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“If we’re going out,” dear Vicenta, “we’re going out with some guts!”: Storytelling, Indigeneity, and Felt Experience in Deborah Miranda’s *Bad Indians*

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In the memoir *Bad Indians*, Deborah Miranda retraces intimate and intergenerational accounts of colonial violence on Indigenous homelands, livelihoods, and relational ontologies in California. Miranda underscores how these instances of violence remain silenced in U.S. national historiography. By engaging with Miranda’s multi-genre storied-mosaic, in this essay I argue that *Bad Indians* uncovers narratives of refusal by California Indigenous women that ultimately attest to the ways in which Indigenous storytelling stands as a powerful conduit for anticolonial contestation and resurgence. I draw on Daniel Heath Justice’s theorizations of colonial epistemic violence and Dian Million’s “felt theory” to demonstrate the ways in which Miranda “names” acts of gender-based violence and recenters Indigenous women’s relational ontologies and felt experience (Million). In reframing gossip as trauma survivors’ testimony as truth-telling, as literature, and as theory, Miranda boldly denudes settler colonial violence as a biopolitical mechanism systematically and institutionally organizing settler nation-states. By situating present-day gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG2S) within a settler historical continuum, *Bad Indians* interconnects, across temporal-spatial frames, Indigenous women’s truth-telling and Indigenous cosmologies. It grapples with individual and collective experiences of dispossession and reconnection, grief and trauma, adaptation and resistance.

Isabel told that story like it happened to her, or to her daughter. She told that story like she could bring down the wrath of God just by finding the right words.
Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians*

I am beginning to realize that when something is that broken, more useful and beautiful results can come from using the pieces to construct a mosaic . . . . if we pick up thepieces and use them in new ways that honor their integrity, their colors, textures, stories—then we do those pieces justice, no matter how sharp they are, no matter how much handling them slices our fingers and makes us bleed.
Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians*

Introduction

In her memoir, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013), Deborah Miranda (Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation of California and Chumash) uncovers histories of California's colonization that are not readily visible in U.S. national historiography. Miranda recuperates pieces of her family's and personal memories and reassembles them into a "mosaic of stories" (Dietrich, 2018: 104). Such an assemblage sheds light on the lingering intergenerational impact of dispossession and control by the Spanish Jesuit Mission system and the Mexican and U.S. governments, respectively, on Indigenous people in California. Miranda traces the contours of her family's genealogy and the imperial and national forces that marked the encounters between her settler European ancestors and Ohlone Costanoan Esselen ancestors and how this history poignantly shaped Miranda's personal trajectory. She interweaves this narrative with a detailed account of widely unacknowledged factual histories of land dispossession, submission, enslavement, sexual violence, control and elimination exercised by non-Indigenous actors and governing powers. Miranda takes the reader on a journey in which "settler colonial biopolitical logics" have sought to repeatedly disrupt Indigenous political and social relations with ancestral land, sovereignty, body, and kin. In many instances, this process has culminated in the termination of federal recognition for California Indigenous nations.

The title *Bad Indians* works not only as provocation to stereotyped constructions of Indigeneity; the personal accounts it narrates also reflect "different forms of belonging and intimacy with a decolonial potential inherent to them" (8). Embedded in this decolonial potential is the need to recuperate asphyxiated Indigenous histories, an endeavor that for the author involves a spatiotemporal remapping of self, belonging, geography, historical oppression, and justice. This paper focuses on specific instances where Miranda narrates (Esselen-Rumsen) Isabel Meadows's account of a Native girl's rape, Vicenta, by a Carmel Mission Spanish priest, more than a hundred years after the fact. Seeking to contemplate the multi-genre and historical scope of this memoir, this study draws on interdisciplinary theoretical questions advanced by Indigenous scholarship, feminist theories, Settler Colonial Studies, and Cultural Studies. I argue that Indigenous women's stories interconnect across time and space[1]. I explore how these women encounter and counter the erasure of individual and collective experiences of gender-based violence, grief, trauma, adaptation, and healing within a larger frame of settler colonialism. Building on the concept of "felt theory" (Million, 2009), I aim to show how "felt experience"—the embodied trauma/resilience Indigenous individuals carry intergenerationally— is often not translated institutionally as factual or objective testimony to historical trauma. I start from the premise that Miranda's renditions of Vicenta's account through her reading of Isabel Meadows's good gossip interweaves intergenerational testimonies of "Native survivance" (Vizenor, 2008: 1) that attest to the modus operandi of what Patrick Wolfe calls a "settler logic of elimination" (*apud* Dietrich, 2018: 8).

This essay also seeks to understand the impact of the genealogies of violence that Miranda retraces in her memoir. In particular, I look at how gender-based violence emerges in these

[1]While my focus on gender-based violence in this article mostly refers to experiences affecting women either identified as or self-identifying as "Indigenous women," I acknowledge that gender-based violence affects Indigenous Womxn, Femmes, and Gender Non-Conforming individuals as pervasively and brutally as cis-gender Indigenous women and girls. Such violence has been strenuously denounced by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn and Girls, 2Spirit and Trans (MMIWG2ST) campaigns in Canada and in the United States. For more information, visit the Indigenous Kinship Collective at https://indigenouskinshipcollective.com/mmiwgt2s.

women's accounts as a settler colonial tool of elimination, assimilation, and oppression of Indigenous people. I demonstrate that, by giving center stage to Indigenous women's survivor testimonies and felt experiences, Miranda sheds light on the multilayered complexities of California Indigenous histories. Whereas, on the surface, white dominant culture and settler colonial forces may appear to have superseded Indigenous social and political relations to land, more-than-human life and people, in the memoir *Bad Indians*, storytelling embodies forms of truth-telling that attest to histories of Indigenous continual resilience. Elucidating the saliency of such processes, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) emphasizes how Dene storytellers engage in the "act of telling one's own story as a practice of affirming our experiences, connecting to the ones that have come before us and our homelands and speaking our own truths on our own terms" (Simpson, 2018: s.p.). This call for comprehensive social redefinitions, connectivity, and relationality is central to Miranda's work. She emphasizes the importance of seeing herself and her life story as a mosaic. Her memoir is a multilayered and multifaceted assemblage of images, facts, poems, and histories. Echoing Simpson, Miranda's memoir comprises a palimpsest of memories and erasures to be recuperated, re-narrated, and rewritten from the standpoint of individual and collective experience under settler colonialism.

