ancestry continues to be a determining factor in who is a Status
Indian (âpihtawikosisân).

Since 1985, Canadian legal Indian Status has been divided into two categories, called
“6(1)” and “6(2)”. Both categories represent full Native status for any individual, the numbers in
brackets affect the next generation. In short, depending on your category of status, and that of the
person you choose to have children with, directly affects the status of said children. (The
“equation” that ensues from this reality is broken down by âpihtawikosisân in the post entitled
“Got Status? Indian Status in Canada, sort of explained”). In essence, just “two generations of
out-marriage (parenting between Status Indians and non-Status Indians/non-Indians) results in
children without status” (Palmater, 46). In this sense, the legal definition of Native status/identity
trumps actual family and/or community affiliation. Dr. Pamela Palmater, a Mi’gmaq lawyer,
professor, and activist, writes about these legal identity issues in Beyond Blood: Rethinking
Indigenous Identity (2011), in accordance with her areas of expertise in Indigenous law, politics,
and governance. The main issues presented in her book are that “Canada remains in control of our individual legal identities, a fact that continues to affect our communal and national identities” (15) and that “[t]he overall formulas [of the Indian Act’s provisions...] reflect a basic concept of blood quantum or descent-based rules designed to assimilate all Indians through legislative extinction” (Palmater, 31). The legal identities, as defined by the Indian Act, are discriminatory by nature and problematic for contemporary Mi’gmaq people and their future generations in terms of identity and belonging. In the foreword to Beyond Blood, Chief Bill Montour explains:

Most people are able to take their cultural identities for granted. Generally, people know they are Dutch, German, Italian, or Chinese, for example. In Canada, however, the federal government controls the identities of Indigenous peoples through its laws and policies. Specifically, it controls whether or not Indigenous people may identify themselves as ‘Indian,’ which in turn affects their ability to be a member in a local community or a citizen of their Indigenous nation (Montour quoted in Palmater, 8).

The above quote touches on the complex concept of membership. The definition of band membership is distinct from Indian Status because an individual may possess Status, but may not automatically be a member of a particular band. The same 1985 amendments to the Indian Act that determined new categories of Indian Status also recognized the rights of bands to determine their own membership. “Membership is very important, because it may bring rights to live on reserve, participate in band elections and referendums, own property on reserve, and share in
band assets. It also provides individuals with the opportunity to live near their families, within their own culture” (Furi and Wherrett).  

On the whole, a Native/Mi’gmaq person may identify with his or her culture, its traditional values, teachings, and language but may not have “status” legally, which limits the advantages conferred by Canadian law as well as one’s sense of belonging within an Indigenous community. Conversely, Native/Mi’gmaq status may be ascribed to an individual on paper, but they may still feel detached from their cultural identity due to a lack of investment in Mi’gmaq teachings and traditional values. In this sense, “Canada makes the presumption that blood quantum or remoteness of descent from one’s Indian ancestor equates with one’s level of connection to both an individual and a communal Indigenous identity and culture” (Palmater, 32). The fact that the younger generations of Mi’gmaq have become estranged from their Native language, spirituality, and traditional values has contributed to the belief that “[Mi’gmaq] heritage was somewhat separate from [Mi’gmaq] identity” (Bartels, 254) and has generated a number of unanswered questions concerning identity and belonging related to authenticity. When taking into account the legal definitions of Native identity that are conferred to some individuals and not to others based on nebulous and arguably discriminatory criteria, perceived Native cultural authenticity is always a subject to contend with. The definition of cultural authenticity connotes the notion of cultural purity, which is problematic at its core:

The social realities that Indigenous peoples face today are that they live among other Canadians, frequently intermarry, and have other relationships that often result in children. This has been the case for centuries. Consequently, there are no

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21 For more information on Indian Status and band membership codes and their related issues, see the document prepared by Megan Furi and Jill Wherrett for the Parliament of Canada online.
Indigenous groups in Canada that are completely made up of ‘pure’ Aboriginal peoples—even if there were a test to determine such a status. This fact, however, does not in any way detract from their distinct status as Indigenous peoples.

(Palmater, 181)

I personally view debates over authenticity as more exclusionary in nature than anything else. Commonly, the notion of authenticity judges Native peoples “in terms of where they fit on the ‘Indianess’ scale. The whole concept of Indianness was based on the idea that there was one Indian people who existed at a point frozen in time” (Palmater, 35). Ultimately, for Mi’gmaq/Native people, authenticity bases the locus of our cultural identities on external factors that are beyond our control, which in turn spurs feelings that fuel what Palmater coins as “identity insecurity” (60). This identity insecurity continues to resonate with modern Native/Mi’gmaq people and can be interpreted as a driving force within contemporary Mi’gmaq literature. For instance, Lorne Simon’s *Stones and Switches*, although set in the 1930s, depicts a main character that struggles with his spiritual and cultural identity in a liminal space.

On October 8th, 1994, Mi’gmaq writer Lorne Simon tragically lost his life in a car accident. The Publisher’s Note on the inside flap of the book states that “[n]ine months earlier the Editorial Committee at Theytus Books has chosen his novel *Stones and Switches* to be the first publication by an En’owkin International School of Writing graduate student. On the day of the accident, the final proof of his novel was in the mail on the way to him for his approval.” In his first and only novel, *Stones and Switches* (1994), set in the 1930s depression era on the fictional Native reservation of “Messkig” (Mi’gmaq for “large”), the novel follows the protagonist Megwadesk as he encounters a moral (and spiritual) dilemma. Megwadesk lives in
the ironically-named Messkig (Mi’gmaq word for “large”) reservation, which was not large at all, and “was ringed by white squatters who had seized vast tracts of Indian land. All the Micmac shacks were huddled into a few acres” (Simon, 11). The only livelihood for a Mi’gmaq man like Megwadesk was fishing. However, the novel opens with Megwadesk having poor luck in fishing with his net, which has been barren of fish for “six accursed days” (5). Meanwhile, his neighbour’s net has been overflowing with fish every morning. His neighbour and friend, nicknamed Skoltch, is not very diligent in checking his net, and it occurs to Megwadesk that he could take some of Skoltch’s catch and none would be the wiser. Making his way to the net, Megwadesk seeks to justify his actions: “An’ ain’t it traditional for Micmacs to share their catch, anyhow? Why, sure it is! But ain’t Skoltch broken this tradition time and time again? Yes, ‘cause alls he does is look out for hisself and no one else ‘tall!” (Simon, 13). However, the eeriness and stillness of the night coupled with Megwadesk’s conscience forces him to balk: “He listened for footsteps or for twigs snapping but all he could hear was his mother saying ‘Doing evil doesn’t pay. It all comes back eventually. That’s why witches suffer in the end’ (14). In the end, he panics and flees the site.

