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Proceedings of the International Conference on Gender Studies and Sexuality
Vol. 2, Issue. 1, 2025, pp. 26-48
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33422/icgss.v2i1.1451
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ISSN: 3030-0533 online

Diamond Scientific Publishing

From Stolen Childhoods to Reclaimed Lives: Indigenous Women's Stories in Five Little Indians

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Abstract

This paper offers a feminist analysis of Five Little Indians by Michelle Good, focusing on the lived experiences of Indigenous women within the devastating legacy of the Canadian residential school system. Established in the late 19th century, this system forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families, intending to erase their culture and assimilate them into colonial society. Through the lens of Indigenous feminist theory and intersectional praxis, the paper examines how the novel recounts the multiple traumas, physical, emotional, sexual, and cultural, inflicted on characters like Clara, Lucy, and Maisie. The novel subverts Indigenous women's stereotypes by featuring them in full and diverse experiences and struggles. The paper is a detailed examination of sexual violence themes, forced motherhood, and the effort to establish Indigenous women's identities in the wake of trauma. Through qualitative textual analysis and close reading, the paper reveals how colonial institutions, embodied in characters like Sister Mary and Father Levesque, perpetrated patriarchal violence to multiply the system's erasure of Indigenous identity and kinship relations. The research highlights the novel's exploration of intergenerational trauma, disrupted kinship, and the loss of a stable home, while foregrounding the resilience and determination of Indigenous women to survive and rebuild their lives. By centring Indigenous women's voices and experiences, this paper contributes to broader feminist and decolonial conversations on survival, memory, and the transformative power of storytelling in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords*:* Indigenous women, Feminist perspective, Colonial violence, Indigenous feminism

1. Introduction

"Many abused children cling to the hope that growing up will bring escape and freedom. But the personality formed in the environment of coercive control is not well adapted to adult life. The survivor is left with fundamental problems in basic trust, autonomy, and initiative. She approaches the task of early adulthood—establishing independence and intimacy—burdened by major impairments in self-care, in cognition and in memory, in identity, and in the capacity to form stable relationships. She is still a prisoner of her childhood; attempting to create a new life, she reencounters the trauma" (Herman, 1992).

The history of Indigenous residential schools in Canada is a painful legacy marked by forced assimilation, cultural suppression, and systemic abuse. Although missionary-run boarding schools aimed at eradicating Indigenous culture date back to the early 1600s, the formal residential school system became more fully institutionalised in the 19th and early 20th centuries. One critical legislative anchor was the Indian Act of 1876, which granted the Canadian federal government sweeping powers over Indigenous peoples' lives, including education (Mosby, 2013). According to Chief Moon-Riley et al. (2019), in 1894, attendance at the residential schools was made mandatory for Indigenous children, and many children were removed from their families. By mid-20th century and in the 1950s through to the 1980s the policies towards indigenous children carried on from these forced separations in so-called "welfare" grounds in what has come to be referred to by scholars and governments as the "Sixties Scoop"—where an estimated thousands of indigenous children were removed from their biological family and re-resurrected in non-indigenous foster families or adoptive households. The last federally funded school closed in the 1990s (1996 in many histories), and with burgeoning testimonies of survivors, awareness grew. In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to bring to light the experiences of survivors and to look at the heritage of these schools. The research, including the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015), establishes the residential school system as a state-sponsored attempt at cultural genocide.

Today, the school system is commonly accepted to be an instrument of forced assimilation, but it has brought intergenerational trauma and loss, kinship disruption, cultural displacement, and many other maltreatments. According to Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman (2014), children forced to live in these schools experienced various forms of abuse and neglect, and these experiences continue to affect the well-being of subsequent generations. Chief Moon-Riley et al. (2019) report that familial exposure to residential schools was widespread among their sample of Indigenous university students. Specifically, 42.7% of participants had mothers and 33.7% had fathers who attended residential schools, with 85.7% being raised by their mothers and 66.7% by their fathers who had attended. More broadly, 85% of participants reported that at least one parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle had attended a residential school. Among those with familial exposure, 28% had one family member attend, while 16% had four or more relatives attend. Nearly all participants (97.4%) considered these experiences to have been negative for their relatives. Approximately 79% indicated that they were personally affected by these familial experiences, including 61.6% who felt their upbringing and care were influenced by residential school experiences. Around 85% believed that their family's stress management had been affected, and two-thirds perceived that their own handling of stress was influenced by relatives' experiences.

Despite these profound effects, most participants (62.8%) reported that residential school experiences were rarely discussed within their families. The quote at the beginning of the study by Herman shows how the consequences of abuse in childhood are longstanding and prevalent. Escaping the abusive environment physically will never necessarily mend the psychological and relationship-based damage. The survivors in life will have to contend with a personality shaped by abuse, and it will stand in the way of independence, intimacy, and individual maturation. There was a lack of defined educational objectives for the children, as each school's curriculum was determined by the church in charge. Moreover, church personnel and teachers often had insufficient training and received minimal supervision (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). According to Fast and Vézina (2010), children were subjected to physical and emotional abuse, as well as deprivation of food, as a means of control.

Michelle Good is Indigenous—Cree—author, lawyer, and member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan (Abbadasu, 9711). Before increased participation in her legal or writing life, she spent some twenty-five years of her life in service to Indigenous organisations. She graduated in law at the University of British Columbia in 1999, and for over fourteen years of her life, she has defended survivors of the residential schools. Later in life, still practising law, in 2014, she completed her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at UBC. Her debut novel, *Five Little Indians*, references extensively the real life of Indigenous peoples, her mother and her grandmother being part of them, and their histories within the residential school system. The story is fictional, but several incidents are true histories and communal traumas.

The book has won several prizes, e.g., the HarperCollins/UBC Best New Fiction Prize, Amazon First Novel Award, Governor General's Literary Award, Kobo Emerging Writer Prize, and several others. In an interview, she said: "We knew for forever that these little children were buried and hidden on the grounds of residential schools, but nobody would listen to us and there was so much resistance, in spite of the fact that the Truth and Reconciliation report in 2015 laid out a very specific roadmap for the government to deal with missing children and burials. What justice would be is for those little kids to be able to go home, because that's all they wanted. And for the state to assist with that in a meaningful way, and not have to be convinced that they need to do the right thing. That would be justice, because those kids, they need to go home so they can be released in a proper way" (Wray & Good, 2022).

Five Little Indians traces the experiences of five First Nations children from British Columbia who survived school. It is an exploration of what comes after: the struggles with trauma, alienation, identity, feelings of nonbelonging, and a long and laborious path to healing and reclamation. Good uses her characters to illuminate how colonial systems (legal system, religious system, residential system) have lingering effects—not just on individuals but on whole populations and intergenerational ones. What the novel is very effective at is an exploration of life after residential school—how the free-but-not-really would be attempted by survivors, family and culture become disturbed, and resilience is constructed in spite of it all. The story in Michelle Good's *Five Little Indians* (2020) starts in the late 1950s and continues through to the early 1960s, when priests and Royal Canadian Mounted Police forcibly remove Clara, Maisie, Kenny, Howie, Lucy and other children from their families and lock them up at the Mission School in Arrowhead Bay (Butler, 2024).