Cherokee writer and scholar Daniel Heath Justice has emphasized the importance of naming the types of violence inflicted on Indigenous peoples. In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Justice argues that "we must name our violent history to understanding its continuing effects" (2018: 12). Miranda's personal accounts boldly denude the intimate modes through which violence itself features as a key mechanism of the "biopolitical logics" organizing settler colonial societies (Dietrich, 2017: 67). In this light, Miranda's retelling of experiences of intergenerational gender-based violence reveals persistent forms of Indigenous resistance against settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy. Similarly, Simpson explains how difficult it is for Indigenous women's personal accounts to gain due legitimacy. In the preface to *Northern wildflower: A memoir* by Catherine Lafferty (Yellowknives Dene First Nations), Simpson praises Lafferty's life writing and underscores that "[m]emoir is not an easy genre, particularly for Indigenous women. We rarely get the opportunity to tell our stories, and when we do, we are often met with racism, patriarchy, and judgment. […] I can't think of any other young Dene women who have written memoirs, and that makes this story all the more important" (2018: s.p.). Miranda's endeavor to write about her family's background and trajectories as Ohlone and Costanoan-Esselen people also speaks to this challenge. Saliently, Simpson clarifies the intricacies entailed in this telling: "[f]rom an artistic standpoint, it can be difficult to tell the story of our lives to audiences that may not fully understand the colonial context that is responsible for the violence in our lives" (s.p.). In bringing Simpson's views in conversation with Athabascan scholar Dian Million's "felt theory," as outlined below, it will become clear that Miranda's storied mosaic elevates and gives visibility to Indigenous women's testimonies and their felt experience under conditions of settler colonial violence.

As a key counterpoint, however, Simpson adds that, in her memoir, "Catherine does an excellent job of truth telling while not succumbing to a victim narrative" (s.p.). Tracing these shattered accounts in Miranda's memoir reveals an investment in deconstructing narratives of victimhood. As Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor explains, "[s]urvivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry" (2008: 1). In this sense, *Bad Indians* gives testimony to what "Native survivance" is: "an active presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion" that is "greater than the right of a survivable name." *Bad Indians* enacts survivance through the "continuance of

stories," not necessarily always in an overtly reactionary mode, "however pertinent" (1). Miranda's keen writing style ranges from piercingly sharp to gingerly prosaic to lustily poetic. It sets off to do what "[s]urvivance stories" do: "honor[ing] the humor and tragic wisdom of the situation, not the market value of victimry" (Vizenor, *apud* Madsen, 2008: 61). Vizenor's own stories resonate with what Miranda infuses in her storytelling: "tricky not tragic, ironic nor heroic, and not comfy representations of dominance" (Vizenor, *apud* Madsen, 2008: 61). As I will show in the following sections, *Bad Indians* and Miranda's oeuvre as a whole, showcase that, faced with a settler "colonial apocalypse" (Justice, 2018: 5), Indigenous women have strategized ways to contest settler logics through subversive acts, such as "gossiping." Indigeneity has not only survived but it has resisted colonial apocalypse through strategic refusal and adaptation by simultaneously reimagining and forging alternate Indigenous futurities.

1. The politics of counternarratives: "Felt Theory"

As a part of larger Indigenous cosmologies, Justice reminds us that Indigenous literatures are also agents of contestation, recovery, and resurgence. Indigenous testimonies, such as the ones outlined in the present study, also attest to the power of storytelling as strategies of resistance. Justice affirms that storytelling offers insightful ways to engage the questions of how "we learn to be human," and how "we become good ancestors" (28). Accordingly, he highlights that Indigenous storytelling and Indigenous literatures have the potential to foster a mindful reconnection of human kin relations and relationality with more-than-human life and Indigenous ontologies beyond fixed temporal spatialities. Notably, this nuanced and multilayered braiding can also be traced in Miranda's storied mosaic.

These processes are part and parcel of the intergenerational, individual and communal, felt knowledge/experience that Athabascan social historian Dion Million defines as "felt theory." A term that recognizes the legitimacy of Indigenous pain and their testimony of trauma as credible and concrete evidence of colonial violence. Million raises the question of what counts as scholarship, theory, and theorizing. She challenges the notion that storytelling and affect do not count as research and asks: what is the role of stories – of survivors' testimonies and histories of trauma – in revealing the state of the world, such as the colonial systems running across Native communities? Exchanged through oral traditional performance, painful secrets, art and poetry, academic settings, survivors' testimonies are powerful; they operate as "indictments of a colonial system" (2014: 33).

In the 1990s, Indigenous people stood up to white male entitlement in academia, spoke out about heteropatriarchy inside their communities, and delivered one of the first public testimonies on their experience of child abuse in Canada's residential school systems. Dian Million argues that their "narratives were political acts in themselves that in their time exploded the measured 'objective' accounts of Canadian (and U.S.) colonial histories" (54). She argues that:

> Narratives serve the same function as any theory, in that they are practical vision. Not least, Indigenous narratives are also emotionally empowered. They are informed with the affective content of our experience. The felt experience of Indigenous experience in these Americas is in our narratives and that has made them almost unrecognizable to a Western scholarship that imagines itself objective. (34)

Across time and space, such individual experiences are interlaced through an "archipelago of stories" that transcends "historical specificity." As a First Nations woman, Million says she feels a *déjà vu* when she looks into histories of oppression across time and space: because stories carry lingering truths that are larger than statistics, yet routinely made invisible by them. She powerfully attends to Justice's questions about the imperative need of *becoming* good ancestors, as she affirms that Indigenous "stories, unlike data, contain the affective legacy of our experiences. They are a felt knowledge that accumulates and becomes a force that empowers stories that are otherwise separate to become a focus, a potential for movement" (32-3). This view demonstrates the driving force behind stories in reconnecting Indigenous people with each other, with ancestors, and with the land. This is the kind of work that Million, Justice, Simpson, Lafferty, Vizenor, and Miranda engage within their own storytelling.

