

OF STRANGERS AND RELATIONS: NATIVE AMERICAN HOSPITALITY IN TONI JENSEN AND SUSAN POWER

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This article examines narrative articulations of Native American hospitality in the autobiographical essay “The Worry Lines” (2020), by Métis writer Toni Jensen, and the fictional chapter “Sacred Wilderness” (2014), by Standing Rock Sioux Tribe member Susan Power. In both texts, relevant connections to the Other are made outdoors by means of words, deriving in the lowering of walls—which both separate and connect—and calling for a reexamination of Indigenous peoples as strangers within the doors of the US settler colonial state. The result is a vindication of Indigenous sovereignty and literary activism through the epistemological and ethical value of relationality, as well as a contribution to hospitality studies more broadly through its vindication of the power of conversation and literature.

KEYWORDS: Native American hospitality, relationality, solidarity, decolonial love, hope.

D’estrans i relacions: l’hospitalitat nativa americana a Toni Jensen i Susan Power

Aquest article examina les expressions narratives de l’hospitalitat nativa americana a l’assaig autobiogràfic “The Worry Lines” (2020), escrit per l’autora Métis Toni Jensen, i al capítol “Sacred Wilderness” (2014), part de la novel·la homònima de Susan Power, membre de la tribu Standing Rock Sioux. En ambdós textos, a través de les paraules s’estableixen connexions rellevants amb l’Altre en espais a l’aire lliure, cosa que resulta en la disminució de les barreres que tant separen com connecten, i subverteix la interpretació dels pobles indígenes com a estranys portes endins de l’estat colonial dels Estats Units. El resultat és una reivindicació de la sobirania indígena i de l’activisme literari a través del valor epistemològic i ètic de la relacionalitat, així com una contribució als estudis d’hospitalitat en un sentit més ampli mitjançant la reivindicació del poder de la conversa i la literatura.

PARAULES CLAU: hospitalitat nativa americana, relacionalitat, solidaritat, amor descolonial, esperança.

De extraños y relaciones: la hospitalidad nativa americana en Toni Jensen y Susan Power

Este artículo examina las expresiones narrativas de la hospitalidad nativa americana en el ensayo autobiográfico “The Worry Lines” (2020), escrito por la autora Métis Toni Jensen, y en el capítulo “Sacred Wilderness” (2014), parte de la novela homónima de Susan Power, miembro de la tribu Standing Rock Sioux. En ambos textos, a través de las palabras se establecen conexiones relevantes con el Otro en espacios al aire libre, lo que resulta en la disminución de las barreras

que tanto separan como conectan, y subvierte la interpretación de los pueblos indígenas como extraños de puertas adentro del Estado colonial de los Estados Unidos. El resultado es una reivindicación de la soberanía indígena y del activismo literario a través del valor epistemológico y ético de la relacionalidad, así como una contribución a los estudios de hospitalidad en un sentido más amplio mediante la reivindicación del poder de la conversación y la literatura.

PALABRAS CLAVE: hospitalidad nativa americana, relacionalidad, solidaridad, amor descolonial, esperanza.

Humanity is in crisis —and there is no exit from
that crisis other than the solidarity of humans.
—ZYGMENT BAUMAN

What we dream of is already present in the world.
—REBECCA SOLNIT

From the stranger within our doors to open places of approximation

In this article, I examine the representation of hospitality in two recent texts by Native American women writers, most specifically, “The Worry Lines” (2020), by Métis writer Toni Jensen, and “Sacred Wilderness” (2014) by Susan Power (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe).¹ Both authors are literary activists that illustrate the present movement of Indigenous resurgence in the United States. As I argue, their texts vindicate Indigenous women’s values and demands as they offer a more general lesson on how to best attend to the relation between the self and its many others which can be useful for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike.