There, in the hands of men like Sister Mary and Father Levesque, the children are subjected to physical floggings, sexual abuse, psychological bullying, and cultural elimination. The violence is pervasive: Howie is beaten by Brother so badly that he is hospitalised. These opening chapters show how school had a dual mandate: it was an institution of assimilation, but it was also a site of systematised violence designed to break the will of Indigenous children. As is key, Good refuses to portray the survivors as simple, helpless victims. With Howie's escape and Kenny's attempts to resist, the novel points up the possibility of agency even in conditions of dehumanisation. As researchers of trauma studies such as Cathy Caruth note, histories of trauma tend to fluctuate constantly between silence and testimony (Caruth, 1996). Good exercises this pull—her characters carry the unthinkable injuries of their pasts, but the novel itself is their slow testimony.

2. Indigenous Feminist and Trauma Scholarship in the Context of Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada

The lived realities of Indigenous women in Canada are embedded within a matrix of colonialism, racial violence, and systemic neglect that continues to structure their social, economic, and physical vulnerability. Decades of scholarship, official inquiries, and feminist analyses have foregrounded how gendered colonial violence is not an episodic aberration but

a persistent outcome of settler governance. This review synthesizes recent and foundational works on Indigenous feminist and trauma scholarship, drawing upon sociological, legal, medical, and historical studies to map the intersecting forces of colonial domination, gendered violence, and intergenerational trauma that define Indigenous women's lives.

Although Indigenous children make up only 5% of the child population in Canada, they account for 22% of confirmed child maltreatment cases. Indigenous families are four times more likely than non-Indigenous families to be investigated by child protection services, and Indigenous children are 12 times more likely to enter foster care (Trocmé, 2010). By 1930, approximately 75% of First Nations children aged 7 to 15 were enrolled in Indian Residential Schools (IRS), along with many Métis and Inuit children (Fournier & Crey, 1997). It is estimated that over 150,000 Indigenous children attended these schools in Canada (Barkan, 2003). From the age of three, children were legally removed from their families and placed in institutions designed to "kill the Indian in the child" (RCAP, 1996). These schools forced Aboriginal children to abandon their languages, cultural practices, and beliefs, while providing inadequate education (Deiter, 1999; Friesen & Friesen, 2002). Beyond high mortality rates and cases of children going missing, many experienced chronic mental, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect (RCAP, 1996). Consequently, survivors of IRS are more likely than other Aboriginal adults to experience a range of mental and physical health challenges (First Nations Centre, 2005).

Indigenous women and their organizations have pointed out that mainstream strategies addressing violence against women often fail to reflect their unique realities and circumstances. For instance, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) has been criticized for focusing narrowly on gender discrimination and equality, which can obscure the political and social issues specifically affecting Indigenous women. Moreover, there is a persistent lack of acknowledgment that Indigenous women frequently face human rights violations that intersect both their individual and collective identities (Kuokkanen, 2010). In its Final Report on NWAC's National Roundtable regarding the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the Native Women's Association of Canada noted that PTMAs involved in the Roundtable highlighted that an effective "independent mechanism" should include Indigenous women who occupy leadership or governance roles within their own communities. One group expressed this view by stating, "The voices of the women have been silenced for far too long. It is now time for the women to take the lead on this road to healing. All of the Calls for Justice need to be implemented. As mothers and grandmothers, we should have a huge say over social workers and those implicated in child welfare" (Native Women's Association of Canada). In September 2016, the Government of Canada formally initiated the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). The primary aim of this two-year inquiry was to examine the systemic factors contributing to socioeconomic inequalities and the prevalence of gender-based physical and psychological violence affecting Indigenous women and girls.

2.1 Historical and Structural Foundations of Gendered Colonial Violence

Violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada must be understood as a structural outcome of settler colonialism. As Razack (2000) demonstrated through the landmark case of *Pamela George*, colonial violence is both spatially and racially structured. The brutalization of an Indigenous woman by white university athletes and the lenient judicial treatment of the perpetrators exposed how Indigenous women's bodies have been historically constructed as expendable, their suffering rendered invisible within legal discourse. This spatialized injustice, where violence becomes normalized in racialized "zones of degeneracy," exemplifies the ongoing colonization of Indigenous bodies and territories.

Amnesty International (2014) similarly identified the disproportionate levels of homicide and disappearance among Indigenous women as a "national human rights crisis." Statistical data revealed that Indigenous women were nearly three times more likely than non-Indigenous women to report being victims of violent crime, and seven times more likely to be murdered. In Saskatchewan, where Indigenous women constitute merely 6% of the population, they represent approximately 60% of long-term missing persons cases. These data underscore not only the prevalence of gendered racial violence but also the Canadian state's chronic failure to respond with adequate policy measures or accountability frameworks. Through its independent research, the Native Women's Association of Canada recorded 582 instances of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls, primarily occurring over the past twenty years.

The *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (MMIWG, 2019), published as *Reclaiming Power and Place*, extended this analysis by identifying such violence as the direct consequence of "persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses" amounting to genocide. The Inquiry located the crisis within Canada's colonial structure, where policing, justice, child welfare, and healthcare systems perpetuate inequities that endanger Indigenous women and girls. By framing the crisis as systemic rather than individual, the MMIWG report redirected public discourse toward state accountability and the urgent implementation of its 231 Calls for Justice.

2.2 Institutional Complicity and the Health Dimension of Colonial Violence

The institutional reproduction of violence is further elaborated in Kolopenuk's (2024) analysis in *The Lancet Regional Health – Americas*, which reframes colonialism as a determinant of health. Kolopenuk argues that colonial dispossession is embodied—experienced in Indigenous women's health outcomes, interactions with healthcare providers, and lack of culturally safe medical spaces. By situating violence within the purview of healthcare, the article challenges narrow reconciliation discourses that focus on "closing the Indigenous health gap" while ignoring colonial violence itself.

The paper contends that ending such violence requires implementing health-sector-specific Calls for Justice from the MMIWG Report, recognizing healthcare as a site of both harm and potential repair. This institutional dimension links with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) findings that the residential school system inflicted "spiritual, emotional, and physical genocide" on generations of Indigenous peoples. The TRC's Calls to Action emphasize the obligation of public institutions—including health and education systems—to reform in ways that support self-determination and community healing. These frameworks affirm that colonial violence is not solely historical but continues through bureaucratic neglect, inequitable access to services, and erasure of Indigenous epistemologies within state institutions.

2.3 Intergenerational and Intimate Partner Violence

Research on intimate partner violence (IPV) among Indigenous women situates interpersonal abuse within broader histories of colonization and trauma. Ogden and Tutty (2023) examined narratives of 40 Indigenous women from Canada's prairie provinces and demonstrated how experiences of residential schooling, linguistic loss, and patriarchal imposition correlate with elevated rates of IPV. Their mixed-methods study revealed that Indigenous women are abused by their intimate partners at rates three times higher than non-Indigenous women (21% compared to 7%), with higher risks of sexual assault and fatal violence. The authors link this crisis to intergenerational trauma: colonial disruptions of kinship and cultural norms have undermined healthy relational models and produced cyclical patterns of violence. Earlier quantitative work corroborates these findings. Brownridge (2003, 2008) and Brzozowski,

Taylor-Butts, and Johnson (2008) found that Indigenous women are eight times more likely to be murdered by intimate partners and face more severe and repeated assaults. Heidinger (2021) confirmed that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women experience higher rates of IPV and sexual coercion, often compounded by racism and economic marginalization. Burnette and Figley (2017) expanded this discussion by offering a holistic framework connecting historical oppression, resilience, and transcendence, highlighting how cultural continuity and community-based interventions can mitigate violence's long-term impacts.