In her memoir, Miranda attends to historical redress by "naming" the genealogies of violence that she retraces in the archive, and which marked her family histories under imperial and settler colonial regimes. In doing so, she employs a nuanced "indigenous reading" to this archival material. This mode of reading allows her to see histories of gender-based violence that are "full of grief" and pain through a lens that "enriches Native lives with meaning, survival, and love, which points to the important role of archival reconstruction in developing a robust Two-Spirit tradition today" (2010: 255-6). As Justice emphasizes, Indigenizing ways of reading and writing textual and non-textual materials also helps restore forms of relational kin among Indigenous individuals, communities, ancestors, and more-than-human life. This process galvanizes in-depth decolonial healing through the re(dis)covery of Indigenous bodily and felt experiences as well as of love, erotics, and queerness against the grain of intergenerational gender-based violence.

Miranda builds on Million's theory of felt experience as she seeks to indigenize and decolonize the archive. Million's approach on the testimonies of intergenerational trauma linked to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) led by the Canadian government highlights the importance of radically shifting the ways in which Western societies understand how Indigenous people have experienced historical trauma. Million proposes "felt theory" as a necessary alternative to "affect theory" and "historic trauma theory," as the latter may be implicated in the institutionalization and moralization of trauma discourse. The Western framing of medical treatment contributes to maintaining an institutionalized, "paternalistic control of Indigenous identities" that "distract attention from the state's 'promise of justice'" (Miranda, 2016: 379). Ultimately, these initiatives bring survivors into a catch-22: while speaking out publicly purportedly confers these individuals empowerment, the institutionalization of their testimonies through such standardized theoretical frames reduces their individual and collective experiences to a position of victimhood that necessitates nothing more than white settler benevolent aid. In this sense, as Million contends, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation frame purportedly aims to address Indigenous intergenerational trauma and the state's intricate colonial history. Yet, it hinders the fulfillment of Indigenous agency, autonomy, sovereignty, and, ultimately, healing. Through decades of exposure to state-sponsored Christian residential schools, Indigenous communities have experienced what the TRC has described as "cultural genocide," perpetrated through acts such as child removal and forced assimilation, physical, psychological and sexual abuse, starvation, forced labor, and death. According to

these testimonies, this is a factual history that has long been kept quiet by the state and the commons.[2]

Miranda and Million show how civil society and the legal and medical state apparatus have reasons to not effectively provide responses to biopolitical structural inequality, institutionalized racism, gender-based violence against Indigenous individuals, nor to promote transformative and restorative justice among First Nations. By the same token, on the flipside of this seeming inefficiency by the state in addressing these issues, lie the settler colonial logics that aim at disrupting Indigenous sovereignty and ancestral relationship to land. Justice must include, as Miranda explains, "redresses to violent crimes" and "focus on legal processes, land, water, and subsistence conflicts" linked to legacies of colonialism, all of which entails conversations that white state institutions astutely avoid (2016: 376-8). This is where "felt theory" comes into play as redress to the complexities inherent in historic trauma and the telling of it. A felt theory approach offers tools to attend to survivors' testimonies and help them to "push[…] into the pain" – "which is the *only* way through that allows preservation of an Indigenous identity." As such, felt theory opens up a space to validate and analyze the strategies of survival and emotional knowledge that originate from experiences of trauma. Moreover, it deliberately moves away from victimology and focuses instead on colonialism as an ongoing presence that produces "*felt* affective relationship(s)." In this context, settler colonialism is recast as an "emotional blow"–with even stronger collateral damage than "historical and psychological wounds" (Miranda, 2016, emphasis original).

As Million and Miranda recast settler colonialism as felt experience, they create spaces for *grieving* that which has remained *ungrieved* for too long by settler society.[3] They are: spaces for *feeling* and *articulating* grief and pain; spaces for anger, irony, and humor; spaces for intimate reconnection and healing. This perspective not only sheds a different light on individual and collective experiences of traumatic histories, but it also reveals a common resonance in the ways that Meadows, Miranda, and Million engage with intergenerational trauma under settler colonialism. We might ask, therefore, whether the temporal-spatial nexus these storytellers engage comes to embody and constitute itself a space of therapeutic healing. Is their storytelling medicine? Is it theory? Is it science? Is it politics? Is it justice? The writings of these Indigenous women foreground Indigenous continuity as they validate Indigenous lived experiences, memory, emotions, and voice (Miranda, 2016: 377, emphasis original).

[2] In 2021, investigations that uncovered "hundreds of unmarked graves of children who may have died at the schools of disease or neglect, or even been killed" challenge the silence of liberal state institutions over Canada's colonial legacies (Austen & Bracken, 2021). Before announcing her departure from Canada's House of Commons, the New Democratic Party member for Nunavut, Mumilaaq Qaqqaq (Inuk) talked about how she had been racially profiled by the Parliament's security and how she felt she "didn't belong" there. She remarked that "[t]he reality is that this institution and the country has been created off the backs, trauma and displacement of Indigenous people" (Austen, 2021).

[3] I draw on Judith Butler's politics of mourning and grieving in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* Butler draws on Achille Mbembe, Theodor W. Adorno, Jay Bernstein, among other critics, as she considers how the nation-state operates a bio/geo/necropolitical system of "precarization" of what it classifies as non-conforming human life and how it ultimately produces "ungrievable" deaths (25-6; 31-2).