The population of the US is not only large but also extremely diverse, and as a consequence, “American history and culture [...] is traversed by hospitality and its own parasitic double, hostility” (Manzanas and Benito, 2017: 7). In fact, “this violation of the laws of hospitality can be traced throughout the history of expansion to the West and the transformation of Native Americans into unwanted guests, into hostages corralled and relocated in their own land” (46). Native Americans are not strangers *at* the US door, as Bauman would say (2016) —for no one with any historical sense could consider them immigrants— yet they clearly are strangers *within* the doors of the settler colonial state. Of strangers, argues Bauman,

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we know much too little to be able to read properly their gambits and compose our fitting responses—to guess what their intentions might be and what they will do next. And the ignorance of how to go on, how to deal with a situation not of our making and not under our control, is a major cause of anxiety and fear. (8-9)

Fear and anxiety are common reactions to Native Americans, who are in large part, and due to the prevalence of colonial stereotypes of the *indian*, not always known as real people living in the US right now. Hence, an account of hospitality in the context of Native American writing requires an attention to ongoing settler colonialism, made manifest, among others, in the outrageous ciphers of violence against Indigenous women, or in the constant attempts at stealing Indigenous lands.

In response, Indigenous peoples vindicate their sovereignty over bodies, lands and traditions, and they do so largely by reinforcing the ethical and epistemological value of relationality, whereby being is defined as being-with. In the words of Lee Maracle, “*All our relations* refers to the earth and all its beings in relationship to us. Relation implies a loving, caring, sustaining covenant between beings. [...] Violation of these agreements has consequences, in law and in life, and these consequences affect us personally and socially” (2017: 95). Interestingly, relationality is articulated through storytelling, for “[s]tories are our helpers; they lead us to right living, to the good mind, to relationship with one another and the land. Stories help us to be human” (100). As Margaret Kovach offers, stories are connected to belonging and signify relationships (2011: 94), and “[s]tories are who we are. They are both method and meaning. Stories spring forth from a holistic epistemology and are the relational glue in a socially interdependent knowledge system” (108).

The literary affirmation of the essential Indigenous value of relationality also confirms the potential of hospitality as a frame to understand the world. In the view of Manzanos and Benito,

hospitality opens spaces up as forms of exchange; it dialogues with space and border theory, reexamines the roles of hosts and guests, mobilizes the notion of home and converses with hospitable and inhospitable languages as it rearranges the concepts of belonging, membership and citizenship. (2017: 8)

Yet, it needs to be remembered that hospitality is both hostility—resulting in Derrida’s “hostipitality” (2010)—sustained on walls aimed at protecting those inside from the strangers outside and solidarity, or the various alliances that traverse and challenge those walls, functioning in spite of them, within them. Nowadays,

instead of “a barometer of civilization”, hospitality has become “a mark of weakness in the face of the need to secure a stable national narrative” (Manzanas and Benito, 2017: 6). Hence,

[h]ospitality has turned from a discourse of generosity into a discourse of spatiality and (dis)placement, from an interpersonal moral act into a national political issue. It has swerved away from the ethical face-to-face encounter with the Other in the welcoming abode of the self, toward the political encounter with the stranger at the borders of nationally bounded space. (19)

As a result, the prevalent discourse of hospitality “reveals and reinforces views of centrality and alterity, belonging and alienation, inclusion and exclusion, legality and illegality, power and submission” (20). These positions, however, are not fixed but unstable, open to subversion and revision, proving that, as Manzanas and Benito offer—drawing on Doreen Massey—, “[h]ospitality is always under construction, in the process of being made” (2017: 7-8). As we observe in Jensen’s and Power’s texts, the Natives’ experience of estrangement does not necessarily prevent them from being able or willing to offer hospitality to others. This can be connected to Manzanas and Benito’s observation that “prior experience of homelessness”—which I also take as applicable to dispossession— “prepares the self for the truly hospitable response to the Other knocking at the door” (21). Because the particular accounts of hospitality that I am analyzing bear similarity not to “a discourse that underlines and supports a certain dynamics of power” (20), but to the biblical or classical understanding of hospitality as the “codification of ethical openness in the face of the Other” (20), as “a form of proximity, an acceptance of the Other into one’s dwelling, understood as a set of social and cultural relationships” (10), they make a useful contribution to that process of construction of hospitality today. They also respond to John Rajchman’s call “to be attentive to the unknown that is knocking at the door” (1999: 47) and confirm, as offered by Larissa Lai, that literature has a role to play in the unfolding of that necessary attention to “know when the knock comes, and recognize it as such” (2018: 96).