The link between colonialism and family violence has also been theorized historically. Miller (2003) and Shepard, O'Neill, and Guenette (2006) emphasized how residential schools' policies of gender segregation and abuse produced intergenerational dysfunction, affecting survivors' capacity for intimacy and parenting. McGillivray and Comaskey's (1999) *Black Eyes All the Time* demonstrated that the Canadian justice system routinely fails Indigenous women survivors of IPV, reflecting systemic bias that devalues their testimony and misinterprets their trauma. Andersson et al. (2010) and Burnette and Figley (2017) proposed community-led frameworks that combine traditional knowledge with trauma-informed care as pathways for prevention and recovery.

2.4 Indigenous Feminist and Trauma Frameworks

Indigenous feminist theorists have been instrumental in reorienting scholarship from a deficit-based narrative to one of survivance, relationality, and resurgence. Anderson (2000), in *A Recognition of Being*, reconstructs Indigenous womanhood as rooted in community and relational ethics, asserting that colonial patriarchy disrupted Indigenous gender balances but failed to extinguish them. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017, 2011) advances this idea through her articulation of "resurgence" — everyday acts of rebuilding Indigenous life through culture, kinship, and land-based practices. These frameworks move beyond victimhood toward sovereignty in both cultural and political terms.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies* provides the epistemological foundation for this movement, challenging Western research paradigms that objectify Indigenous subjects. Smith calls for Indigenous-controlled research practices that center storytelling, community accountability, and relational ethics. Similarly, Cheryl Suzack et al. (2010) in *Indigenous Women and Feminism* argue for a feminist politics grounded in self-determination and critique of settler legal frameworks. Sarah Carter (1997) and Lee Maracle (2015) contextualize Indigenous women's resistance within longer histories of colonial encounter, highlighting how Indigenous womanhood itself becomes a site of political struggle.Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart's (1999) formulation of "historical trauma" is crucial to understanding intergenerational suffering among Indigenous families. Her framework explains how cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations manifests in addiction, violence, and mental health disparities. These theoretical insights have influenced trauma-informed practices in Canadian Indigenous communities, where healing is pursued through cultural reclamation and communal support rather than individual therapy alone.

2.5 Healing, Resurgence, and Systemic Reform

Emerging literature increasingly emphasizes healing as a collective, decolonial process. Burnette and Figley (2017) argue that interventions must foreground resilience rather than pathology, while Andersson et al. (2010) propose community-led models as sustainable alternatives to state-imposed solutions. Simpson (2017) and Maracle (2015) articulate resurgence not as romantic revivalism but as praxis—reclaiming Indigenous epistemologies through language, storytelling, and ceremony. These ideas converge with the MMIWG (2019) report's Calls for Justice, which urge governments, institutions, and society to support

Indigenous-led healing initiatives addressing both the psychological and structural legacies of violence. Thomas King's (2012) *The Inconvenient Indian* extends this discourse by exposing how settler societies continue to commodify and erase Indigenous existence while benefiting from Indigenous dispossession. His analysis underscores the necessity of narrative reclamation—controlling representation as a political act of survival. Together, these works reveal that justice for Indigenous women is inseparable from sovereignty, cultural continuity, and structural reform.

In summary, the corpus of Indigenous feminist and trauma scholarship reveals that violence against Indigenous women in Canada is not an isolated phenomenon but a manifestation of enduring colonial systems. Across healthcare, justice, and family structures, institutionalized racism and patriarchal hierarchies sustain cycles of trauma. Yet, Indigenous feminist theorists and community practitioners have articulated transformative frameworks rooted in relational ethics, cultural resurgence, and collective healing. Integrating these perspectives into academic, policy, and community spaces remains a central imperative for both reconciliation and justice.

3. Purpose/Objectives

This examination explores how Michelle Good's *Five Little Indians* portrays the lives of Indigenous women as they confront the intergenerational legacy of the Canadian residential school system. It focuses on how Indigenous women are represented not only as victims but as survivors of cultural, physical, and sexual violence within colonial institutions. At the same time, the study foregrounds the feminist and decolonial dimensions of the novel, situating it within broader conversations about Indigenous women's identity, resilience, and resistance. Characters such as Clara, Lucy, and Maisie exemplify the struggle to reclaim agency, kinship, and belonging in the aftermath of systemic dispossession. By tracing these experiences, the analysis highlights storytelling as both a cultural practice and a literary strategy of survival, memory, and resistance.

4. Methodology/Approach

This study employs qualitative textual analysis as its central methodological framework, combining feminist literary criticism with Indigenous feminist theory to examine *Five Little Indians* by Michelle Good. Qualitative textual analysis is employed in this study, as it enables close and critical engagement with the narrative, uncovering how the novel represents Indigenous women's experiences of trauma, resilience, and identity. The study also incorporates secondary sources, including author interviews, research papers, reports, and statistical data, to contextualize Indigenous women's struggles and enrich the textual analysis of Five Little Indians.

The selection of *Five Little Indians* was guided by both literary and socio-cultural criteria. The novel is widely recognized for its contribution to contemporary Indigenous literature in Canada, and its representation of residential school survivors provides a rich site for examining colonial violence, gendered oppression, and intergenerational trauma. The focus on the female characters Clara, Lucy, and Maisie was intentional, as their narratives embody multiple facets of Indigenous women's experiences—sexual violence, forced motherhood, disrupted kinship, and cultural survival.

The study proceeded through a three-stage analytical process:

1. Close Reading: Textual passages explicitly and implicitly depicting trauma, sexual violence, kinship disruption, and forced assimilation were identified and annotated. This stage ensured detailed engagement with the text and allowed for the recognition of both overt and subtle narrative strategies.

2. Thematic Coding: Recurring motifs—such as motherhood, survival, storytelling, resilience, and identity reclamation—were systematically coded. Each code was linked to the character through a matrix to track patterns and intersections of colonial and gendered oppression across the narratives. The coding process followed a reflexive approach, acknowledging the researcher's positionality and potential interpretive bias.
3. Interpretive Analysis: Coded themes were analyzed using Indigenous feminist theory (Simpson, Anderson) and trauma theory (Caruth). This interpretive stage aimed to contextualize the women's experiences within the historical and socio-political realities of the Canadian residential school system while foregrounding the novel's subversion of stereotypes and affirmation of Indigenous women's agency.

Positionality and Ethics: The researcher acknowledges their positionality as a scholar working within Indigenous literature, recognizing the responsibility to interpret sensitive narratives in an ethical and respectful manner. This includes avoiding voyeuristic readings of trauma, foregrounding Indigenous voices, and situating textual analysis within broader historical and cultural realities of residential schools. Ethical considerations were maintained by centering the lived experiences of Indigenous women, respecting narrative integrity, and emphasizing survivor resilience rather than victimization alone.