2. "Feelings are Theory": Storying Felt Experience in Isabel Meadows

Isabel Meadows was born in Carmel Valley, California, in 1846. Miranda's family is related to her through tribal connections and marriage. Isabel's mother was an Esselen-Rumsen Indian and her father was an English whaler. Her grandparents, her parents, her extended family, and her community were connected to the Carmel Mission (1770 to 1835), which was a part of the Spanish Jesuit missionary system established in California and in the American Southwest by the Spanish Empire. Starting in the sixteenth century, Spanish missionaries also installed missions across Latin America, from Mexico to Brazil. In the 1930s, Isabel moved to Washington, D.C. to work as a "consultant" for ethnologist John Peabody Harrington, who was acquainted with Isabel's family. Harrington knew that Isabel spoke the Rumsen language and "recognized her exceptionally astute knowledge of tribal culture and languages in the Monterey/Carmel/Big Sur area" (Miranda, 2016: 374).

In her accounts, Isabel relays to Harrington what Deborah Miranda frames as "a spider's web" of enmeshed "relationships, remembrances" as well as "good gossip" (374-5; 381). In Miranda's exploration of Harrington's archival material, she emphasizes that Isabel's storytelling "flipped" the self-interested, as-told-to frame applied by social scientists' salvage anthropology that sought to archive "disappearing" Indigenous cultural and traditional knowledges. She alludes to acts of Native cultural appropriation and "forced acculturation" throughout the memoir, showing that they are a part of the genealogies of imperial and settler violence that she retraces in *Bad Indians*. She elucidates this idea by deconstructing, for example, ethnographic and dehumanizing renditions of California Native women in the chapters entitled "Digger Belle" and "The Belles of San Luis Rey" (2012: s.p.). Isabel was aware of the risks for her community in sharing "insider's knowledge." At the same time, she was aware of the risks that sharing her insider knowledge implicated. Yet, as Miranda conjectures, she might have decided to do so for the sake of her community's continuity. As such, she seized an opportunity to capitalize on Harrington's expertise that allowed her to deposit and preserve knowledges that would be necessary for future generations. Her storytelling was grounded in self-determination, autonomy, agency, and felt experience. For Miranda, not only did Isabel's testimonies establish her as a knowledge keeper but also as a "storyteller, scholar, and cultural activist" (2016: 374).

But what was Isabel Meadows speaking about/to/against? What was she resisting and advocating for? Indeed, Miranda leads us to see Isabel as an insider who knew the risks salvage ethnology posed to Indigenous communities. In the same way, she might have been aware of the cultural exploitation of Indigeneity that ran rampant in the early twentieth century and before. Meadows might have been aware, perhaps, that she was one of the last survivors who could retrace the sweeping and succeeding colonial forms of violence by the Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. American imperial and settler colonial systems in California (374). In this sense, Harington's offer signified a possibility to create a fissure in the system through which she could give visibility to California Natives' traditions and histories and potentially help to unleash a process of decolonization in the future. This was an opportunity for her, as a survivor and witness of settler colonial apocalypse, to narrate the cycles of genocide, historical trauma, and intergenerational violence that her community (has) relentlessly endured "across three waves of invasion" (Miranda, 2012: s.p.).

This settler colonial invasion– to which Miranda's writing attests – is ongoing; it works incessantly to elide Indigenous presences in California and across the U.S., more broadly, through anti-Indigenous national policies, mythmaking, misinformation, amnesia, and denial.

Part of this colonial erasure reveals the unwillingness of the U.S. settler society to come to terms with the post-traumatic conditions reproduced by the settler nation-state which cut across discriminated, disenfranchised, and racially marginalized groups, including Indigenous people, African Americans, Latinx individuals, Asian Americans, LGBTQI2+ individuals, and individuals with disabilities.[4] Multigenerational trauma registers on physiological and psychic levels, a condition that intimately affects individuals and communities which René Dietrich describes as "embodied memories" (2016: 138), and which Miranda links to recent studies in epigenetics[5] (Dietrich, 2018: 112). This condition reveals how colonial legacies affect Indigenous ways of being and Indigenous communities intergenerationally.

Settler colonial policies seek to fragment Indigenous individual subjectivities and collective identities. Through biopolitical regulation of Indigenous lifeways, these policies aim at disappearing Indigeneity and depoliticizing Indigenous resistance by compromising social and political realities, which Dietrich describes as "embodied knowledge and practices" rooted in Indigenous relationalities (2016: 138). These lie at the core of sociopolitical relationships among land, more-than-human life, ancestors, and people: "Indigenous societies and polities [are] made up through their interdependent and non-hierarchical relationality" (Dietrich, 2017: 70-1). The traumatic effects of these ruptures are visibly identifiable in the accounts relayed by survivors of intergenerational trauma. High rates of mental health issues and physical illnesses among Indigenous individuals are correlated with experiences of microaggression, racism, dispossession, precarization, marginalization, and state violence lived throughout national historiography.[6] Vicenta's, Meadows,' and Miranda's testimonies lay bare the subversive permeability and malleability of Indigenous life in settler colonial California. Native individuals and families have forcefully embodied and responded to the imposition of colonial Catholic discipline, moral and legal principles, and elusive identity codes that collide with Indigenous cultural and social orders. Against this backdrop, Indigenous narratives feature as sites of contestation.

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[4] Through these lenses, historical erasure can be seen as necessary to hide the main prerogative of the settler colonial territorial project: Indigenous dispossession and replacement to better "control resources, [land,] and [racialized] labor" (Pulido, 2018: 2). Dietrich explains that the settler state withholds Western-centric heteronormative whiteness as the human default against which intersecting categories are created to be regulated–e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sex, nationality, language, religion, age, and disability–through geo- and biopolitical means (2016: 138). Protected by law, ultimately, these processes guarantee the state's political authority and sovereignty (Pulido, 2018: 2).