In line with all this, my analysis is compatible with Floya Anthias’ endorsing “a notion of solidarity that pertains to all societal members” (2018: 155), replacing current approaches to integration and diversity where only the “other” —most usually an ethnic or racial other— is targeted, in place for solidarity aimed at “building a common future, irrespective of differences in beliefs, values, or ways of life” (155-6), and which “builds on the notion of *identities of action* rather than identities of common origin or culture, unlike the focus of integration and diversity discourses” (156; original emphasis). In this view, the best approach to hospitality as an opportunity to reach solidarity will necessarily be translocational,

which involves “a focus on *social locations* rather than a focus on cultural difference and boundaries”, so that “identity and belonging are conceptualized as a set of processes (therefore there is a need to attend to historicity) and not as possessive characteristics of individuals” (154-5; emphasis in the original).

In the texts under analysis, these trans-locations are associated with the outdoors, which indicates a move beyond other symbols that have been used to account for social relations. Anthias recovers philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel’s claim in “The Door and the Bridge” (1994) that the bridge functions as a metaphor for the boundary, for it highlights the edges as it links them. The door, in turn, “treats the boundary as more fluid and the spaces between them as more connected” and it denotes “the possibility of a continuous and mutual exchange” (Anthias, 2018, 157). Manzanas and Benito also discuss doors, drawing on George Perec, and claim that they break the space in two, imposing a partition and dividing the world between the private and the public (2017: 17). Hospitality would then have to be relocated to the threshold, as Derrida posits (2010). These views may be said to conform to Simmel’s idea, which is the basis of his analysis of bridges and doors, that the human being is a “connecting creature who must always separate and cannot connect without separating” (1994, 10). Yet, should we assume that this way of seeing the world is necessarily universal? As I contend, these tenets would have to be reconsidered, at best, by the possibility of a different view on the world, the self, and space as that proposed by Indigenous peoples, who, as Indigenous resurgence authors and critics tell us (LaDuke, 1999; Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2017), did not see the world as necessarily split into indoors and outdoors, who did not require separation in order to recognize the fluidity and connection of all things. Hospitality in texts by Native women is articulated as outdoor encounters, as exemplified by a translocational place of intersection of several separating and changing lines in Jensen’s, and by the meetings in natural places across time and space in Power’s. Hence, it makes sense to change the focus from bridges or doors—including thresholds—to other positions which more clearly signify relation in a way that approximates the traditional Indigenous views. If hospitality has to do with walls and how we perceive and deal with them, defining the limits we live by—which separate and unite the self to everything that is not the self—, then these texts call on us to start looking at those walls differently.

The worry line in constant motion

“The Worry Line” is one of the sixteen pieces that compose Métis Toni Jensen’s memoir-in-essays *Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land* (2020). In *Carry*, she draws a map of gun violence in America by situating the narrative voice at the junction between personal memory and historical record, and at the intersection of various dynamic categories that make the self, including, but not limited to,

race, skin color, gender, class, age, or regional origin. At the same time, she explores the multifarious ways in which these and other limits intersect and can be challenged by pointing to their porosity, connecting personal stories to cases of violence in the US, combining memory with research, her experience with other people's. The outcome is a text which is both very personal and very political, where the various lines that separate, and the relations that connect—real or imagined, spatial or temporal—are both result and process, fixed and dynamic, composing a multidimensional map that could not be contained on a flat surface.