Overall, this methodological approach combines textual rigor with theoretical sensitivity, ensuring that the analysis of *Five Little Indians* remains attentive to both the literary craft of the novel and the historical realities of colonial violence that shape the lives of Indigenous women.

5. Findings: Thematic Analysis

5.1 The Theft of Childhood: Structure and Effects

Michelle Good's choice of the title *Five Little Indians* is both unsettling and deliberate. It immediately recalls the racist nursery rhyme *Ten Little Indians*, which for generations trivialised and dehumanised Indigenous peoples, reducing them to vanishing figures in a colonial imagination. By reclaiming and reworking this phrase, Good points to the way Indigenous children were historically stripped of individuality and treated as interchangeable subjects within the residential school system. The title's stark reference to "five" signals the novel's focus on the intimate, personal lives of Kenny, Lucy, Clara, Maisie, and Howie, allowing readers to see them not as statistics of a colonial project but as full human beings. At the same time, the title underscores survival against erasure. While the rhyme systematically counts down to "none," Good resists this colonial logic of disappearance. Her five characters endure unspeakable trauma—dispossession, violence, addiction, and fractured kinship—but they continue to resist, remember, and, in different ways, build lives in the aftermath of systemic violence. Thus, the title functions as a critique of colonial narratives of disappearance and a powerful gesture of reclamation, transforming a demeaning trope into a story of survival, testimony, and resilience.

What the residential schools took were not just childhood freedoms but sources of identity—language, family relationships, bodily integrity, and ritual knowledge. In *Five Little Indians*, Clara, Lucy, and Maisie are brought as children and forced through schooling as ideological and physical conversion: separation from family, forced expulsion from Indigenous modes of being and knowing, and repeated regimes of violence and humiliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015; Chrisjohn, Young, & Maraun, 2006). Trauma theory examines and helps to understand that such experiences are not just in the past and to be told but imprint themselves on memory, disrupt the continuity of the story, and shatter a survivor's time and self (Caruth, 1996). Good's characters perform that disruption: their childhoods are

severed by institution-based violence and have lingering psychological, social, and embodied effects. Among the five survivors, Lucy's story most vividly captures how trauma reshapes the body's responses to fear and loss, turning ordinary gestures into mechanisms of endurance. This clearly illustrates the somatic dimensions of trauma—how the body internalizes colonial violence and converts it into patterns of coping and survival.

5.2. Lucy — Counting as Containment, Memory's Embodied Habit.

The novel demonstrates that counting for Lucy serves as a ritualized survival mechanism. It functions as a somatic coping method — a way to contain fear and preserve continuity when language and home have been taken away. Narrator mentions:

"Lucy counted, a habit she never slipped out of since that first day in the classroom when Sister had hit her over and over with her pointer stick… It calmed her" (Good, 2020).

Caruth's analysis of trauma as a break in continuity in narratives helps to illuminate why Lucy's mind returns to discrete units (seconds, cots, panes): counting restores a fractured sense of time. Feminist theorists point to how bodily habits in survivors are not individualistic pathology but embodied wisdom developed in duress (Anderson, 2000). Lucy's counting betrays how violence in childhood reconfigures interiority in the adult, but the habit itself preserves a skeletal structure to be activated in resilience, a private toolkit by which she might navigate fearful moments. In contrast to Lucy's bodily coping mechanisms, Maisie's narrative exposes the emotional and domestic dimensions of loss, revealing how colonial disruption fractures the everyday intimacies that once anchored Indigenous childhood.

5.3. Maisie — The Irretrievable Domestic Past and The Hunger for "Little-Ness"

"What I so desperately needed was to be standing on that stool by the stove, carefully stirring under her watchful eye, like when I was little. To be little again, living without fear and brutality—no one gets that back. All that's left is a craving, insatiable empty place" (Good, 2020).

This is one of the very subtly destructive lines on appropriated childhood. The object of Maisie's desire is neither status nor objects but the everyday gesture of childhood caring — the tactile apprenticeship beside a mother's stove. Colonial uprooting breaks not just bodies but miniature domestic economies in the habit of belonging. The pronouncement nobody gets that back is a corrective to recovery discourses, thinking time heals; instead, Good stage-manages irrecoverable loss. The "insatiable empty place" theorises intergenerational abuse as an absence reproducing longing and, in the case of Maisie, precipitating re-enactment abuse and suicide. From a decolonial feminist frame of reference, losses like these require cultural repair on a communal and not an individual therapy basis (Simpson, 2017).

5.4. Sexualized and gendered violence: How Colonial Institutions Targeted Indigenous girls

Good's framing of abuse—especially sexual abuse by clerical staff—makes colonial domination's gendered rationality explicit. Sexual violence in residential schools wasn't an afterthought; it was an instrument that violated bodies and induced shame and hence derogated survivors' subsequent connections and sense of self (Anderson, 2000). For Lucy and Maisie, sexual violation is a turning-point event: it initiates shame, self-abnegation, and social ostracism. That Lucy is dismissed from nursing because she is pregnant outside wedlock is an example of how colonial and institutional morality penalised Indigenous women even subsequent to "liberation" from school—an extended policing of their bodies and social acceptability (Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 1988). Briefly, school life in the novel is both gendered and sexualized and plots a trajectory of vulnerability into adult life.

5.5. Disrupted Kinship and the Burden on Motherhood

The book continues to show how removal policies destroyed family relations. With children like Clara, Lucy, and Maisie raised outside kin relations, intergenerational cultural transmission and memory of parenting knowledge is erased (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999). Lucy's solo mother experience, welfare, social exclusion, and bureaucratic impediments are a shorthand encapsulation of this rupture. The state's interventions in place of communal and relation-based kinship protocols are replaced by surveillance, and so motherhood is made less simple but unstable. Feminist and Indigenous scholars have shown how these ruptures are political: they are a deliberate plan by settlers to eliminate community resilience (Simpson, 2017; Smith, 2012).

6. Intergenerational Trauma and Disrupted Kinship

"Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth, 1996).

Intergenerational trauma refers to the transmission of historical oppression and harmful impacts through generations. Initially applied to Holocaust survivors (Danieli, 1998), the term has been applied widely to bring Indigenous peoples whose lives have been impacted by residential schools, land removals, and systemic disadvantage (Evans-Campbell, 2008). The trauma in *Five Little Indians* manifests in Kenny's inability to preserve attachment and in his subsequent death, leaving behind his daughter Kendra to cope with the loss of an abiding father. The novel shines a light on how survivors' wounds bleed over into their kids and create traditions of loss and separation. Maisie's suicide, Lucy's expulsion from nursing school, and Kenny's alcoholism all illustrate how broken kinship systems disturb family life. Critics note how broken kinship networks are among colonialism's most destructive bequeathals. Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraun (2006) believe specifically that residential schools destroyed family relationships by instilling European-based violence on Indigenous kinship systems. Nonetheless, Good notes resilience. Clara, e.g., transforms her individual pain into advocacy in her work as a Native Courtworker. Lucy re-purposes her life even though excluded from mainstream schooling, and raises Kendra with pride and devotion. These characters illustrate what Yellow Horse Brave Heart (1999) calls the Indigenous "historical trauma response" — an adaptation mode reliant on community healing and culture preservation.