[5] Miranda explains in her interview with Dietrich that "it's not that disease didn't exist precontact, but there are ways in which colonization affects you down at the genetic level. There is a whole new way of thinking about that in epigenetics, in which the genes don't actually change, but the ways in which the genes respond to certain things change, definitely" (Dietrich, 2018).

[6] Recent studies have shown that mortality and infection rates among groups that public health practitioners call "vulnerable populations," such as Indigenous peoples in Canada (Spence *et al*., 2020), in the U.S. and in Brazil, along with other racially and economically disenfranchised groups, have been "disproportionately higher than Whites" during the Covid-19 pandemic. Importantly, these statistics reflect not only a nation-state's response that has "disastrously fallen short" but the longstanding settler biopolitical logics of elimination that organizes the state and intersects these groups distinctively (Weine *et al*., 2020).

3. "Dear Vicenta": "Isabel Told that Story like It Happened to Her"

In "Dear Vicenta," Miranda pulls a circular thread that crosses time and space as she uncovers, almost one hundred years later, Meadows's revelation about Vicenta Gutierrez's rape at Carmel Mission in California:

> [W]hen [Vicenta was] a girl [she] went to confession one evening during Lent, and Father Real wanted her, to grab her over there in the church. And next day there was no trace of the padre there, and he was never seen again. He probably fled on horseback in the night. Some said he fled to Spain. He was a Spaniard. He grabbed the girl and screwed her. The girl went running to her house, saying the padre had grabbed her.—Isabel Meadows. (2012: s.p.)

Besides recreating this traumatic episode, Miranda writes a letter addressed to Vicenta. In a comforting and intimate way, she tells Vicenta: "I'm sorry, because I don't know what to tell you. I could try to be funny and say, 'Hey, guess that priest gave up celibacy for Lent, huh?' Or I could go for the crude wink, 'I know what you gave up, honey!'" In this passage, Miranda shows her concern for a traumatic episode that happened long ago in a way that is still disconcerting to her since it refers to an act of sexual violence and abuse that resonates with her own personal experiences as a child and as a lesbian adult. She goes on to ponder if she should be more satirical, instead of taking it too seriously, by simply joking about it in an attempt to detract herself and Vicenta from the inflicted/ing wound (s.p.). Miranda challenges the notion that normalizing such acts of violence and merely seeking radical acceptance can help with the pain:

> That's how I've learned to deal with it. That's how I talk about what happened to me as a kid. I mean, it happens all the time, right? It's not just that we're women; we're Indian women…poor Indian women. The statistics on *that* are predictable. Thirty-four percent of us raped; one in three! And ninety percent of the rapists are non-Indian". (s.p., emphasis original).

In this passage, Miranda reveals that the rates of sexual violence against Indigenous women are the highest among women nationwide. Yet, as Indigenous activists and scholars, including Sarah Deer (Muscogee Creek Nation), Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca), Melanie Yazzie (Dené) emphasize, these numbers remain normalized/invisibilized in U.S. rape statistics.[7] Meanwhile, as Miranda suggests, Indigenous women and their communities are left to "learn[...] to deal with such" pain on their own. Learning about such violent histories can be an utterly painful process and grappling with such trauma requires both individual and collective accountability.

Vicenta's story reveals not only the appalling testimony of colonial gender-based violence to which she was subjected, but it also opens a window into the overarching logic of settler

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[7] For more information on these and related topics, see: S. Deer (2015) *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*. University of Minnesota Press; M. Goeman and J. N. Denetdale (2009). Native Feminisms: Legacies, Interventions, and Indigenous Sovereignties. *Wicazo Sa Review*, 24(2), 9–13; N. Estes, M. Yazzie, J.N. Denetdale, D. Correia, R. Cody., & B. Benallie (2020). *Red Nation Rising: From Border Town Violence to Native Liberation* (First). PM Press.

biopolitical control in which gender, sex, and sexualities are regulated and used as instruments to disrupt people's kin relations, dehumanize Native women and men, non-cisgender individuals, and their families. According to such a logic, gendered violence can carve a deep wound within individuals' subjectivities –making them and their communities vulnerable and "conquerable." Vicenta's story, therefore, is emblematic of a patriarchal colonial system that has intimately governed the lives of California Natives. Not only has such a system impacted Indigenous forms of marital and gender relations, language and forms of subsistence, but it has also penetrated the intimate levels of individuals' minds and bodies, deeply affecting one's sense of personhood and peoplehood, through a disruptive genocidal process, as Dietrich suggests (2016: 138). Miranda contends, nevertheless, that this is not the whole story. She writes, "Vicenta. If that was your name, the padre should have been more careful about giving it to you. Even in Spanish, it means 'conquers'" (2012: s.p.).

As she unveils Vicenta's story in *Bad Indians*, Miranda brings to light forms of violence against Indigenous people that have been erased in U.S. national historiography and that, as Daniel Heath Justice argues, must be named. Miranda does so by underscoring both Vicenta's tacit refusal to be silenced and Isabel's impetus to speak up. In describing these episodes, the author invokes and recreates the felt experience and embodied experience shaped by Vicenta's and Isabel's past performative acts. By bringing forth her own embodied memories, corporal and felt experience, Miranda thus powerfully reanimates these performative acts in her multigenre mosaic. She brings to light what Diana Taylor calls "embodied practices" as performance, epistemologies, languages, images, oral narratives, and traditions that the Western archive marginalizes or invizibilizes. Given its peripheral cultural position, this "repertoire" represents resistance against structural power (Taylor, 2003: 21-3). Both Miranda and Million reactivate and contribute to this repertoire of embodied practices; in doing so, they engage with genealogies of resistance and subversion within and outside academia through a process that privileges Indigenous healing, transformation, and resurgence across generations:

> Isabel preserves and praises Vicenta's brave act and exhorts women of her generation, and the women who will one day read Harrington's notes, to claim that kind of self-awareness. We are valuable human beings, she tells other Native women: our bodies are sacred, and we have a right to speak out against violence and violation. (s.p.)