The time is 2006 and the first-person narrator spends an academic year working at Chatham College on her first tenure-track job. Pointing to the intersection of race and gender, she was hired, she claims, because she is likeable and Métis and with a face “that is read over and over as lovely, as nice, as compliant” (Jensen, 2020: 155). The way she is treated as a good stranger, one who does not activate the alarms of fear and anxiety that other features or attitudes would, underscores the validity of those alarms, their persistence, for it is implied that another kind of scholar looking differently would not have been hired. As the narrator ponders, “I think often that I should not be held responsible for other people's misreadings. My face is a very clear face. But in order to read it, you have to be willing to look. You have to be willing to read a woman's face as something other than compliant” (155). This is precisely what she is asking us to do: to open up to the possibility that things mean something different from what we know or think we know. This is not easy in a place where, as she claims, she is always asked about her Indianness at faculty events, expected to have “true Indian” opinions on certain issues, which she finds tiresome and alienating (155), and which indicates the problematic tokenism and extractive attitudes so common to academia. Adding the gender component to her social locations, she explains that she is pregnant and thinks she is expecting a boy, not because she wanted one—she is, after all, observing that “boys are being shot all over America” (146)—but because she is aware of the limits of self-expression and self-possession for women: “When I say I thought I was carrying a boy, what I mean to say is that I wanted for the child I carried a life where the life—down to the facial muscles—remained theirs” (147).

Race and gender intersect with place and class, and Jensen encourages readers to delve into the map of Pittsburgh's neighborhoods and other storied places that she is describing. Because of their three dogs, and because the narrator and her boyfriend cannot afford it, no one will rent to them in the neighborhoods surrounding campus. In spite of her tenure-track job, the narrator is basically poor—this poverty, she says, is “one of academia's dirty secrets” (161)—so that she does not always have enough money for food. The shame at having to leave her groceries on the conveyor belt at the supermarket one time because her credit cards were declined will still haunt her long after. As will the physical and psychological

impact of having to go back to work three days after giving birth, after a C-section, postpartum preeclampsia, and her baby's initial "failure to thrive" (172), because she will not be paid maternity leave. All these social locations, to use Anthias' term, interact to make the narrator's experience what it is, but they are not fixed or left unchallenged.

Apart from her job, the limitations of class are reflected in the neighborhood where she lives, which "is hard to define" (152) and characterized by its relations and high crime rate. To outsiders, going to her neighborhood means crossing a line, as exemplified by her experience with the "worry line" in the title. After exploring the various Webster's definitions of the verb *worry*, she uses it to describe the behavior of the police officer who is following her as she is driving home, in the encounter which best exemplifies the dynamics of hospitality in the text:

The police officer behind me is experiencing worry in the most American of senses. He's worrying over the neighborhood, that he's crossed the line into a place where he's much more likely to be shot. [...] Webster's definition of the phrase *worry line* is "a crease or wrinkle on the forehead or between the eyebrows", with its first known use in 1972. Most Americans would recognize the way I'm using it here, though—as a marker between neighborhoods or blocks. Turn left, walk two blocks, and you've crossed the worry line. [...] [I]n this, our America, the worry line is redefined daily. It is in constant motion. (150)

The police officer has been following the narrator for more than two miles because they are in Pittsburgh, and her car has Texas plates (157). He is trying to protect the limits between inside and outside, legitimacy and illegitimacy, and she becomes a stranger in his mission, a threat. As they draw closer to her rented house, he uses the flashlights, but no sound, probably concerned "about who lives in the house, about who might come out from nearby houses or the apartments across the street, about who I am. His is a logical worry" (149). When she stops at her rented house, the officer gets out of his car, but he is uncomfortable, nervous. She is seven months pregnant and alone on a tough day. Yet, he does not see anything beyond the place where she lives, he is even suspicious of her seven-month pregnancy, probably interpreting it as a cover to deal drugs in this problematic neighborhood. As she perceives it, "[h]e's the one with the gun, and yet he's clearly scared to be here, clearly made uneasy by a white-facing, white-passing pregnant woman with nothing in her bags but books" (158). His prejudiced view of her raises a wall between the two which cannot be easily overcome. Also, this is a dangerous situation for her, for she is aware that in a place where "one-third of stranger killings are committed by police" (157), she could say the wrong thing or

use the wrong tone and become one more of the many women killed alone on a street in the dark (157).