Kenny's trajectory demonstrates the destructive trajectory of intergenerational trauma. Despite several attempts at reestablishing a connection to family and kinship networks, he is brought into a lawsuit by the government. A recount of his experiences retraumatises him and leads to his eventual alcohol abuse-related death. His life exemplifies how processes of law, though necessary to establish recognition and reparations, reopen closed wounds. Scholars of transitional justice sound a note of caution in noting the failure of institutional truth-telling to take into consideration the individual cost of reliving trauma (James, 2012). Kendra, Kenny and Lucy's daughter, exemplifies the intergenerational nature of loss. Anger at her father's absence is a problem to be suffered by her, and she must transcend her identity in relation to an unstable paternal relationship. Through her, Good exemplifies how some of the consequences of residential schools trickle into subsequent generations and become a part of their subjects as well as their grandchildren.

6.1. Dislocation and Struggle in Urban Spaces

The scene shifts to Vancouver, where the survivors must navigate an urban space that offers neither safety nor homeliness. Lucy, released from school with only $25 and bus money, is immediately confronted by exploitation in the city. Maisie, having appeared to find some

stability through her boyfriend Jimmy, is unable to look past her recall of abuse at the hands of Father Levesque and commits suicide. This series documents the treacherous afterlife of abuse: even though physically leaving the space of the school behind, its psychic violence persists. For Indigenous women in particular, Good illuminates how gender increases the vulnerabilities of the survivors of residential schools. Lucy's pregnancy causes her to be expelled from her nursing program, an act demonstrating discriminatory educational and employment policies to which Indigenous women were subjected. Maisie's suicide is another devastating reminder of how sexual abuse and humiliation, solidified through colonial institutions, killed Indigenous women in greater numbers. From a feminist perspective, these representations shatter stereotypes of Indigenous women as "broken" by instead demonstrating how patriarchy's and colonial society's systems actively produced repetitions of marginalisation (Anderson, 2000).

One of the earliest images of resistance in *Five Little Indians* is Kenny's escape. Good writes:

"With less than a hundred yards behind him, Kenny ran back, untied the punt and pushed it back into the water. Let them think I drowned. … He stepped onto the docks and made his way to the far end … craving some sort of shelter" (Good, 2020).

Here, the rhetoric of flight—running, hiding, craving to be protected—anchors the conflicted experience of a lost childhood. At an age at which children are to be enveloped by families, Kenny is mapping tactics against predators, human and animal and living in fear of "cops who didn't believe him" and priests abusing him. Critics like Caruth (1996) have argued that trauma is likely to manifest in the mode of repetition and displacement; already in this scene, the boy is weighed down by adult-sized vigilance and distrust, constituting how he moves through the world. This scene also dramatises the psychic legacy of the residential schools: Kenny learns to "disappear" in order to survive. His consideration, let them think I drowned, betrays the need to erase oneself as a form of protection. From a feminist and decolonial perspective, this scene may be read as what Spivak (1988) refers to as the silencing of the subaltern—the boy's sole form of agency is to disappear from the colonial eye. The beach, the owls, and the approaching dusk position Kenny in a space of risk between human colonialists and the hostile wilderness. In this in-between space, Good underlines both the fear of abandonment and the strength that propels survival. From a historical trauma framework (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999), Kenny's running is neither freedom nor liberation but further displacement. His wariness of authority and need to be sheltered foretell his alcoholism and alienation in life. His running is at the same time an expression of a will to be other than the system that would consume him and an "everyday act of resurgence" (Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 2017), small refusals of colonial constructions by Indigenous survivance protocols.

7. Healing, Resistance, and Cultural Reconnection

Despite the high emphasis on suffering in the novel, Good is always interlacing healing and resilience possibilities. The case of Clara is significant. Following barely evading an activist operation on the U.S. border, Mariah, a Cree healer, takes her in and nurses her. Through Mariah, Clara regains her way towards her culture and begins coming to grips with the guilt of her friend Lily's death at Arrowhead Bay. This scene is a representation of the work of Indigenous knowledge systems, spirituality, and community caregiving to counter colonial violence. The latter utilisation of Clara in the novel as a Native Courtworker is a symbol of change from victim to advocate. The novel asserts through her and other characters, such as her, that Indigenous survivors not only suffer but also resist through regaining their voice, standing up for others, and insisting on justice. This is a manifestation of what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) calls Indigenous resurgence—the practice of life-building through culture, lands, and relations. The novel ends with Howie and Clara walking toward a life together in Saskatchewan, symbolic of individual and communal recovery. Their encounter

is neither framed as an abiding resolution—the hurts of the past are still alive—it is presented as the recovery of agency, of love, and of territory. Through this ending, Good forecloses assumptions of Indigenous erasure and presents instead continuity, survival, and resurrection. Critically speaking, *Five Little Indians* is a counter-history to colonial histories that sought to eradicate Indigenous speech. It is testimonial and restorative simultaneously, combining the dry truths of damage with the possibility of resilience and resurgence. The novel centres Indigenous women at the very fore of this retrieval and in doing so advocates feminist and decolonial literary praxis.

7.1. Clara as Advocate: From Survivor to Defender of Others

In Chapter 8, Clara recalls her first case as a Native Courtworker:

"The guy, not much more than a kid, had been caught stealing apples… He'd just been let out of Indian School… put on a bus to the city" (Good, 2020).

This anecdote mirrors the central plight of the novel's protagonists: children discarded by the residential school system, "just thrown away" once they outlived their institutional usefulness. The stolen apples are starvation in and of themselves—they are the desperation of young Indigenous women and men never afforded family, culture, and the means to exist. Clara's rationalisation—saying he had no other choice—marks her recognition of systemic wrong and transitions her from victim to advocate and defender. From a theoretical standpoint, the scene illustrates what Paulo Freire (1970/2000) calls "conscientization"—acts of critical perception of oppression and revolt against it. Clara transforms her individual traumatisation into advocacy on behalf of others in trying to navigate colonial institutions that criminalise Indigenous modes of life. Instead of being paralysed by guilt over Lily's death, she transforms her experiential life into advocacy by demanding that the young man deserves not punishment but dignity and opportunity. Lucy's response—"Like us. Just thrown away" underscores the collective dimension of trauma. Their conversation exposes the structural violence of residential schools, where children were not merely abused but then abandoned, forced into cities without networks of care. Critics such as Chrisjohn and Young (2006) have argued that this systemic disposability is a defining feature of cultural genocide: the creation of intergenerational cycles of alienation, incarceration, and poverty.

But the scene ends in solidarity: the kiss and Lucy's words, "Keep fighting, woman." Feminist theorists like hooks (1984) are adamant about the important role of women's support of each other in defying patriarchal and colonial regimes. This exchange reveals how Good illustrates Indigenous women, even in the aftermath of destroyed childhoods, standing in support of each other's strength. The support of Lucy and the encouragement of Clara are signs of resilience—testaments to how life is never individual but communal and founded upon caring (Winstanley, 2022). Through Clara, Good suggests that reclaiming life after trauma requires both systemic critique and practical action: defending others, creating opportunities, and rehumanizing those colonialism sought to discard (Longtin, 2024).