Miranda's accounts connect past and present as she refers to rape statistics in the present tense: "ninety percent of the rapists *are* non-Indian" ("Dear Vicenta," *Bad Indians*, my emphasis). Vicenta's sexual assault is not an isolated case. This excerpt indexes how systemic colonial gender-based violence has taken different shapes across time and space. Miranda situates Vicenta's story of sexual violence within a colonial context that replicates itself in boarding or residential schools – as extensively exposed in the reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada, in the sterilization of Indigenous women and in the denunciations by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited People campaign.[8]

[8] MMIWG2S across the United States' and Canada's Indigenous territories have been often eschewed from national homicide and rape statistics. As the Canadian National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) final report has revealed, colonial gender-based violence against Indigenous women, girls, and also 2SLGBTQQIA (two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual,

Yet, Miranda reveals instances of intergenerational violence that she experienced in the form of sexual and psychological abuse in her own life. As we learn from her memoir, Miranda's parents had an affectionate but intensively unstable relationship. Miranda's father suffered from alcoholism, and he was often violent and abusive–including sexually abusive to her. The trauma Miranda's father endured in his life impacted Miranda's own childhood and adult life. Importantly, these legacies do not merely elucidate the after effects of a colonial apocalypse. On a personal level, Miranda's life, as much as the life of her ancestors – such as her estranged father, her settler-descended mother, Isabel Meadows, and Vicenta – but also the lives of Indigenous authors who inform this present study such as Dian Million, Leanne B. Simpson, Daniel H. Justice, along with their families and communities – are in distinct ways witnesses and survivors of historic trauma across distinct geographies and temporalities engulfed by imperial and settler colonial regimes.

Like these writers, in her work Miranda shows that Indigenous communities and individuals have survived settler apocalypse across and beyond colonial systems that aim to eliminate Indigeneity by relegating it to a fixed and romanticized past. Rather, Indigenous people have maintained their cultures, knowledge systems, and connections to language and place through constant adaptation, transformation, and strategizing. Such strategies are deeply rotted in traditional knowledge and they make possible dynamic forms of refusal to settler norms by privileging Indigenous survivance and, as Kyle Whyte (Potawatomi) calls it, "Indigenous resurgence" (2017: 67).

The assemblage and publication of *Bad Indians* into a memoir represents the culmination of multiple embodied practices and acts of resistance by Native women. As it gives continuity to these stories in the present, Miranda's writing becomes an act of resistance itself:

> Isabel seemed to understand that in a perilous time, Vicenta's narrative had to enter into that written realm, leave the community of Indian women in order to return to us someday—as it turns out, almost two hundred years after it happened. To me, this means that Isabel herself knew the power of story, and believed in our survival—in the future, there would be Indian women who would need this story! (2012: s.p.)

These embodied practices resist the archival erasure that shapes collective amnesia. They uncover the rigidity of U.S. settler society in recognizing Indigenous knowledge, felt experiences, and testimonies, as factual history, critical theory, science, and ethnography.

Miranda uncovers the histories of Native families' facing genocidal violence under shifting government systems in California in ways that debunk settler heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, meritocracy, and ableism embedded in Judeo-Christian national narratives about binary gender normativity, Manifest Destiny, Western expansion, the "vanishing Indian," and the American Dream. Discourses that reveal themselves as nothing more than "fake news" since they not only elide but deliberately distort and manipulate the genocidal legacies of

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transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual) individuals has been largely perpetrated by white cis-gender men and sanctioned by the state through legal bureaucracy, ineffective investigation, and refusal of the criminal justice system to punish the perpetrators ("National Inquiry"). In the United States, Indigenous activists, leaders, and politicians have been pushing for decades for public officials to support legislation to undertake an official inquiry into cases of MMIWG2S as well, with modest legal achievements ("Why Are Missing").

"America(s)" historiography itself. Notably, Miranda criticizes the fact that violence against Indigenous women has become a topic of academic study. From studies on missionization to child removal, eugenics, and MMIWG2S, Miranda argues, "Scholars write dissertations, [and] sexual violence against colonized women is a real field of study, and what happened in the dark confessional or between the pews is suddenly outrageous, a weapon of colonization, not a shameful wound" (2012: s.p.). In criticizing this state of affairs, Miranda calls attention to the ways Indigeneity remains subject to objectification, commodification, and victimization even in liberal academic fields that seek to denounce colonial gender-based violence. Such gestures ultimately fail to denounce such violence as they recenter the settler narrative while muting Native perspectives. Referring to Isabel's story, Miranda explains:

> By not following the rules, the rules that said we don't talk about this stuff, we don't name names, we don't tell outsiders. Maybe she figured, "What's left to lose?" Everyone was telling her that extinction was right around the corner, and it sure as hell felt like it. So why not tell the whole story? Why just tell the stuff they can analyze in a monograph, simplify for their children when they learn about the exotic animals that used to live here? (s.p.)

Miranda's remarks might suggest that academic research – as much as journalism and the media –can be implicated in anti-Indigenous violence, even when their focus is colonial violence itself. As liberal democratic institutions, one might ask to what extent their public duty should also translate into accountability and demands for an effective transformation of anti-Indigenous public policies. To what extent should scholarship and news reports be a catalyst for transformational change of the white settler status quo? To what extent does research reproduce the same kinds of deadly silences that kept Harrington's field notes on Meadows testimonies of colonial violence mute for more than a century; that is, until Miranda recuperated them in the historical archive? Conversely, we might ask, to what extent are the voices of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited peoples and their communities allowed to enact a self-governance of their bodies as they reveal their felt experiences in academic research? How does ethnography today flip the lingering dominant narratives that objectify, exoticize and marginalize Indigenous people in mainstream white culture? How far is academic research from the kinds of representation of California Native women a century ago, such as the voyeuristic and dehumanizing renditions of the "Digger Belle" and the photograph of the "The Belles of San Luis Rey" that Miranda deconstructs in *Bad Indians*?