This simple dilemma raises a more significant struggle for Megwadesk; a struggle between his traditional Mi’gmaq upbringing and beliefs and the alluring White world. Megwadesk lives this spiritual tug of war throughout the story:

It’s our silly beliefs, eh, that keep us from getting anywhere, he thought. [...] Last night I could’ve taken advantage of Skoltch’s net but I ran away instead! An’ why? ‘Cause I was ‘fraid of the spirits getting back at me! An’ Nisgam nuduid, even though I know in my head that it’s all nonsense, I can’t get past what I was raised to believe!” (Simon, 18)
Written in the form of an internal monologue, the function of this passage in the text is one of realism as well as irony. Megwadesk’s internal moral anxieties are relatable as they are representative of the pressure he feels to provide for his family. Yet his fears stunt him in inaction no matter how much he tries to assert that the Mi’gmaq beliefs are just superstitions or “tricks of nature” (17).

Coincidently, Megwadesk has also been plagued with nightmares for six sleepless nights. He knew that his common-law partner, Mimiges, the character who represents Native traditional spirituality and views, would interpret the dreams as someone working a hex on him, but Megwadesk did not want to hear that: “He felt uneasy about the dreams, but he still believed that everything his people usually considered to be of ghostly origin could be explained as a trick of nature and he wanted this idea to grow strong enough in his mind to enable him to overcome his fears” (17-18). On one hand, Megwadesk already doubts the Mi’gmaq traditional beliefs, dubbing them witchery, superstitions, or ‘wishes’ yet still cannot completely reject his belief in them. On the other hand, he was also raised Catholic and when Mimi announces that she is pregnant, it is very important for them to get married by a priest. But there are also aspects of the Catholic religion that spur Megwadesk’s anxiety and disbelief. Megwadesk sums up this inner struggle of spiritual identity when he thinks: “It was either the whiteman’s Christian world or the old Indian beliefs that were correct but both of them had aspects that revolted him” (Simon, 32).

In this way, Megwadesk perceives himself as a liminal being on the threshold of both cultures, of both religious/spiritual beliefs. Liminality describes “an ‘in-between’ space in which cultural change may occur: the transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated….” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 130). Liminality is an
intermediate and transitional state, so in my opinion, liminality is a feeling/sense that sometimes precedes hybridity, which is, in turn, the seamless combination of aspects of differing cultures in order to form a unique, true self/identity. Throughout the story, Megwadesk struggles with the idea of which belief is right: “In his mind, either one believed in the old ways or one believed in the white man’s Christian ways and yet there were many stories around which were a blend of the two” (Simon, 44). And it does not occur to him until later that both can be right, simultaneously: “Perhaps he was too obsessed with the thought it had to be either one or the other. [...] If Christianity was true then so, too, were their old beliefs. Both were dependent on things normally considered impossible” (108). Megwadesk’s realisation could be described as cultural/spiritual hybridity, a term that “commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 118).

What Megwadesk does not realize at the beginning of the novel is that his life already seamlessly merges both Native/Mi’gmaq and White/Christian cultures. Descriptions of his house depict a silver crucifix and a statue of Saint-Anne in the same vicinity as a wreath of sweetgrass and a quill basket filled with crystals and stones. Megwadesk and the people from Messkíg are fluent in both English and Mi’gmaq and demonstrate religious and cultural syncretism in that their stories and beliefs meld aspects and practices of both Native spirituality and Christian religion. It is part of the irony of Megwadesk’s situation that the readers are aware of the hybrid lives of the characters before he recognizes or understands them. Megwadesk is so preoccupied with the either/or and right/wrong dichotomy that he cannot (or refuses to) understand how his friend, Skoltch can assert that Glúskęb and Jesus are “cousins […] Or maybe step-brothers” (42), and how Mimi upholds Christian beliefs of prayer and marriage, while believing in Mi’gmaq mysticism. Simon cleverly juxtaposes cultural practices of both belief systems
throughout the novel. For instance, Mimi interprets Megwadesk’s nightmares as a bad omen and fashions him a “weapon,” a small stick sharpened on both ends with a piece of crystal tied to one end, meant for him to sleep with that can be used to defend himself in the dream world. Mimi instructs Megwadesk how to use the dream weapon just as she removes the crucifix around her neck and places it around his (108).