7.2. Gendered Trauma and the Search for Freedom: Lucy's Transformation

Michelle Good uses Lucy's physical appearance and rituals of beauty to symbolise the deep scars of the residential school system. The narrative recalls:

"Not long after her arrival in Vancouver, Lucy quit her evening routine of rolling the giant pink curlers in her hair… She was mesmerised by the hippie girls… shiny and swaying, unhindered by the brittle freeze of hairspray. In the years since Lucy's departure from the Mission, her hair had grown past her shoulder blades. She thought it grew faster now that it was free of Sister's temper and her well-used razor" (Good, 2020).

Here, Lucy's hair operates as a site of memory and resistance. At the Mission School, hair was violently policed—cut short, stripped of individuality, and controlled by nuns' razors. The act of allowing it to grow long becomes both a symbolic and material reclamation of selfhood. As scholars of Indigenous feminism have noted, the body is one of the first sites where colonial violence inscribes itself, particularly against women (Anderson, 2000; Smith, 2005). Lucy's fascination with the "hippie girls" is less about mimicry and more about confronting the contrast between her own fear-shaped existence and the seemingly effortless liberty of white women who had never been targeted for assimilation.

This is a moment we may read through the "oppositional gaze" (hooks, 1992), whereby subordinated women look critically at dominant images to consider their own distance from them and not to consume. Lucy is not hoping to be like the flower children—she knows the structural barriers residing on Indigenous women to move through the world "without anything or anyone to fear or resist." Her vision points to the way colonial violence persists into adult life to habituate even the smallest pleasures of fashion and beauty and self-presentation. But even this short excerpt contains a glimpse of healing: Lucy feels her hair "grew faster now that it was free." The metaphor refers to strength, to the possibility of healing once freedom from the weapons of oppression has been attained. From a decolonial perspective, the reclamation here is one comparable to what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) calls Indigenous self-determination in cultural and embodied form. Lucy's later struggles in her life as an individual mom operating through the welfare system are testaments to the longstanding power of structural oppression, but in this very small action—choosing her own relationship to her body—she regains an essential reclamation of her life.

8. Feminist and Decolonial Perspectives

Feminist and decolonial readings of *Five Little Indians* reveal how the lives of Indigenous women are doubly burdened by colonialism and patriarchy. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) criticises liberal feminisms, liberal feminisms universalise women's oppression by overlooking histories of colonisation and race. Good resists this erasure by centring Clara, Lucy, and Maisie as full characters whose struggles occur at the intersection of colonial violence and patriarchy. Clara's healing through Cree protocols and subsequent activist labour follows Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2017) definition of Indigenous resurgence by prioritising the return to Indigenous ways of knowing and self-determination. Lucy's coerced motherhood repeats Gayatri Spivak's (1988) critique of how colonial institutions silence "subaltern" women. Maisie's suicide reflects what Kim Anderson (2000) identifies as the multiply-vulnerable status of Indigenous women within regimes of sexual abuse. Through these characters, *Five Little Indians* joins broader feminist and decolonial theories about survival, memory, and narration. Narration is cultural preservation and resistance, argues Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) in Decolonising Methodologies. Good's novel is testimonial and counter-history: it bears witness to violence while taking space back from the Indigenous women to speak their lives in their own words.

8.1. Clara's Awakening: From Guilt to Political Resistance

When Clara encounters the grainy footage of Mae, the activist, she is "transfixed":

"Who do these white people think they are? Our people saved their raggedy asses when they got off the boat, freezing and starved. They returned the favor with hatred and murder. There weren't so many of them and it changed everything. There ain't so many of us and we will change everything, too, and we will change everything, too, and I will lay my life down to take back what's ours." Clara was transfixed by this woman" (Good, 2020).

This moment represents Clara's pivot from internalised rage and guilt over Lily's death toward collective struggle. The vitriol of Mae's words shatters Clara's remorse, reminding her that her pain is neither private nor exceptional but of a piece with greater historical violence. Critics like Glen Coulthard (2014) argue that Indigenous resistance requires an escape from reconciliation protocols in order to challenge colonial systems of power directly. This is dramatised in Clara's encounter with Mae: she is confronted by another Indigenous woman with a refusal to be silenced, a remaking of victimhood into rebellion (Kishore, 986). For Indigenous women in particular, anger has always been delegitimised as destructive. But as Audre Lorde (1981) reminds us, anger is "loaded with information and energy." The transfixed stare of Clara is a signal of recognition: the anger she has carried within her her whole life need not kill her—it can be transformed into action. That is why she goes on to become a Native Courtworker and transforms her private pain into public service to others. From a feminist and decolonial lens, Clara's political awakening is likewise a matter of representation. Seeing another Indigenous woman, "fearless, furious, determined", defies the colonial narrative rendering Indigenous women as helpless victims.

Instead, Clara discovers a tradition of resistance, what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) calls "constellations of co-resistance." By standing in the tradition of Mae's life, Clara begins to reclaim her life—not only by working through trauma but by re-locating in Indigenous struggle. The break here is with narratives like Maisie's, whose anguish builds to tragedy. Clara's grief is channelled into action, serving as an exercise in survival and revival. The scene highlights Good's overall theme: it's often necessary to draw strength from communal Indigenous voices to reclaim life after an abducted childhood. Agency for Good's women rarely appear in spontaneous triumph. Instead, it's incremental: leaving school, refusal to exploiters, acquisition of skills, preservation of friendships. That Maisie tried to get off of Arrowhead Bay and experience life in the city—tragically so short-lived as it is—is a refusal of total assimilation. Lucy's enrollment in evening classes and her aspiration to become a nurse are signs of hope and a refusal to be reduced to simple victimhood. These are actions in alignment with trauma scholarship in framing resilience as not the absence of pain but as the capacity to construct meaning and preserve relations in the face of woundings (Caruth, 1996; Evans-Campbell, 2008).

Here, Clara witnesses an embodied, public act of protest that channels her internal anger into communal action. The scene instructs us in what Indigenous feminist scholars recognise as the political efficacy of anger: not pathology, but explosive to reclamation (Lorde, 1981). The visual frame is like a mirror; witnessing another Indigenous woman refuse erasure is how Clara is able to move from private remorse towards outward advocacy. This turning point by itself explains her eventual choice to become a Native Courtworker — an act of re-institutionalising on Indigenous soil. The citation points up Good's argument that recovery of life after residential school is social and political as well as psychological.