Miranda's critique emphasizes that, although statistics on sexual violence sharply erase the rate of disparities among Indigenous populations and other groups, this data reveals the alarming ways in which white society maintains Indigenous women as targets for elimination. "Erasure is a bitch, isn't it?," she asks rhetorically in her letter to Vicenta. This episode reveals a disconcerting degree of complicity by the white society to biopolitical policies that, as Indigenous intellectuals like Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, have suggested, keep in motion an Indigenous genocide. By the same token, the nation-state covertly acknowledges that Native women are the bearers of the next Indigenous generations, the future custodians of and/or claimants to Indigenous territories and resources under the jurisdiction of the U.S.[9]

[9] For more information, see: R. Dunbar-Ortiz (2014). *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Beacon Press; D. A. Miranda (2010). The extermination of the Joyas: Gendercide in Spanish

Miranda's remarks also illuminate that Vicenta's and Isabel's courageous testimonies of violence registered in Harrington's field notes did not spark much–if any–interest for researchers and intellectuals at the time Isabel revealed them. For over a century, universities and cultural institutions rushed to catalogue "authentic" cultural and linguistic Indigenous practices and women's customs before a purported "Indigenous disappearance." Data mining, supported by salvage anthropology, ranged from archeological desecration of Indigenous sacred sites to the collection and analysis of Indigenous bones in university departments and museums.[10] Influenced by mainstream feminist trends in research, data collection has been focused on the impacts of eugenicist policies, including sterilization of Indigenous women:

> Now it's all legitimate research, figuring out how women survived the missions, how many rapes, how many self-induced abortions, how many infanticides, the Native medicines for birth control, the ravages of syphilis that caused sterility, and worse. (s.p.)

In these passages, Miranda suggests that scientific premises and methods applied on Indigenous groups still enhance institutional power by means of continued colonial exploitation of Indigeneity. It is worth questioning, in this sense, why colonial violence against Indigenous women has had little resonance in academia and civil society, despite the scholarship on the topic. Echoing Miranda, feminist scholars like Leanne Simpson, Dian Million, Rita Dhamoon, Eve Tuck (Unangax̂), Sarah Hunt (Kwagu'ł) and Audra Simpson (Kahnawake Mohawk) have stressed that "whitestream and other feminist movements" have often failed to acknowledge the "intersections among settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and heteropaternalism" (Arvin *et al.*, 2013). Anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and even anti-colonial feminist movements in North America and on a global scale need to account for how their own struggles are implicated in Indigenous women's past and present histories under settler colonialism.[11] Notably, this is an important process of accountability that can create networks of solidarity across intersecting oppressions – networks that are fundamental in addressing urgent issues such as white supremacy, structural racism, climate change, environmental injustice, Indigenous sovereignty, and human rights violations.

Notwithstanding the systematic attempts to obliterate Indigeneity by white dominant discourses and federal policies, Isabel's accounts give a name to Vicenta's story and recover its

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California. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *16* (1–2), 253–284. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2009-022.

[10] A recent decision at the University of California, Berkeley, elucidates this idea. The name of anthropologist Alfred Louis Kroeber was removed from a building following pressures from local activists, including local Indigenous advocates whose unceded territories are occupied by the university. For more information, see: N. Brennan, N. (n.d.). *Justice for Ishi: UC removes hall's name*. *Indian Country Today*. Available online: https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/justice-for-ishi-uc-removes-halls-name [Consulted on: 1/08/2021].

[11] These contentions also open up possibilities for solidarity and alliances because these struggles are "differently and differentially implicated in the conditions that intersectionally structure and uphold a matrix of domination" (Dhamoon, 2015: 29). See: J. A. Byrd (2011). *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. University of Minnesota Press; S. Speed (2019). *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State*. The University of North Carolina Press.

human, historic, and political value: "And she used your name. She made certain we knew which family you belonged to, connected you with your brother" (Miranda, 2012: s.p.). Therefore, Isabel does not position Vicenta as a victim, but rather courageously foregrounds Vicenta's agency and self-governance against the violence of patriarchal disciplining and sexual exploitation by a figure of maximum authority in the community. Miranda elucidates this instance by reporting "back from the future" to Vicenta:

> Isabel didn't forget you, though. One hundred years after the padre raped you in the church, Isabel told your story to Harrington. She told it like it happened yesterday. And she was mad. She used Spanish and a brutal English to make sure Harrington understood. Vicenta, she used the priest's name. "Padre Real." (s.p.)

Vicenta's courage to tell her family the story of her rape and *who* had done it led the priest to run away from that community, an escape from his unlawful act and from its testimony. These passages showcase how the courage to speak out against colonial injustices may have implications that go far beyond one's individual actions, as Miranda explains:

> Isabel remembered your story, and she told it to Harrington, and he told it to me, and I'm telling it to everyone I can find.
> You told first.
> Maybe that's why Isabel felt, of all the stories she knew about violation and invasion and loss, your story was the one to tell Harrington. She was proud of you. She respected you for refusing to shut up. She liked that you weren't a good Mission Indian. Maybe she even thought future Indian women could learn from you.
> That 34 percent hasn't gone away since I started this letter. (s.p.)

Vicenta's telling of her sexual assault was disseminated across the community as gossip and became known by Isabel Meadows's family. As Miranda explains, Meadows's narratives connect individuals collectively, geographically, and intergenerationally. Miranda's own approaches seem to be rooted in Meadows's strategic gossip as she takes up archival and contemporary histories to remap individual and family intimate relationships into new repertoire, a new mosaic.

