

1. Introduction

Rita Joe was a celebrated Mi'kmaw poet, proud of her language, culture, way of life. Born Rita Bernard in 1932 in Whycocomagh, Nova Scotia, she was orphaned at the age of ten. She was sent to the Shubenacadie Residential School, where she was not allowed to speak her language and endured mental as well as physical abuse. She dropped out at 16 and married Frank Joe, her future father-in-law, with whom she had children. Rita Joe began writing in the mid-1970s and produced seven books, among them *Poems of Rita Joe* (1978), *Song of Eskasoni* (1988) *The Blind Man's Eyes*, which was released posthumously after her death in 2015. She was appointed to the Order of Canada in 1989 and admitted into the Queen's Privy Council for Canada in 1992. Peyachew was an Aboriginal Achievement Award recipient who received honorary doctorates from many universities. Frank Joe had died in 1989, a year before Rita was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease; she continued to write until her death in 2007, five days after her 75th birthday. At her death she was described by *The Globe and Mail* as the Poet Laureate of the Mi'kmaq people (*Globe & Mail*, 2007).

Colonialism in Canada is a long history, one that has barely been recognized by Canadian society at large until now. Colonial rule cut Indigenous people off from their roots, denying them the right to languages and excluding their traditions. Despite these obstacles, Indigenous writers began being published as early as the 19th century. Prominent early works include non-fictional life writing by George Cop way and George Henry and political writing by Joseph Brant and Métis leader Louis Riel (Das, n.d Vintage arrived late to the 20th century comparative to how it began, which is why there are more works identified as "contemporary" rather than "modern."

The first Indigenous writer of creative literature to be published and read in the wider, literary culture was E. Pauline Johnson, a Mohawk woman whose poetry was initially read in public in 1829 when it began to be anthologized. She has been accused of sentimentality, but Johnson cared very much about Indigenous issues and was an influence on later Indigenous writers. Indigenous people have been in Canada for thousands of years. They are the first peoples of the land and have had their own social, political, economic and culture systems long before European civilizations founded in North America (Das, n.d.).

Another term for Canadian indigenous people is Aboriginal Canadians. This community is made up of three main parties: the First Nations, Inuit and Métis. The Inuit reside for the most part in northern Canada, where it is called Inuit Nunavut, in Arctic territory. People of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry, the Métis were based in the Prairie Provinces and Ontario but are now present in

communities across the country. The First Nations are the aboriginal peoples living in what is now mainland Canada (Eigenbrod et al., 2003)

Canadian indigenous culture was traditionally eminently decentralized without large-scale organization(s) up until a series of colonization efforts began around the 17th century. But after Europeans arrived, indigenous cultures blended with Western culture. The Métis people appear in the late 17th century as big-game hunters and buffalo herdsman, mixed-blood descendants of unions between Indian women and European men. Inuit, in contrast, remained largely isolated from settlers and traded comparatively little with Europeans. Despite treaties, laws and agreements with Indigenous people for them to have rights, the lives of Indigenous people are still very much the same. (Eigenbrod et al., 2003).

National Aboriginal Peoples Day honours the contributions of Indigenous people to Canada's history. Some of the most recognizable Canadians in pop culture are members of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities who act as role models and contribute greatly to Canadian cultural identity. In Canada, Indigenous literature was largely of an oral type and described the colorful and heroic lives of mythical figures. When Europeans first arrived (from France and later England), the Indigenous people did start to write down their stories, although European colonizers often ridiculed oral literature as being "uncivilized" compared to written texts. Still, oral traditions are an essential vehicle for disseminating knowledge and expressions in many Indigenous communities. Prior to examining in detail the literature by Indigenous (First Nation, colonial) people, it is necessary to know what events led the Natives to take up reading and writing their own work (Das, n.d.).

Before the 1960s, Indigenous literature in Canada was primarily oral, including songs and storytelling. It wasn't until the 1960s, when changes in political culture urged Indigenous people to band together and stand up for their rights that organizations like the National Indian Brotherhood (now known as the Assembly of First Nations) began to emerge. One major change was the administration releasing the 1969 White Paper which sought to eliminate the Indian Act and "Indian Status." Faced with an intense opposition from Native communities which saw the whole thing being used to strip them of their rights and identity. Indigenous writing focused on the fight to reclaim identity, including ancestral stories and individual histories¹. Writers like Maria Campbell and Anthony Apapark Thrasher innovated a new form of narrative focused on the effects of colonial oppression. Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society* (1969) also attacked the government, calling for indigenous people to reassert their once-noble place in Canadian society. Later novels such as Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* (1985), and Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) have made it possible to sit itself down with that weight, the tremendous pressure put on Indigenous communities by settlers.

Such works are crucial to appreciating the Indigenous experience and effects of colonization (Eigenbrod et al., 2003).