8.2. Kenny — Flight, Erasure, and Survival

"With less than a hundred yards behind him, Kenny ran back, untied the punt and pushed it back into the water. Let them think I drowned. … he stepped onto the docks and made his way to the far end … craving some sort of shelter." (Good, 2020)

Kenny's decision to fake his own death is not melodrama — it's an act of strategic erasure. The narration Let them think I drowned betrays the fact that sometimes vanishing is the only form of agency a child whose life is hunted by institutional power has. Trauma researchers note how survivors become hypervigilant and develop survival strategies reconfiguring their experience of time and space (Caruth, 1996). Kenny's beachfront liminality — in-between the sea and harbour, dusk and night — performs what historical trauma research refers to as

extended displacement: evasion is survival, not freedom (Evans-Campbell, 2008). That such survival fails to transform into safety in the long term (the alcoholism and death of Kenny) illustrates how childhood strategies become adult behaviour in the absence of structural support. Where Good is at its political necessity is in illustrating how reclamation is grounded in communal cultural protocols and not individualism. Clara's restoration course — from survivor tortured by remorse over Lily's death to a woman re-linked to Cree healing protocols and an active Cree Courtworker — reveals how Indigenous knowledges provide healing paradigms and types of political praxis. Mariah's healer character in the novel is a prototype of the necessity of culturally specific recovery work: reconnecting to land base, ceremony, and relational protocols resists alienation imposed through school protocols (Smith, 2012; Simpson, 2017). Clara's advocate work takes private trauma and transforms it into communal caring; the trajectory from private pain to public witness is itself a reclamation.

8.3. Clara — Rage, Representation, and Political Awakening

"Clara bit her tongue, listened and watched. She thought of what it was like to lose your freedom. She thought of her helplessness at the Mission and being under the thumb of Harlan and the city cops. She met with court staff, judges and prosecutors during her training and hung on their every word, gleaning everything she could. It wasn't easy to say the words that all of them needed to hear, but Rose was right. This was about those people standing helpless before the law, often just trying to get by in a world they'd been abandoned to, entirely unprepared" (Good, 2020)

The quote captures Clara's transformation from a survivor of systemic oppression into someone who begins to understand the mechanisms of justice—and injustice—within Canadian society. Her memories of helplessness at the Mission, her abuse under Harlan, and harassment by city police remind her what it feels like to have no control over her life. These experiences shape how she perceives others who appear before the courts. When she trains and listens to judges, prosecutors, and staff, she is not just absorbing legal knowledge; she is filtering it through the lens of her own trauma. The line "this was about those people standing helpless before the law" is crucial. Clara recognises that many Indigenous people enter the justice system not as equals but as marginalised individuals abandoned by a colonial state that robbed them of cultural grounding, education, and support. Her empathy lies in understanding that survival often forces people into conflict with laws designed without their realities in mind. What this passage shows is Clara's movement toward advocacy: she realises that justice cannot just be about punishment or procedure, but about recognising the structural abandonment and intergenerational trauma that shape Indigenous lives.

8.4. Howie — Testimony, Refusal, and The Demand for Accountability

"You want to know I'm sorry… But I am not sorry. Not at all. You have no idea what that mad did to me and a whole lotta other little boys. He deserved what he got and more. Where was the law when he was beating us…?" (Good, 2020)

Howie's failure to be able to feel remorse is an ethical criticism of systems that criminalise survivors while protecting abusers. His rhetoric reinterprets violence as accountability: the legal system demands remorse from the vulnerable, but too often fails to intervene when the abuses occur. This rhetorical reversal — invoking the absent law — is a commonplace criticism of transitional justice because it criticises processes demanding testimonial labour from survivors and offering too little structural redress (TRC, 2015). Howie's indignation is thus a form of moral clarity: his failure to be shamed by a system once an accomplice to abuse is in itself a political statement. It is important to recognise that reclamation is unequal. Suicide by Maisie and premortem death by Kenny signal how colonial harm is deadly or path-dependent.

Their trajectories close off simplistic redemption narratives. Critical literature on historical and intergenerational trauma warns against wishes that legal redress or compensatory justice itself heals deep breaks; sometimes formal recognition reopens wounds but cannot bring the cultural capital to repair (TRC, 2015; Caruth, 1996). Good's realism prohibits neat closure: reclamation and loss coexist.

9. Feminist and Decolonial Readings: Why Centring Women Matters

A feminist, decolonial perspective reveals the distinctness of these women's pain and survival. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) clarifies why in the novel Indigenous women encounter multiply mediated sources of disadvantage—state violence, racialised and combined with sexual violence and gendered exclusion on an economic level. Decolonial feminist writing is emphatic in insisting upon life recovery through restoring to Indigenous systems and knowledge bases their sovereignty (Mohanty, 2003; Simpson, 2017). The return to Cree healing of the character Clara, the insistence on caring for Kendra by Lucy, and the relations of survivors in communal ways are realities of this theory: recovery is a political reconstitution of social worlds and not individualistic.

What Use is a politics of relation and diminutiveness? Rather than episodic heroism, *Five Little Indians* requires survival as relation and society: it is lived through friendships, kinship-like relations, re-learning of culture on a societal level, and occasional public witnessing. For scholars, the novel argues in favour of approaches intermingling trauma analysis and Indigenous epistemologies—research recording pain and tracing the community trying to heal it (Smith, 2012; Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999). If reclamation is the moral aim of the novel, it is reached only when survivors are afforded space to speak for themselves in relation to land, community, and non-Western legal and healing protocols. These five experiences define a course: earliest flight and survival (Kenny), coping in the body (Lucy), longings for an absent domesticity (Maisie), transforming private anger into public opposition (Clara), and political refusal to be defined by imposed narratives of guilt (Howie). They show how childhoods lost to violence beget psychic damage and coping mechanisms; sometimes the coping is productive of reclamation (Clara, Lucy), and sometimes it hardens into fatal repetition (Maisie, Kenny). Good's realism refuses to tidy up loose ends: reclamation is realisable but partial and unequal and sited in community and cultural re-learning and not individual heroic recovery.

Regardless of whether their parents are alive or deceased, the state and church deprive the children in *Five Little Indians* of their families and leave them little other than orphans. Separated from home in childhood, they are robbed of the option of return; parents such as Bella and Sagastis are specifically prevented from recovering them. Siblings are separated from each other, such as Lucy and Wilfred, and after a long time in the system, the bond of family is very often irreparably severed. Kenny barely knows Bella at their reunion, while she never gets over her loss. Maisie, however, by no means discouraged in her feelings towards her parents, is incapable of trusting them and faults them for having failed to defend her against the abuse to which she has been subjected. Even in the cases in which flight seems to be an option, the separation spiral is repeated—Howie and his mother flee to America, but prison and death divide them definitively. But the novel is just as powerful in highlighting how kinship, in whatever form it takes, is essential to the continuity of life. At school, the friendships the children form—with Kenny and Howie or with Lucy and Edna or with Clara and Lily—are lifelines to carry them through pain. Later, even though conventional family groups are an impossibility, in their own ways, they create their own. Mariah is the mother of Clara and Vera. Clara is co-mother to Lucy and to her daughter, Kendra. Howie takes in his mother's neighbour, Maggie, as family. Thus, the novel at the same time reveals the destructive breakage caused by

the residential schools and honours the resilience of Indigenous nations to create kinship networks in the face of relentless attempts at their destruction.