Vicenta's stories and the trajectory they have taken from Meadows's ferocious testimonies to Miranda's irreverent and subversive letter resonate with Dian Million's "felt theory" and Miranda's centrality of "Indigenous reading." Counter to Western objectivity, historic trauma theory, and affective theory, Million's "felt theory" powerfully captures the role of personal narrative both as a space for breathing out the painful hauntings that residential school survivors bore in their bodies and psyche and as an "emotionally laden affective force to transcend the individual's experience"– a potent force for collective healing (2014: 34). As Miranda explains, "[t]hrough the vehicle of this field note we are engaged in a very Indigenous practice: that of storytelling as education, as thought experiment, as community action to right a wrong, as resistance to representation as victim" (2012: s.p.). In this context, these women's felt experiences reveal the intricate ways in which historic trauma operates, and the ways in which storytelling – through survivors' testimonies – can provide the language and the emotional foundation for reconnection with present and ancestral histories, self-governance, and healing across time and space.

Daniel Heath Justice's definitions of Indigenous literatures help us think about gossip as a form of literature. Mishuana Goeman also insightfully describes Native women's literature(s) as rooted in a process "counter to colonial imaginings" – particularly in their ability not only to oppose colonial narrations that naturalize space through power and language, but also to (re)invent stories that "branch into the past, present, and future" (Goeman, 2008: 296). Both Meadows' and Miranda's narratives compose an Indigenous documental and literary register and inquiry into Indigenous felt experiences that attest to Indigenous women's agency, survivance, and anticolonial strategies that span from the Spanish missions to Silicon Valley. Read together, these narratives create a new repertoire, a new mosaic.

Blurring temporal and spatial temporalities, Isabel and Miranda are both witnesses who can testify, in distinct space-time frames, to Indigenous women's felt experiences without positioning them as victims in need of white settler salvation and absolution. Rather, by weaving gossip into storytelling, Meadows and Miranda deploy a "new language" that articulates both Indigenous historical testimony, as well as individual and collective empowerment and self-governance in ways that attend to historical complexities and realities experienced by survivors of colonial trauma. As Miranda emphasizes, "[s]uch analysis puts Indigenous pain back on the map as both a reality and a value asset, elides erasure of the "crime" for which it testifies, and allows for a more Indigenous definition of what healing from colonization might involve" (2016: 383). Therefore, reading gossip as storytelling recasts it as a key strategy of Indigenous community unity, survivance, continuity, and resurgence. Storytelling takes different shapes that (re)animate, as Daniel Heath Justice explains, meaning, connections, memories, and kinship relations. As such, storytelling opens up spaces for learning, healing, and transformation. Isabel's gossip and Miranda's mosaic grow into storytelling out of an assemblage of pieces of shattered histories. Yet, as they bring these sharp pieces together, they also create spaces for reconnections and rediscoveries. The reader becomes part of the process of creation of these assemblages through a felt reading experience of Miranda's historic journey of trauma, healing, and reconstitution of the self.

Conclusion

Bad Indians' richly assembled multigenre collection of prose, poetry, drawings, music, and photography exemplifies how stories of survivance can be craftily disruptive of settler colonial logics. Miranda's storytelling attends to Justice's questions about how to become human and how to be good ancestors through Miranda's reconstitution of an ancestral family map in the shape of a storied mosaic. Vicenta's, Meadows's, and Miranda's testimonies constitute Indigenous legacies that (re)imagine and re(invent) different Indigenous futures. In bringing together felt theory and good gossip as a form of Indigenous storytelling, Miranda offers a multifaceted reading and understanding of the felt experiences embedded in Isabel's accounts of Vicenta, and Miranda's interpretation of them as reflected in her own life stories. As Miranda puts it, Isabel's tactics also emerge from felt theory as it enables her to "exploit the intense energy" in her stories and to transform "wounds into power" (383). *Bad Indians* intimates the complicated histories produced by settler colonialism in California. Daniel Heath Justice has also emphasized the need to name the histories of violence that continue to oppress Indigenous peoples. In naming those histories, Indigenous women's gossip and literature engage in counter-discourses that open spaces for decolonial acts of refusal. They reclaim and unapologetically rewrite, as Goeman puts it, determinist "colonial imaginings" of Indigenous

deficiency and disappearance, of settler innocence and Manifest Destiny, myths that continually serve as justifications for genocide and settler dominance (Goeman, 2008: 296).

Bringing together pieces of violent histories into a mosaic, as Miranda does in her writing, is like dealing with broken and sharp pieces of glass, as she says: they can break the skin and make it bleed but they can also heal the soul. Through "this composition of fragments and mosaic and mixed genre," Miranda demonstrates that storytelling is essential for Indigenous healing and continuity. Storytelling expands constellations of spatial and temporal histories and relational kinships, revealing its political and social implications across time and space (Dietrich, 2018: 104). Importantly, as Justice reminds us, individuals learn to navigate and cope with post-apocalyptic stress syndrome in their own way. Therefore, Miranda's storytelling reveals how the biopolitical repertoire of colonial violence affects and shapes each individual's experiences and personhoods distinctly (Justice, 2018: 12). *Bad Indians* thus attends to Justice's cry for Indigenous literatures to "name" colonial forms of violence and disruptions they engender. This is a fundamental step in addressing intergenerational trauma, unsettling settler colonial counter-narratives, and walking towards futures conceived through decolonization and resurgence. Indigenous literatures teach *us all,* Indigenous and non-Indigenous humans alike, about the vital interdependence among humans and more-than-human life. Indigenous storytelling teaches that to be human and "good ancestors" is a continual process as it fosters, renews, and reconnects Indigenous peoples' relations with land, tradition, ceremonies, spirituality, and kinship. Such a mosaic of stories is medicine for a planet that aches for justice.

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