Religious/spiritual syncretism is actually a significant aspect particular to Mi’gmaq culture. As stated in the Introduction, the Mi’gmaq people’s unique place in geography and history resulted in earlier colonization and conversion than the rest of the indigenous people further to the centre and West of Canada. As early as 1610, the relationship between the Mi’gmaq Nation and the Catholic Church “was spelled out in a concordat, or treaty, between the Grand Council and the Pope, in which the Mi’kmaq agreed to protect priests and French Catholic settlers and the Church granted certain religious authority to the Mi’kmaq Nation” (Barnaby, Astuidàykw, 51). An interesting implication of this concordat²² is that it affirmed Mi’gmaq sovereignty, since such agreements/treaties may only be signed by national governments. Since the time of the signing, Roman Catholicism became the official religion of the Mi’gmaq people (Barnaby, 51). The main distinction between the idea of religious conversion and religious syncretism is that the Mi’gmaq people have adapted the Catholic religion to reflect their cultural realities and values rather than being overpowered and overshadowed by the colonizer’s religion. The Mi’gmaq “didn’t have to go to a building to worship, because everything […] was God’s creation. Our ancient religion was everywhere. Being Catholic and being Mi’gmaq were synonymous, because our culture, our way of life, was based on giving and sharing” (Barnaby, 52). Henderson also echoes this notion when he states that “Migmaw Catholicism allows each

²² For further reading concerning the meaning and significance of the Concordat, I recommend The Míkmaw Concordat (1997) by James Youngblood Henderson.
person his or her harmony without forcing absolute conformity to experiences or values [....] Migmaw consciousness and languages have honoured creativity and spiritual growth, and are tolerant of its members being both traditional and Christian” (104).

The concepts of liminality, hybridity and syncretism are significant in Mi’gmaq stories because post-colonial subjects (whether characters like Megwadesk or real people like Lorne Simon) have more than one culture/thought-pattern to deal with on their journey to fulfilled identity and belonging. A means of negotiating the conflicting cultural customs, ideas, beliefs, and languages must be found to achieve a solid and positive sense of identity. This process of identity building functions on many levels. On a fictional or imaginative level, Megwadesk comes to terms with conflicting beliefs, which he realises were not so conflicting after all. In reality, Lorne Simon writes a novel (a non-Indigenous form) in English about a Native Canadian in the voice of a Mi’gmaq man. His novel is liberal in its use of Mi’gmaq language and features a glossary at the end of the book. Characters like Megwadesk touch us as Mi’gmaq people and speak to our own feelings and realities, just as authors like Lorne Simon demonstrate passion about cultural heritage and survival through stories.

Contemporary Mi’gmaq poets also explore questions of identity and belonging especially in relation to traditional Native background, values and spirituality in their writings. “These writers express both pain and joy, outrage and celebration” (Joe and Choyce, 12) towards their Mi’gmaq identity. The discourses of liminality and hybridity as well as nativism are represented in the poems of Shirley Kiju Kawi. Nativism is defined as: “the desire to return to indigenous practices and cultural forms as they existed in pre-colonial society. The term is most frequently encountered to refer to the rhetoric of decolonization which argues that colonialism needs to be replaced by the recovery and promotion of pre-colonial, indigenous ways” (Ashcroft, Griffiths,
Kiju Kawi’s poetry illustrates the different implications of the concept of nativism on contemporary Native situations. Kiju Kawi is a spiritual name meaning “Mother Quill.” “Shirley is the author of three volumes: *Sons of Membertou* [1993], *Within My Dreams* [1994], and *Drums over Mountain* [1996]” (Joe and Choyce, 281). The poems I have selected to illustrate the issues of identity insecurity and striving for belonging are “A’tukititijik,” “Lost Identity,” and “The Inner Spirit”, which were collected in *The Mi’kmaq Anthology* (1997).

The first poem depicts a scene where the speaker witnesses “A’tukititijik,” a gathering of people, usually elders, telling stories and legends of the past. Initially, the speaker beholds the scene in wonder and excitement – “I saw shadows of the past dancing among the elders of the present” (95) - and hears the sounds of beating drums, symbolic of her Mi’gmaq culture. She does not fully understand the Native language in which the elders speak, but respectfully attends the meeting in inquisitive silence: “Though I could not relate to their distinctive language / I saw and watched the expression on their faces” (95). It is expressed in the poem that what is being said at the A’tukititijik cannot be adequately translated, for there would be a loss of meaning in the translation. This reality and subsequent feelings of exclusion cause the speaker to sadden at the loss of a language deemed sacred: “How could such beauty as the Mi’kmaq language and the / richness of our culture be so easily forgotten *(sic)*.” (95) This constitutes another instance in Mi’gmaq literature where Native language is significantly linked to cultural continuity and memory. If we have forgotten most of our traditional language, how can we truly understand and interpret cultural memory and, perhaps more importantly how can we express these memories, our heritage, to others? In this sense, the speaker also questions the fate of her Native culture:

Will we, as elders to our children and their children
be able to sit around the fire light.

Telling stories and legends of the past in the cool

stillness of the night.

Will A’tukititikik live on to the future or will it just

slowly fade with the elders of today (Kiju Kawi, qtd. in Joe and Choyce, 95)

This closing stanza reflects a serious and very current issue for Mi’gmaq people: the question of cultural continuity. As our elders grow older and pass away, will we have gained enough knowledge and skills from them in order to assure the continued life of our language and culture?