Although the walls that separate the officer and the narrator seem solid, the truth is that “the contemporary world is one in which topological and political distinctions of the interior and the exterior are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in a simple way” (Balibar, 2017: 34). As a consequence, “the founding equation of the nation state, that of *citizenship and nationality*, has now become deeply destabilized” (34; emphasis in the original). The officer in the text is Latino or Chicano and, therefore, on the wrong side of many borders himself. This is a dangerous situation for him, and he is scared. Both of them perceive the other as dangerous and the self as the most vulnerable person in this encounter, but only one of them has a gun, and we know how dangerous a scared gunned man can be. The narrator knows this too, and she figures out a way to survive this encounter by connecting to the fear of the Other and coming out to meet him with her best and only weapon: words. Luckily, she is perceptive enough to use her “most soothing of teacher voices” (Jensen, 2020: 159) so as to work her way out of the situation by tearing down the walls that separate the two strangers, if only for a moment. Like Sheherazade to the sultan, like a mother to a child, she talks and talks to the police officer, in order to calm him and prevent him from using the gun he keeps his hand on. Finally, he “seems to grow tired of my talking. Eventually”, she claims, “my white face earns me free passage” (159).

In this scene, then, “[i]t is not the Other that comes to inhabit the territory of the self, as much as the self coming out to meet the guest, the self empathizing with the Other, seeing [herself] in the Other and welcoming its needs” (Manzanas and Benito, 2017: 30). In this act of hospitality, “the line is temporarily deactivated and communication ensues” (9). Yet, coming out of her position to meet the officer does not necessarily originate in an uninterested attempt at connecting with him. This is simply her best chance at saving herself, by deactivating his perception of her as a threat and establishing a relation. Hence, her action “entails an approximation, rather than an offer of shelter” (29). The narrator’s hospitality — “both a virtue belonging to ethics and an institution belonging to the law of the land, a disposition pertaining to the individual and also a prescription” (3)— is an adaptation of traditional hospitality in displacement which contributes to the text’s vindication of the human right to a safe home.

As a result of this temporary connection through words, the narrator gets to go inside to her relative safety. However, the walls do not disappear, and the narrator has only had a glimpse of connection that she wishes she could take further:

I would like for him to understand that where a person lives isn’t always an indication of what he or she does, of his or her heart. But I know it

sometimes is or, with time and necessity, is made to be. I know there are limitations we find ourselves unable to breach. I know sometimes we drown in the stagnant water of where we're from. (Jensen, 2020: 159)

Words work this time but, as the narrator knows, this kind of encounter does not always end up happily and guns, the ultimate symbol of power and surveillance, make dialogue very difficult. Nevertheless, we have borne witness to the mechanism that sustains the wall-making process, and a crack has been opened. The walls can move and change, they depend on perspective, and they have, within themselves, the potential for their own undoing. Last but not least, we confirm Bauman's idea that "[w]hatever the obstacles, and however immense they might seem, conversation will remain *the* royal road to agreement and so to peaceful and mutually beneficial, cooperative and solidary coexistence simply because it has no competitors and so no viable alternative" (2016: 116). Once more, literature proves to be a privileged promoter of such conversation.