Perhaps the greatest wound inflicted by the school system is the denial of a solid sense of home. The mission school in *Five Little Indians* is neither refuge nor safety but a site of violence and alienation. And “home” anywhere else in the community is no less vexed. When Kenny is returned to his village, the flourishing community of his mind has given over to decline—empty parks and crumbling houses mirroring his own uprooting. Decades distant and back again, Howie is unable even to recognise his childhood community and is reduced to guiding passersby to establish his bearings, illuminating how time and trauma shatter one’s tie to territory.

Against this backdrop of uprootedness, Mariah is an exception: embedded in the cabin her grandmother once used to occupy, she is a living manifestation of continuity and of the life-bestowing power of tie to earth. Her story is an intimation that, inasmuch as it may be too much to return to the past intact, it is possible to import ancestral affiliation into the present. However, the novel confirms that home is not only inherited but is made. Lucy, leaving the mission school with a single handmade bag to her name, begins to construct stability in the form of the Francis Street house built by her and Clara and by her and George and Vera and Kenny. Their pooled labour—scrubbing and repair and planting flowers—transforms the dwelling into a space of memory and gentleness. Its meaning is long-lasting: Clara and Kenny are drawn back to it in their lifetimes, and Lucy will not move even when offered a materially preferable alternative. The same is the case with Howie’s decision to restore Sagastis’s house and share it with Clara in the final chapters, and so confirm the possibility of re-grounding after rupture. Again, here, the novel highlights how home is less a question of permanence of site than it is a question of love and resilience and elective affiliation.

9.1 Indigenous Feminist Perspectives of Simpson and Anderson

Indigenous feminism as articulated by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson privileges resurgence, relation-making, and community-based healing in the context of colonial violence. These ideas are reflective in *Five Little Indians* in the attempts by the survivors to reclaim agency and cultural identity after having been forced to endure the trauma of the residential schools. Simpson’s emphasis on everyday forms of resistance is visible in Clara’s job as a Native Courtworker and advisor in her advocating on behalf of other women and their healing from abuse and rape, to show how healing is never individual but embedded in networks of relations. Similarly, Kenny’s modes of survival and Lucy’s reclamation of her body and freedom demonstrate the indirect but powerful ways in which Indigenous peoples resist the inheritance of colonial violence and support Simpson’s argumentation that resurgence is an ongoing communal and not an individualistic act of heroism. Kim Anderson’s textual work on Indigenous women calls attention to the gendered features of colonial trauma, disrupted kin relations, and the reclamation of the maternal. The novel illustrates how systematised and sexualized abuse and social pressures affect Indigenous women disproportionately, in concert with Anderson’s critique of patriarchal and colonial frameworks. The challenges of raising Kendra by Lucy and the suicide of Maisie underscore the intergenerational and embodied effects of these system disruptions. However, moments of care and guidance, namely Clara’s guidance of young ones, show how Indigenous women reestablish power and agency through their kin. As a whole, Simpson’s and Anderson’s approaches illuminate the novel’s exploration of resilience, relational healing, and reclamation of Indigenous women’s standings and demonstrate how literature may be employed as a lens to initiate an understanding of both trauma and the healing strategies grounded in Indigenous feminist praxis.

10. Practical Application of Findings

The analysis of *Five Little Indians* demonstrates how literature can serve as both testimony and resistance. By foregrounding the stories of Clara, Lucy, and Maisie, the novel challenges dominant colonial narratives that often silence or stereotype Indigenous women. The traumas they endure—sexual violence, cultural loss, and fractured kinship—mirror the lived realities of many survivors of residential schools, but the novel does not leave them suspended in victimhood. Instead, it emphasises their resilience, their attempts to rebuild kinship, and their ability to reclaim identity through acts of survival and storytelling. The findings of this study carry significance beyond literary criticism. They highlight the urgency of integrating Indigenous women's voices into broader feminist, decolonial, and reconciliation discourses. For instance, the novel's portrayal of disrupted kinship systems underscores the need for policies that strengthen Indigenous family structures, community healing, and intergenerational support. Similarly, its depiction of sexual violence and forced motherhood resonates with ongoing concerns about systemic violence against Indigenous women in Canada, connecting the narrative to current activism such as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) movement. Another practical implication lies in the transformative power of storytelling itself. By validating Indigenous women's narratives in academic and cultural spaces, scholars, educators, and policymakers can support decolonial approaches to history and memory. The analysis of *Five Little Indians* demonstrates how literature can serve as both testimony and resistance. By centering the stories of Clara, Lucy, and Maisie, the novel challenges dominant colonial narratives that often silence or stereotype Indigenous women. The traumas they endure—sexual violence, cultural loss, and fractured kinship—reflect the lived realities of many residential school survivors, yet the novel highlights their resilience, efforts to rebuild kinship, and reclaiming of identity through storytelling.

The findings have practical significance beyond literary criticism. They suggest specific actionable applications in education, policy, and community practices. For example:

1. Curriculum Design: Incorporating Indigenous literature like *Five Little Indians* into secondary and postsecondary curricula can foster critical understanding of colonial histories, intergenerational trauma, and Indigenous women's resilience. Modules could include discussions on disrupted kinship, survivor narratives, and strategies for cultural reclamation.
2. Community Healing Practices: The novel underscores the importance of storytelling and intergenerational dialogue as tools for healing. Community programs can adapt these insights to facilitate workshops, healing circles, and mentorship programs that center survivor voices and strengthen family and community bonds.
3. Justice and Policy Reforms: The depiction of sexual violence, forced motherhood, and systemic oppression highlights the urgency of addressing ongoing inequities. Findings can inform justice reforms, including culturally sensitive support services, legal advocacy for Indigenous women, and targeted interventions aligned with initiatives like the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) movement.

By validating Indigenous women's narratives in academic, cultural, and policy spaces, scholars, educators, and policymakers can support decolonial approaches to history, memory, and social reform. Literature like *Five Little Indians* thus functions not only as a record of colonial violence but as a guide for dialogue, healing, and practical action. Recognizing Indigenous women as knowledge keepers, survivors, and agents of change becomes both a scholarly insight and a concrete step toward reconciliation.

11.Conclusion

Five Littl7e Indians chronicles the abrogated childhoods and ongoing injuries of Indigenous survivors of residential schools while insisting upon resilience, tenderness, and cultural continuity. Michelle Good centres Indigenous women at the very forefront of this reclamation, and the novel is therefore an important addition to feminist and decolonial literatures. The novel argues insistently that historical trauma cannot be undone, but life is possible in a reconstituted community, cultural resurgence, and communal storytelling. This paper argues that *Five Little Indians* is less a fictional production than a cultural intervention in historical silences around Indigenous women's lives. The novel demonstrates how trauma is gendered and intergenerational, but it insists on revealing resilience as profoundly embedded in cultural memory and communal strategies of survival. Through feminist and decolonial analyses, voices systematically suppressed by colonial history are reclaimed and re-centred. The results are clear: literature forms an important pedagogical tool to teach colonial histories and their gendered outcomes, while academic contexts must continue to premise Indigenous women's narratives within feminist, postcolonial and trauma studies. Future directions will entail comparing the representation of Indigenous women in Canadian literature to that in global Indigenous literatures. At the same time, greater interdisciplinary exchange across literature, Indigenous studies and history will be necessary to advance these very important but disparate decolonial frameworks.

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