“Lost Identity” is a prose poem that tells the story of a Mi’gmaq child having a spiritual encounter with her ancestors. The child asks the spiritual apparitions if she can join them and listen to their stories and chants, as well as learn about the ancient Mi’gmaq ways. Sadly, one of the spirits refuses the child’s request: “‘You say that you are of Native blood yet you cannot speak the language of your fathers. You do not know of how we lived, you do not understand the way of the earth or what it can do for you’” (Kiju Kawi, qtd. in Joe and Choyce, 96). Throughout the poem, the child is described as wearing moccasins, symbolic of her Native ancestry; however, after being unable to answer the questions of the spirit ancestor, the symbol of her identity has disappeared: “Tears filled my eyes as I bent my head and realized that I no longer wore moccasins on my feet” (Kiju Kawi, qtd. in Joe and Choyce, 97). On the whole, like A’tukititijik, this poem depicts the current generation’s anxiety or feeling of inadequacy towards Native identity as well as the issue of authenticity and whether or not the latter determines a sense of (or even a right to) belonging. In a way, assimilation put an end to an identifiable or
‘authentically pure’ Mi’gmaq identity in the sense that one’s level of fluency in the Native language or extent of knowledge in traditional skills and values determines one’s degree of “Native-ness.” And once that essence is lost, the saying goes, one cannot authentically reclaim it. I realise this prose poem was most likely meant to instill strong feelings of anxiety and sadness towards the “lost identity,” but I disagree with the perpetuation of the myth of authenticity (Griffiths). Although the link between ancestry and traditions as well as identity is significant, Palmater notes that “the concept of continuity does not require Aboriginal groups to provide evidence of an unbroken chain […] between their current practices, traditions and customs, and those which existed prior to contact” (82). Instead of nativism and authenticity, Palmater focuses her discussion of Native identity on connection and commitment: “Traditions can be respected in many different ways, and could also be in the form of a commitment to learn and preserve traditional practices versus using them as a screening tool” (186). The child in the poem wishes to learn the ways and the stories of her ancestors and even though she cannot meet the spirit’s criteria, it does not make her any less of a Mi’gmaq for her desire to learn and to connect is still present.

“Lost Identity” also illustrates and troubles the concept of nativism. The ancient spirits in the poem represent the pre-colonial, traditional values and culture while the child represents the average modern Mi’gmaq grasping for the past, for cultural belonging. In a way, nativism as a belief is a form of nostalgia, a longing or affection for the past:

There is a trend in contemporary Indigenous discourse to create a bi-polar differentiation between colonizer and colonized: within this creation of a discursive dichotomy, the past is sometimes romanticized. Such romanticization
of the past distorts the experiences of those who lived through these times of change, and distorts present realities as well. (McLeod, 24)

In “Lost Identity,” pre-colonial Native ways of knowing are highly romanticized, especially in the enumeration of the spirit ancestor’s criteria for acceptance of the child that focus on oneness with nature: “Can you tell what the wind is saying to us? Can you see the animals hiding in the forest? Have you listened to the running water, what did it say of the creatures that live within?” (Kiju Kawi, 97).

The journey of reclaiming cultural identity on one’s own terms is portrayed in the third selected poem, “The Inner Spirit.” The poem’s speaker expresses her struggle to be identified as and thrive as a Mi’gmaq person:

The hopes and dreams of my roots

were hidden by elements of abuse.

There was no comfort or warmth for

my nativeness to grow and flourish, (Kiju Kawi, qtd. in Joe and Choyce, 99)

As in her other poems, Shirley Kiju Kawi writes her journey of discovering herself in beautifully simple words and emotional as well as relatable scenes. In “The Inner Spirit” it is shown that through the years, the speaker has developed a strong sense of identity that she can now affirm: “I too belong” (99). In this sense, identity is not portrayed as a piece a paper (Status or non-Status), as a physical appearance, nor is it depicted as fluency in an Indigenous language or whether or not one can communicate with forest animals or see the colours of the wind. Mi’gmaq identity is represented by feelings of belonging as well as the inner spirit. Aboriginal
identity, Mi’gmaq identity specifically, is a question of negotiation rather than authenticity. Personal creative expression of culture fits into the process of negotiating new and hybrid Mi’gmaq identity. Identity and belonging “[entail] a sense of self-awareness as an Aboriginal person and [include] whatever life experience that person has had. Being adopted as a child and searching for one’s roots is equally as valid as growing up at the foot of an Elder” (Ruffo, 7).

I view the terms “liminality” and “hybridity” as two sides of the same coin; their meanings may overlap yet both terms are distinct. Both concepts describe “in-between” spaces between cultures and are consequences of two cultures being in contact, living side by side for long periods of time and of the power struggles that ensue in such contact zones. My understanding of the distinction between these two terms connotes the notion of belonging: whereas liminality is the sense of not “fitting in” either culture, having one foot in each cultural pool while not being fully immersed in either; hybridity is accepting a transcultural identity, being able to drink from the waters of each cultural pool and having the mixture transform and fulfill your being. “McLeod considers the concept of storytelling and the correlation between ‘hybridity and survival’. For McLeod narrative is essential in that it links one generation to the next and transmits knowledge on many different levels” (Ruffo, 8). Hybridized forms allow for a culture to be a living organism, with many layers and levels, as well as interpretations. “In the face of colonial pressure, one can struggle to retain an Indigenous identity through a process of ‘hybridization’” (McLeod, 25). In other words, hybridity does not erase or diminish one’s Native culture, but allows for constant evolution and continued survival in a forward motion. As opposed to nativism that prescribes returning to the past, cultural hybridity, when it refers to a conscious form of discourse in post-colonial writing or creativity, is about refreshing the past and making our heritage relevant in the here and now. In other words, hybridity can be a strategy of
resistance or resilience, realized through a forward motion in cultural continuity. There are forms of hegemonic hybridity, especially in the form of cultural appropriation or simplistic reduction of Native cultural elements or practices for entertainment or marketing. Recently, the fashion industry’s appropriation of Native headdresses, the Washington Redskins name controversy (sports team names in general), and “Indian” Halloween costumes are still common and controversial hybrid representations of Native peoples. These facts make it impossible to idealize hybridity in Native culture, but I would argue that hybridity, as expressed in modern Mi’gmaq writing, not only depicts recognizable realities, but also emphasizes a forward motion. We cannot fully decolonize ourselves, we cannot go back to pre-colonial times and, the survival of our culture would not have to depend on either. Revitalizing our cultural heritage is relevant in the work of bringing the past into the present in appropriate and enriching ways. Simon believed in the work of contemporary Mi’gmaq writers and the reclaiming of Indigenous identity through stories. On the back flap on *Stone and Switches*, Jeannette Armstrong, director of En’owkin International School of Writing in 1994), is quoted:

In a letter I received shortly before his death, Lorne wrote, “You recently spoke to the public on the excitement you felt about the work Native writers will be doing in the future reclaiming and revitalizing our past and our cultural heritage. I feel that I am a part of this...Currently there are hardly any Micmac writers who are vigorously taking part in this effort, yet I am sure that I will be setting an example and that others will follow. What I am doing is a ripple emanating from a pearl thrown into the pool of talent. Keep throwing pearls into the pool, for they are not wasted.
4.2 Memories for the Future: Emerging Mi’gmaq Voices in Memoir and Children’s Literature

A spiritual journey to confidence and understanding is depicted in the recently published memoir, *My Mi’kmaq Mother* (2009) written by first-time Prince Edward Island author, Julie Pellissier-Lush. The young author writes about losing her Aboriginal mother to lymphatic cancer when she was just three years old. She tells short stories of her everyday life being raised by her White father, other family members, and unofficial yet kind foster families. Although being of mixed descent, Pellissier-Lush never seems to doubt her Native identity and self-ascribes herself as a strong Mi’gmaq woman in honour of the memory of her mother. The fact that her mother died at such a young age (twenty-four) has compelled her to collect stories about her mother’s life as well as to create a record of her own personal stories:

I want to be able to pass all my memories and stories of the past to my children with this collection of stories. My hope is that they will be able to share these stories with their children some day—little stories of hope in the darkest of times, little stories of love when everyone’s heart is breaking, and little stories of joy where there seem to be only endless tears. (Pellissier-Lush, “Prelude”, n.p.)

As in the ancient traditional Mi’gmaq stories passed down orally through generations, Pellissier-Lush creates a space for storytelling and the transmission of knowledge, experience, and culture in an entertaining and touching way. Although her mother’s storyline was cut short, the daughter was determined to keep her memory alive and also to grow into the role of ‘keeper of the stories’ for her own children: “Parents hold the stories of who we are, who we were growing up and how far we have come in this journey of life” (Pellissier-Lush, “Prelude”).
In traditional Mi’gmaq spirituality, the death of the body is not necessarily the end of a person. This is illustrated in ancient oral stories when certain characters that possess Power can ‘come back to life’ or can recreate themselves in a particular body, even though only a small part of that body survives. In a sense, this memoir assures the continuity of the titular mother’s life by gathering small yet powerful pieces of her life story and transmitting their teachings to others. Pellissier-Lush speaks of her mother’s strength even in the face of certain death: “It was not the death she was afraid of, it was the people she was leaving behind she was afraid for…. Everyone she left behind would have to find their own way to the past, to her culture, to who she was” (156). As proven by the success of this book which, according to the Mi’kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island, reached best seller status locally in Prince Edward Island only a few months after its publication, the author was indeed able to find her own way to her present identity while helping and inspiring others to do the same: “Knowing how fragile life is, I feel it is important to give my stories not only to my children but also to any reader who needs to know that even the shortest of lives can impact and inspire people” (“Prelude”). In this sense, My Mi’kmaq Mother inscribes itself into the same tradition as stories like “The Boy Who Visited Muini’skw” and “Jenu” because its core message is of the importance of family and belonging to a community. Because of her strong relations, Pellissier-Lush does not become a ‘lost character’ upon losing her mother and female role model. Rather she finds and harnesses her own power and identity by creating this collection of stories. These “little stories of hope in the darkest of times, little stories of love when everyone’s heart is breaking, and little stories of joy where there seems to be only endless tears” constitute the author’s survival (“Prelude”). Remembering her mother through snippets of her life story is a strategy in the author’s discovery of identity and belonging and one with local appeal.
Another Mi’gmaq author, Michael James Isaac, originally from Listuguj First Nation, has written two picture books for children in which Indigenous knowledge is transmitted. The two books entitled *How the Cougar Came to be Called the Ghost Cat* and *The Lost Teachings* depict and illustrate traditional Native teachings for today’s young generation. Both works are written and presented in a way that reflects traditional Indigenous storytelling of the past while they also convey very relatable messages for children as well as adults. *Ghost Cat* tells the story of a young cougar named Ajig that wanders away from his home and family to explore a new forest. The new animals he meets in this forest such as the otter, beaver, and deer, all flee from cougar even though “all he wanted was to be welcomed and to have friends.” Raven advises Ajig that if he wants to be accepted by the other animals in the forest that he must “not speak like a cougar, [...] not eat like a cougar, and become gentle.” Overcome by his desire to be accepted into this new group of animal friends, Ajig follows Raven’s advice. Ajig lives in peace with the animals this way until loneliness for his own kind sets in. He eventually returns where the cougars live and they are “quick to notice that Ajig looked like them but did not act like them.” The other cougars rejected Ajig for his perceived ‘difference’. Heartbroken, Ajig decides to hide in the forest and to “keep his distance from his old friends and live alone.” “To this day you can hear Ajig’s scream echo through the forest, but you will never see him. This is how the cougar came to be called ‘The Ghost Cat’.” This somewhat tragic story is about the loss of identity and sacrifice of the self for acceptance and belonging. Isaac explains that “The ghost cat story is one which I have lived” and many Native people can relate to the effacement of the cultural self in order to be accepted by others. In this sense, the story of the Ghost Cat connotes the idea of “passing” through the use of another identity. Racial passing occurs when an individual of a certain “race” can also be accepted as a member of a different racial group by virtue of physical
appearance and/or adopting cultural behaviours and conventions of the desired group. The term “was originally coined to define the experience of mixed raced individuals, particularly in America, who were accepted as a member of a different racial group, namely white” (Beck). Cultural minorities, such as Indigenous peoples, would try to bury their difference and assimilate in order to “pass” as a member of the “dominant race,” just as Ajig was advised to change his natural cougar ways/instincts in order to be accepted by the other animals. Although viewed as a means of escaping racism and gaining acceptance/privilege, passing delves the individual into a deeper state of social and cultural exclusion: “To those individuals who do pass, their experience has proved to be key in illuminating the overwhelming power of privilege – even as said privilege brushes up against other marginalization” (Beck). Racial passing inevitably leads to the effacement of the original cultural self. In this regard, the actions that lead up to Ajig’s chosen exile and his transformation into the Ghost Cat constitute a cautionary tale; warning readers of the long-term dangers of cultural assimilation and downplaying difference. The underlying message of the Ghost Cat story is that of inclusion and acceptance of difference:

Inclusion is about celebrating who you are with other people and being accepted for your own special qualities and gifts. So much can be learned from our differences. How can we learn about ourselves without interaction with other human beings? We cannot, so let’s meet people, and accept and honour them for their differences. This way no one will disappear. (Isaac, “About the Story”)

Isaac’s second book entitled The Lost Teachings is about Eagle who discovers a bundle that contains a message: “Here are the seven teachings that will bring balance, harmony, and peace for those who share and practise them” and a warning “Beware of Envy and Greed.” Eagle decides he must share this knowledge with other animals in the forest; he transmits one teaching
(Wisdom, Respect, Love, Humility, Honesty, Courage) to each animal (Owl, Beaver, Rabbit, Turtle, Moose, Bear) and keeps the last teaching of Truth for himself. However, while Eagle bestows the teachings to his brothers and sisters and makes them “knowledge keepers,” he always forgets to tell them the warning. “For many years the animals in the forest lived in balance, harmony, and peace as they shared and practised the seven teachings. Then one day a dark cloud rolled over the forest.” The dark cloud, embodied by the Wolf, represents Envy and Greed, which make the animals jealous of one another and compel them to argue. Eagle realises that the situation was his fault for forgetting to warn the animals about Envy and Greed, so, as the keeper of Truth, he sets the animals free with truth. In the end, Eagle has become forever the symbol of truth, a constant reminder of the seven teachings as he flies above the forest: “Within Aboriginal knowledge, the seven sacred teachings were passed down from generation to generation through story [...] Looking to the great Eagle, we can be reminded of the teachings, and know they are not lost but are there for us to reclaim” (Isaac, “About ‘Lost Teachings’). The Lost Teachings illustrates the importance of reconnecting and understanding the seven teachings in relation to ourselves and our communities, and hence constitutes an important site for cultural memory.

It is important to note that both books were simultaneously translated into Mi’gmaq and the stories are presented with English and Mi’gmaq text sharing the pages. These books constitute not only a means of transmitting Indigenous knowledge and values into the present and future, but also represent both a consequence of, as well as a tool for Mi’gmaq language revitalisation.

On the whole, all these examples of Mi’gmaq literature illustrate different paths that can be taken on a journey to negotiating cultural identity. Some can get lost along the way and grow
detached from their home culture or circumstances may have stemmed from feelings of anxiety or inadequacy towards their own cultural identity like Megwadesk’s inner spiritual/moral struggle or in the ways Shirley Kiju Kawi’s poems express fear that Native traditional culture and knowledge are fading away. Others find their own way despite overwhelming odds and can finally truly embrace their Native identities, like Julie Pellissier-Lush who flourished and found her own power even though she was raised without conventional mothering, and Michael James Isaac who writes traditionally-informed cultural Mi’gmaq memories with today’s young generation in mind. Overall, in all these stories, the Mi’gmaq identity is represented as a process that requires nurturing, acceptance, humility, and a sense of belonging.

4.3. The Next Steps on the Journey: Local Initiatives for the Future of Mi’gmaq Stories and Language

Throughout my thesis, I have explored the significance of Mi’gmaq stories, past and present, as both products of cultural memory and creators of memory from which readers can draw a sense of continuity as we move into the future. I began my chapters by analyzing the distant past of Mi’gmaq history and storytelling, where the roots of our cultural consciousness lie. Chapters Two and Three were essentially about challenges to Mi’gmaq cultural continuity: the issue of “timelessness” and the residential school legacy. While current perpetuations of ‘timeless’ or ‘imaginary’ Native and Mi’gmaq stereotypes halt the forward-motion of continuity by trapping our cultural existence within the (colonial) past, the implementation of residential schools intergenerational impact attempted to eradicate an identifiable future for our culture through assimilation. As a result, I conclude the fourth and final chapter with examples of some current literary and linguistic initiatives that I am aware of that build continuity in order to ensure the future of the Mi’gmaq culture. First, I have noted many times that Mi’gmaq literature is still
emergent; however, I believe, like the late Lorne Simon, that more and more Mi’gmaq authors and storytellers will surface from the pool of talent and be inspired to renew and revitalize our cultural memories through story. My home community of Listuguj, in partnership with the two other Mi’gmaq communities of the Gaspésie region (Gesgapegiag and Gespeg) developed *The Mi’gmaq Writers Award* in 2007:

The Chiefs and Councils of Gesgapegiag, Gespeg and Listuguj have decided that there is an urgent need to uncover and reward talented Mi’gmaq writers. It is imperative for the survival of the Mi’gmaq as a people that we can identify members who possess a special aptitude and a keen interest in pursuing writing as a hobby or as a career. We have been an oral people for thousands of years, a number of our ancestors were some of the greatest storytellers. This tradition must continue; however, we must be mindful of the use of the technology inherent in the written word and the benefits this can accrue to future generations of Mi’gmaq. (“About the Awards”)