Hospitality as decolonial (self) love

Sacred Wilderness (2014), by Minnesota writer Susan Power (Standing Rock Sioux), is set in contemporary St. Paul, where Candace Jensen, a half-Kanien'kehá:ka/Mohawk, half-Jewish woman, suffers the consequences of having been cut off from her Native past as a consequence of settler colonialism. The novel explores her journey of reconnection to the various parts of her ancestry with the help of several Clan Mothers of the present and the past. In this section I analyze the long chapter entitled "Sacred Wilderness", which is focused on the visit that Maryam, mother of Yeshua, the son of the Christian God, pays to Jigonsaseh, the seventeenth-century Kanien'kehá:ka mother of Ayowantha, inheritor of the Peacemaker's message and Candace's ancestor.² Jigonsaseh and Maryam are presented as two Clan Mothers who meet spiritually, beyond boundaries of time and space, becoming sisters and symbolizing the possibility of connection of their respective worlds. The account of their encounter will be life-changing for Candace, who by wearing an old Iroquois Medicine Mask that has been passed on to her by her ancestors, is able to see "what the Face knew all along—the connection of beings across light, the defeat of time" (Power, 2014: 114).

² The name of Ayowantha is used differently from its most conventional spelling "Ayonwatha", as is that of Maryam—a variation of Mary's name. There are also slight historical discrepancies regarding the characterization of Jigonsaseh, all of which is interpreted by Kelsey as the author's way to emphasize the fictional nature of the work (2015: 200). Yet, they clearly all point to the key characters in the Haudenosaunee—the larger confederacy to which the Mohawk belonged—and Christian creation stories.

It is 1626 and Jigonsaseh tells us, in first person narration, the story of her son Ayowantha, a boy who is deeply connected to all that is, who soothes people with his presence, restoring patience and peace, and who eventually becomes the leader of his community. The village is characterized by its hospitality and at the time of the narrative it was not limited to members of a single clan as was the custom with the Kanien'kehá:ka, but combined "the remnants of several villages that had been decimated by wars" (119). Ayowantha is the perfect embodiment of this virtue, and from his birth, he "watched the world with pleasant interest, open-faced and welcoming" (120). His attitude is one of radical openness and connection, and this allows him to make enemies into friends. After his first fight in battle, he says, "Mother, I loved them. How could I not? No matter that they use different words to say the things we all say. No matter that they wanted to kill me. That was only because they did not see me" (125). His enemies find acceptance in Ayowantha's eyes, which makes them be "seen in a way [they]'d never experienced before" (125). This makes the tribe grow — "[t]his is how we adopted Huron warriors into our family" (126), says Jigonsaseh— and alliances become strengthened. Yet, Ayowantha is born and becomes a man on a par with his cousin and double Shawiskara, who functions as a mirror of Ayowantha and reminds us that the negative of all things is also part of the balance of the world.

One day, before a storm, Ayowantha announces a new beginning: "The storm brings guests who will be new to us in many ways" (128), he says. Everything changes for the Kanien'kehá:ka with the arrival of Catholic priest Bartholomew. When he and his guide are seen in the distance, the War Chief and his head men get "ready to arrange a military greeting for the travelers" (128), but Ayowantha reminds them of how hospitality to strangers is a value of the community transmitted through storytelling: they should not be turned away or met with violence, for "[t]he Creator has a part in each of us" and turning a stranger away or meeting him with violence would mean doing harm to our Creator (129). Although the visitors come during "the hungry time" (129) when resources are scarce, the people make them welcome, quietly wondering what their intentions are. It is made explicit in the novel that hospitality is both virtue and law, an individual choice and a prescription which gives us a good view of the essential values of the community and their vindication of sovereignty on occupied lands. Hence, in the time Bartholomew spends with them, they keep offering him hospitality in spite of the growing tension and discomfort caused by his constant dismissal of their beliefs in his proselytizing mission. Ayowantha uses all his patience in his willingness to converse with the priest and connect with him but the latter gets more and more aggressive and is ultimately involved in Ayowantha's disappearance and possible death.