There are several literary devices poets use to enhance the reader's experience in poetry. For instance, imagery can draw readers into the world of the poem and personification can give human traits to nonhuman things. Setting can inform not just time and place but also mood in a poem. In addition to these, the tone can make a poem more appealing and shape an atmosphere. The structural abstractness or form of a poem also adds to the way it is viewed by an audience (Gerson, 1998).

IST was created as a method for Indigenous peoples to counter oppressive Western-based discourses that deny their knowledge and experiences or portray them inaccurately. As such, it underscores the importance of framing research, policy and discussion using Indigenous perspectives. This framework is derived from Standpoint Theory, which was first established in feminist research, and suggests that marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples, have differing perspectives due to their particular social/historical/cultural experiences. Such a perspective helps illumine power relations and social constructions (Nakata, 2007).

One of the key aspects of Indigenous Standpoint Theory is its focus on self-determination and the rights of Indigenous peoples to manage how they commercially share their knowledge/stories. It resists colonial toolkits and ways of researching that have sidelined Indigenous knowing before. According to this theory indigenous knowledge systems are not the same as western knowledge systems, but may be based on sources such as land, spirituality and community. It reminds us that these perspectives must be located within the broader history of colonization and calls for the recovery of Indigenous lands, languages and cultures as part of the ongoing process of decolonizing (Moreton-Robinson, 2013).

Rita Joe's poem '*The Black Sea*' resonates well with Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST), the importance of indigenous peoples perspectives on environment, self and community. IST notes that indigenous knowledge is informed by specific cultural, historical and social factors which are important in Joe's narration. Throughout the poem, Joe points out to the interaction between humans and nature, through the use of "*The Black Sea*" as a metaphor for beauty and destruction. This connection is a reflection of how indigenous people see land and water are inseparable of identity, aligning with IST's tenets by emphasizing the connections between Indigenous people with land. However, Joe's use of imagery and the experiences of individual resemble IST's focus on self-formation and autonomy. Embedding symbols in her poem such as earth and water, the poet assumes that indigenous voices have been historically ignored because of the colonial power. The Black Sea, also, is used as a metaphor for resilience, defiance, and belonging. These themes resonate with the paradigms of Indigenous Standpoint Theory. If I understand that correctly, it is what Joe's poem show

us of how Indigenous peoples can look for their roots and stories but still connected to the lands and traditions from which they come.

This reading responds to important discussion questions based on the strong imagery in the poem such as, What is represented of Indigenous knowledge systems in Joe's use of imagery?(e.g. "the whispering waters of *The Black Sea*"). How might the poem be in dialogue with dominant narratives, especially as it so forcefully says "I am here!"? How does the point of view of Indigenous people come through in lines like 'I will walk with my people who have cried and laughed'? Here they might connect these questions directly to some of the lines of the poem and thus show what they would actually be doing on the issue.

2-Literature Review

What is thought to be happening is that Rita Joe, a well-respected Mi'kmaq poet and communicator and defender of the rights of her people has been accused of incorporating Indigenous values within the context of her poetry; most notably in *The Black Sea*. Using postcolonial and Indigenous standpoint theory, this literature review foregrounds the history in which Joe's poem has recently been critiqued such that as a feminist-author her cultural background means her discussion of identity, colonization and land differ significantly. Readers enter the depths of the poem's heart and what it signifies in a broader sense for Indigenous representation with a reading grounded on an Indigenous world view. However, in the literature there are gaps at the intersection of Indigenous standpoint theory and narrative reclamation. Notably, Anderson (2018) and White (2021) provide disparate perspectives on the extent to which Joe's work delves into dominant colonial narratives, and Daniels (2017) highlights the urgency that underscores Joe's poetic process in moving between Indigenous knowledge, on the one hand, and those who do not. By situating this study in relation to these debates, I am emphasizing its contribution to the growth of Indigenous literary criticism.

One such formulation of standpoint theory is Indigenous Standpoint theory, which posits that how Indigenous peoples know and be potential to serve as a heuristic for attention to social and cultural processes-in-particular those with colonialist connotations and impact (Alfred, 1999). Within this context, it is important for the purposes of their stories that people know and how Indigenous peoples' are situated in relation to narratives (Smith, 2012). By privileging the views of Indigenous peoples, researchers can interrogate mainstream cultural representations and uncover subtle nuances to the experience of being an Indigenous person. In Rita Joe's work, critics such as Anderson (2018), highlight the fact that she writes from an indigenous perspective that includes her individual experience and community alongside more generalized historical trauma experienced by indigenous peoples. This approach highlights a reading of *The Black Sea* conscious not only of the themes at play in the novel, but also to Joe's voice in relation to Indigenous literature and resistance.