The Award is divided into two age categories: under 17 years of age and 18 or older. There is not only a monetary prize (500$ and 1500$ for each category respectively), but also the winning submissions are printed book-style and distributed to the community by the local organization, Mi’gmawei Mawiomi Secretariat, of which 50 copies are given to the author for his/her personal keepsake/distribution. Since the two main criteria for submissions are community membership and Mi’gmaq content within the stories, I believe the *Mi’gmaq Writers Award* is a step in the right direction towards inspiring Mi’gmaq people to tell their own stories as well as promoting the importance of these stories at the community level.
The second local initiative constitutes the efforts in Mi’gmaq language revitalization. In Listuguj, currently, an ongoing partnership between the McGill Linguistics Department and the Listuguj Education Directorate has made great strides in bringing back the traditional language to our community. In just the past few years, Mi’gmaq language teaching has expanded beyond the classroom and into the seemingly-unlimited reach of social media. The virtual realms of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are now being used as contemporary-relevant teaching tools for Mi’gmaq language\textsuperscript{23}. Indeed, technology and Mi’gmaq language teaching/learning increasingly go hand and hand. Since 1997, the Mi’gmaq Online Dictionary has been a presence on the internet. From its first iteration that constituted seven words and two sentences, it has now grown into a significant resource and database containing over 3500 word entries\textsuperscript{24}. Developed also as a talking dictionary, each Mi’gmaq word entry includes a pronunciation guide, its translation/meaning in English, an example of its use in a sentence as well as recordings of the word being said by three different local Native speakers. Last year, another fun and innovative venture for Mi’gmaq language learning was created. With the use of Quizlet, a free online study tools and apps site, Listuguj teachers are able to upload class content for students to study, play with, and test themselves on their own time. Each entry contains virtual flashcards that display images and written words that can also be heard pronounced through pre-recorded voices. Accessible from a computer and on a smartphone, this application can then allow students to test their comprehension and spelling skills through interactive game settings.\textsuperscript{25} Like the Mi’gmaq Writers Award, the current efforts towards the revitalization of the Mi’gmaq language aim to

\textsuperscript{23} For more information and to follow Mi’gmaq language learning on social media, please visit the blog Mi’gmaq: Language and Linguistics at migmaq.org.
\textsuperscript{24} \url{http://www.mikmaqonline.org/}
\textsuperscript{25} Explore here: \url{http://quizlet.com/learnmigmaq}
reclaim a shared sense of continuity with the past, our cultural heritage, through the means of contemporary technology.

It is truly reassuring to discover a new range of contemporary stories in the selected literary works and emerging voices expressing Mi’gmaq culture, past and present. Neal McLeod, although not Mi’gmaq, sums up the Indigenous perspective on stories and cultural memory: “We are living our lives on our own terms; our stories give us voice, hope and a place in the world. To tell stories is to remember. As Indigenous people, we owe it to those still unborn to remember, so that they will have a ‘home’ in the face of diaspora” (McLeod, 33). We are not solely moving on a path in time from past to future. We are travelling with the past towards the future. We know it is because we are carrying the teachings, the cultural memories of the past in our spirits, our thoughts, our stories, and the ways we choose to live our lives that these future generations may continue to walk their paths. Being able to simultaneously behold the memories of the past as well as the visions for the future without losing our own sense of purpose, or losing sight of the role our present story plays, I believe that is the true definition of cultural continuity.
Conclusion

To be an Aboriginal person, to identify with an indigenous heritage in these late colonial times, requires a life of reflection, critique, persistence and struggle. (McMaster and Martin qtd. in Emma LaRocque, “Teaching Aboriginal Literature: the Discourse of Margins and Mainstreams” 211)

When I started the first time writing, I was trying to inspire all minorities with my work. To make others happy with my work is what I wanted to do. (Rita Joe)

The journey into the past is full of twists and turns. This study set out to declare that Mi’gmaq literature does exist and its very existence constitutes evidence of our cultural survival of colonial rule as well as proof of a thriving, evolving people with an emergent literary voice. The central goal was to show that the selected examples of Mi’gmaq stories, past and present, act as vehicles for continuity and the transmission of cultural memory.

This objective was not free of challenges. There is a reason why the bibliographical sources range from general works on Native culture, history, and literature to more focused works on Mi’gmaq authors, culture, stories and writing. Of course, contextualization of Mi’gmaq literature within Native literature and Native studies in general is important. However, it is also due to the fact that in terms of literary theory there is very little (at least that I have found to date) that has been specifically written concerning the Mi’gmaq people and culture. Since it is a relatively new area of study and a still emergent literature, finding and adapting theoretical sources from different fields of study (literature, Native studies, post-colonial studies, history, psychology, etc.) to my specific subject of research constituted a challenge.

The concept of a forward motion of analysis in the construction of Mi’gmaq culture and identity in literature that I developed is applied in the structure of the thesis chapters. “Power of
Stories” began the journey through Mi’gmaq storytelling in the past. The pre-colonial stories and colonial hi(stories) examined in this chapter provide a window onto the past, but a window that is shrouded and requires interpretation and context. Also, by instilling these stories with a present interpretation and meaning, our perspective shifts and the idealisation of a fixed past is left behind in favour of a more flexible notion of continuity of the past in the present.