When this happens, Jigonsaseh looks for guidance to bring to her grieving people and she sets up a meeting—key to understand the novel’s articulation of hospitality—with the person she has heard from in Bartholomew’s stories but whose voice she has not really found in them, for those stories are “empty of women” and “[t]hey sound unfinished because they ignore half the world” (134-3). Jigonsaseh never stops being polite to the priest but eventually sees him “as a bird who eats the dead” (149) and longs to “make conversation with the mothers of his clan, to move past his certainty that was the way of a child and hear his stories from measured minds—from women who understood that an open hand is more powerful than a fist” (150). This is what motivates her to walk in the woods, find the right place and invite the Virgin Mary—mother of the God Bartholomew keeps talking about—to come talk to her:

Mother of Yesu, the One who died to save the pitiful people of this world, please counsel with me, mother to mother, so I can hear of your powerful medicine from a woman’s tongue. [...] I will not judge your medicine when I have only one man’s words to tell me of it. I invite you to meet with me in this sacred place that lifts our minds above the humble lot of human beings. The trees can be trusted to protect us and keep our counsel private. I am Jigonsaseh, mother of Ayowantha. I am Clan Mother of the Turtles. [...] I thank you for listening to my prayer. (151)

Jigonsaseh is following Kanien’kehá:ka ritual and protocol by issuing an invitation—thus establishing herself as hostess and vindicating her presence on the land—finding and preparing the right place to welcome her guest, and giving her time to accept her call. Unlike more recent accounts of limits to keep off strangers, here hospitality is “an interstitial experience that require[s] neither host nor guest to be either fully in or fully out, though the spatial dynamic was essential to the dynamic itself” (Manzanas and Benito, 2017: 22). And, very interestingly, it becomes “a sacred rite” (22). Jigonsaseh prepares the place, offering some tobacco to the trees in a ritual of gratitude to the woods that will act as witness and guardian. She chooses for her planned meeting a place where she sees “a pine in distress”, “a tall pine that had crashed to the ground, split near its base” (Power, 2014: 150), and which symbolizes the wound Jigonsaseh and her guest—who have equally suffered for their sons—will bring to the meeting. The tree also offers itself as “a great bench” (150), therefore making this outdoor space into a home of sorts. Indoors and outdoors, home and nature become one—they never were, at least in Jigonsaseh’s context, fully separated—in this act of encounter whereby the Mohawk vindicate their presence in a place that will eventually be lost to colonization.

As a response to her call for an encounter in the language of hospitality, the next day Jigonsaseh goes to the place in the woods and finds Maryam waiting on

the tree that acts as a bench, which is covered in fog this time. They “look into each other’s eyes and [find] warmth there” (151). Without hesitation, they face one another, and, in Jigonsaseh’s words, “[a]s one, we reached across the divide between us and locked arms in greeting. We were both strong. Women who had carried burdens and babies. [...] We were sisters” (151-2). Over the course of the next few days, the two women meet and share their stories, understanding one another through spirit talk. They are both willing to connect to the other, to find the many things that they have in common: how both of their sons’ messages are similar, about love; how they are united in their mother’s role, its joys and hardship; how people are, after all, “all afraid together” (153). As Jigonsaseh shares with her people later: “We made good talk [...] mother to mother” (163). Through open conversation, they learn that, unlike the stories that the priest tells—which cannot be reconciled because they speak of the land as a material thing out there waiting to be invaded instead of their view of it as “our family, [...] a sacred place, abundantly generous and good” (154-5)—, when the two women speak, “the stories twine together—they are different, but they don’t quarrel” (155).

The meeting of Jigonsaseh and Maryam offers a basic lesson in the proper way of dealing with strangers. It exemplifies what Seyla Benhabib defines as a “community of needs and solidarity”, created “at the interstices in societies” which fight inequality by combining “the logic of justice with that of friendship and solidarity” (2011: 189). Acknowledging both the things that differentiate and unite them, the women follow the norms that confirm “the rights of humanity” (69) in both the other person and the self. The meeting also confirms that, contrarily to common vindications on either side of the invented white/Indian border, there is no radical essence differentiating one group from the other. These women’s stories—and the cultural backgrounds they respectively uphold—have more in common than we have traditionally been led to believe. As noted by Manzanos and Benito, “there is currently a latent longing for a time when borders were in place, a once upon a time when, as Doreen Massey explains, boundaries were in fact impermeable and there was no transgression” (2017: 6). Yet, this past did never exist, and borders have always been permeable. It is worth remembering this in our interaction with people we insist on seeing as Others.

Another interesting thing this meeting does is illustrate the idea of decolonial love, which Belén Martín-Lucas foregrounds “as a core methodological tool for overcoming epistemic injustice” (2022). In the words of Carolyn Ureña, who explores it as “a theoretical and practical model for healing the wounds of decoloniality” (2014: 86), decolonial love has a subversive power insofar as it “operates between those rendered other by hegemonic forces” (86), it “is based on the “acceptance of fluid identities and redefined by shared humanity” (86), and “serves as an important form of ethical interrelation that is premised on imagining a ‘third

way' of engaging otherness that is beyond that of traditional Western and colonial binary thinking" (87):

To love decolonially is to heal the wound that rejects the other within, to acknowledge the "third meaning" of love that embraces the ambiguity and unknowability of the other, and to unleash the transformative power of that love. That this conception of love makes the forces of coloniality extremely uncomfortable is reason enough to read these kinds of stories as sources of new ways of knowing. (99)

Jigonsaseh and Maryam offer a beautiful example of decolonial love based on their willingness and ability to fully see each other, which is not always easy for these mothers of sacred men, but which is essential in the unmaking of strangers. Maryam expresses this with gratitude to Jigonsaseh: "You are one of the very few who sees me as I truly am. You see what is there rather than what you expect, what you invent" (Power, 2014: 160). In turn, the way Jigonsaseh opens up, offering herself to Maryam, is a radical act of decolonial love that involves a reformulation of identity. Like her son Ayowantha, Jigonsaseh is Kanien'kehá:ka, but that is not all she is. She is that, and many more things, and there is no contradiction. Thus does the idea of decolonial love contribute to the interrogation of binary thinking, an essential move to improve human relations in the world.

Conclusion: Hope as an alternative to certainty

Jensen's and Power's texts exemplify hospitality as a breaking-down of the barriers that separate people. If we expect this undoing of limits to be permanent or stable, we are in for a disappointment, but this does not make it less relevant. In fact, when "boundaries between individuals and groups are lowered, even for an hour or a day or several months, that matters" (Solnit, 2016: xxiv), because it opens up the possibility to look at the world with hope:

Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists. [...] It's the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand. We may not, in fact, know them afterward either, but they matter all the same, and history is full of people whose influence was most powerful after they were gone. (xiv)

Significant moments of hospitality like the ones we have examined in these two texts may also help us to imagine "the stranger for tomorrow", to use Balibar's term (2017: 40), which should in fact be the stranger for today. The solution to the

conflicts in today's globalized world is not to transform the stranger into an enemy or to "return to the 'classical' distinction between the same and the other, the inside and the outside" (41);

It is rather to explore the conditions and the limits, or the difficulties, of hybridization and multiculturalism that make it possible to disentangle the recognition of the diversity from the functioning and the sacralization of borders. So that the stranger is not by definition purely located outside, or figuring an intrusion, but is also recognized as such—and valorized—inside the communities and inside each of us, as a condition of development and existence. This is a moral dimension of politics, which does not achieve anything by itself, but without which nothing is achieved. (41)

Models that focus on solidarity as a way to open up to and connect to Others are more necessary than ever before, and these texts by Indigenous women who refuse to be limited by expectations about what their writing in general and their characters in particular should be like are a good step in that direction. An example of Indigenous resurgence and a form of activism insofar as they vindicate traditional ways of understanding identity in relation, the texts analyzed in this article offer a lesson in hospitality for the contemporary world. They remind us that we have always been relational beings and that acting upon that fact is the only way to understand the self and the Other, and the Other within the self.

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