Chapters Two and Three depicted different realities of the Mi’gmaq cultural and literary present. I view these two chapters as analyses of realities that Mi’gmaq people have had to and still currently face; these realities that negatively affect cultural continuity. If my definition of continuity constituted a forward motion that demonstrates how literature works with the past, then these chapters touched on obstacles to continuity. The perpetuation of myths and stereotypical images of Native and Mi’gmaq people in popular historical novels by non-Mi’gmaq authors stunt continuity when they freeze Indigenous culture within a limited scope of time and functionality. Similarly, the residential school legacy is one of rupture. It exists as a reminder of what policies and people attempted, through their assimilatory ideologies; it testifies to attempts in the past to eradicate cultural continuity and an identifiable future for Native peoples, their cultures and languages. In Chapter Two, critically analyzing contemporary non-Mi’gmaq narratives about Native/Mi’gmaq culture helps readers become more aware of the issues related to cultural authenticity and representation. While in Chapter Three, understanding Mi’gmaq residential school Survivor narratives helps us and others identify with our culture’s resilience and the role these narratives play in developing a modern voice and providing hope for the future. Both Song of Rita Joe and Out of the Depths constitute parts of a “conscious recovery project that seek to construct a usable past or countermemory in response to silencing by official history” (Ty and Sugars, 5).
In the last chapter, some of the many different paths to cultural belonging through writing were explored as our Mi’gmaq culture steps into the future. “Modern forms of Indigenous identity can and do reflect both past and present influences” (Palmater, 185). Whether it be a novel, poem, or memoir, these works carry on Indigenous knowledge and values to the benefit of present and future generations. Megwadesk’s inner struggle in *Stones and Switches* is very relatable for modern Mi’gmaq people especially when he reflects: “Wasn’t he ultimately responsible for putting ideas into his child’s head? How much, he asked himself, of the past is good to keep anyway?” (Simon, 73). As Mi’gmaq readers and writers, we quickly realize that we too are ultimately responsible for what ideas get perpetuated about our past and our culture through stories. As I found throughout my research and analysis, Mi’gmaq literature encompasses both the power and the responsibility of balancing honour with evolution and inspiration with innovation; in other words, harmonizing memories of the past and visions of the future.

Sam McKegney echoes the way I view the concepts of cultural memory and continuity when he writes: “The past is not wholly behind us—nor is it ‘holy’ behind us—just as the future is not unaffected by what we do today” (7). Traditional legends, hi(stories), remembering and healing, figuring who we are and who we want to be through reading, writing, and sharing stories all fall under the heading of literary cultural memory and continuity since they envision “imaginative visions for plausible futures of First Nations” (6). The Mi’gmaq people can always find something useful and relevant in our collective past; storytelling and literature is just one aspect of it. My goal was to present the significance of Mi’gmaq stories in relation to the construction of Mi’gmaq identity and voice. Whether they are traditional, traditionally-inspired, completely modern, or any hybrid combination thereof, stories reflect cultural memories and
capture our state of being: “A collective memory emerges from a specific location, spatially and temporally, and includes such things as a relationship to land, songs, ceremonies, language and stories….To tell a story is to link, in the moments of telling, the past to the present, and the present to the past” (McLeod, 17). Ultimately, Mi’gmaq writers telling their stories, whether fictional or not, are contributing to our culture’s collective story; our overarching and continuing hi(story).

“The present can no longer be envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past or future” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 131), we must define our presence for ourselves. We can honour the past without necessarily getting stuck in it, just as we can envision the future without having to leap blindly into it. This is why I believe that Mi’gmaq cultural expression in any form, which includes creative writing and life storytelling, is particularly efficient at tackling the subject matter of identity and belonging, from the inside out. We are moving past the idea of cultural essentialism and the thought of “some kind of inherent quality that comes with being Aboriginal, an essentialism that comes hand in hand with an ‘Indian Status Card’ so to speak” (Ruffo, 7).

My research on continuity and cultural memory has often stressed the notion of collectivity; the idea that Mi’gmaq writers stem from a shared past and present, and that their stories also share a vision for the future. However, the way I view collectivity does not exclude diversity, which is what I hopefully conveyed throughout these chapters. Each story contains its own discourses and experiences, positive and negative, about joy and pain, revealing angst and empowerment, but as a collective these stories make up the many facets of the prism that is Mi’gmaq culture. To paraphrase Palmater’s focus in her work on Native/Mi’gmaq identity in *Beyond Blood*, our Native identity is flexible enough to adapt to modern circumstance and we
can maintain connections and commitments to the past through traditions, stories and language as they continuously renew over time (184). Furthermore:

“[…] Aboriginal identity should not be regarded in a deterministic fashion, originating from traditional cultural or political attributes. Rather, Aboriginal identity is more properly understood as a relational phenomenon; one acquires it by virtue of one’s connections to others through ancestry, shared historical memories and territories, and shared commitment to one another in community over time. (Schouls qtd. in Palmater, 184)

The underlying objective to my study was not only to discover, explore and analyse stories of the Mi’gmaq people of Eastern Canada, but also to contribute to the awareness of key issues expressed in Native literature as well as to provide an overview of and hopefully encourage a wider readership for emergent Mi’gmaq literary works and authors. I also firmly believe that “our studies of Aboriginal literatures can only be advanced by the production of more Aboriginal works” (Sewell, 226).

In The Inconvenient Indian, Thomas King states that “[t]he fact of Native existence is that we live modern lives informed by traditional values and contemporary realities and that we wish to live those lives on our own terms” (266). In this sense, I strived to write this project as much on my own terms as possible. Writing this thesis has been a lengthy learning experience of putting a part of me in view that I did not even realise I had: the role that I, as a modern Mi’gmaq Native woman, have in the cultural memory and continuity of our people. I, like Mouse in Cibou, did not always believe in the significance of my own voice and, as expressed in the poetic words of Shirley Kiju Kawi, anxieties about my cultural identity and my place of belonging still
resonate within my being occasionally. I knew it was important to me to conclude this work on a personal note when I read this passage in *Song of Rita Joe*: “Don’t fear declaring anything [...] because you are the ones who know. You might not be an expert, but you do know” (96). These wise words of renowned Mi’gmaq poet Rita Joe, advice she gave to her own children, constitute an important teaching for all Mi’gmaq writers and storytellers.

It is important to remember that no one can claim to have all the right answers; it is by expressing what we do know as Mi’gmaq people, what we truly feel, and by asking questions that we can hope to grow our understanding and knowledge. Most importantly, having and developing a voice, even a whisper, is stronger than silence. We are good, we are worthy, and, most of all, we will be remembered because we will always be here. Being heard and being here is, above all else, proof of our culture’s memory and continuity.

*Happiness* is not so much in *having* as *sharing*. We make a living by what we get but we make a *life* by what we give”

(Bernie Francis, *The Language of This Land, Mi’kmaki*, 103).
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