In the poem, Joe explores questions of belonging and identity in terms of country that are grossly under-represented in mainstream literature when it comes to Indigenous experience. Turner (2019) notes that Joe's aesthetic relationship to place, and how her imagery marks the familiar natural world of her Mi'kmaq ancestry. Applying an Indigenous perspective analysis, we can understand how land takes on life more than a mere backdrop and becomes made whole, animate with emotional and spiritual significance. While exploring these issues, Joe challenges colonial narratives that separate Indigenous people from the land and their culture. Furthermore also, as White (2021) argues including Joe's work is how we understand what it is to be Indigenous postcolonial. For Joe, finding a connection between the personal and collective experience highlights how colonization's afterlife is intergenerational, while also narrating resistance and continuity of culture. This deconstruction of *The Black Sea* in terms found wanting by its indigenous inhabitants lends a more nuanced account that underscores the complex processes of identity formation against historical oppression and the re-appropriation by indigenous people their own narrative.

In the language and form of *The Black Sea*, Rita Joe writes back to colonialist discourses in a resistant act itself. Scholarly analyses such as Grey (2020) argue that Joe's creative imitation of poetic form inverts expectations of what literature should look like – an Indigenous voice, a different worldview mouthed back to disrupt dominant narratives. Decolonization also bleeds into language and how that can be upheaved and re-inscribed." Her poetry challenges colonial language and tropes by surfacing Indigenous ways of knowing and expressing grief, joy, belonging to the land. Moreover, on reading: Indigenous standpoint readers of Joe's poetry demonstrate that his poetry fosters empathic solidarity; not only among other Indigenous(d) people/audiences but also non-Indigenous audiences. It is, in the words of Daniels (2017), Joe writes with a timing so insistent that all publics must confront the legacies of colonialism and recognize the urgency of listening to Indigenous voices in movements to take back the narrative. From an Indigenous perspective, Joe's *The Black Sea* is the biting retort to the literary canon as ongoing oppression of Indigenous rights and presence.

(An indigenous perspective reading of Joe's poem offers rich insights into how identity, land and resistance form part of her verse. We understand here the deep well of meaning that pervades Joe's compositions and her own stories, which are entwined within them—at once spun from her life as a Mi'kmaq woman, shaped by her work on behalf of Aboriginal rights. He says the poem is “a call for not just reflection in Indigenous identity but a deeper consideration of Indigenous wisdoms within literary traditions as well. In the final analysis I think Rita Joe's Indigenous literature make an important appendix to our conversations on identity and home, as well as contributing a richer portrait of what it means to be Indigenous.

2. Theoretical Framework: Indigenous Standpoint Theory

IST, or Standpoint Epistemology is a chief module of feminist thought which questions what you get when an individual's lived-through experiences are the basis for how they see the world: it seems to imply that authority rests on personal experience and perspective. Coming out of feminist philosophy, what it demands is that we take seriously the perspectives of members of marginalized groups – those spoken about as “outsiders within”, in the language that informs this approach – which offer us valuable insights at odds with more standard views and thus enable a deeper understanding of society. One's frame of reference is formed by one's social and political context leading to different realities. For example, Hispanic women may share experiences associated with both their ethnicity and sex, but cannot be said to have only one identity (Pohlhaus, 2002). Indigenous Standpoint Theory has an indigenous or non-western way of thinking about how indigeneity engages the world. It highlights how their views as individuals are so frequently overlooked if not swept aside in a world driven by Western thought. This theory highlights the importance of accounting for the social, cultural and political contexts that shape and structure Indigenous experiences (Nakata, 2007).

It is a blueprint for Indigenous peoples to chart their own experience within mainstream power structures. Standpoint theorists emphasize the contribution of “local knowledge” to more general forms of knowledge, and Sandra Harding's notion of “strong objectivity,” for example, suggests that marginals are in the best position to provide an objective perspective. (1990), the mainstream culture and value system are indeed experienced differently, but it tends to view as legitimate the world views of those who wield significant political power compared to those with little or no cultural capital. "This means that if you're from a marginalized background, you might feel that you have to act a certain way or try to 'fit' in, but deep down this doesn't actually reflect who they are," he says. In combination, standpoint theory underscores the significance of multiple perspectives in seeking understanding of the world and underscores the importance of honouring quiet wisdom that resides within minority communities.

First-wave standpoint theory was developed in the 1970s and early 1980s by feminist philosophers such as Sandra Harding in *The Science Question of Feminism* (Harding, 1986). Feminist standpoint theory rested earlier ideas about value-neutrality in science on the specter of transcending a representationally and socially-bounded point of view. It was a performance how we determine access to knowledge, how gender identities are granted or denied access to knowledge and what one considers as knowledge. Standpoint theorists in the first wave were primarily concerned with women's experiences, in an effort to question and dismantle patriarchal knowledge construction and elevate that which is marginal (Wallace et al., 1995).

A theory of knowledge that respects the perspectives of women and minorities. The lens was then broadened to encompass a range of politics and practices of knowledge, as leading interlocutors such as Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, Alison Wylie, Lynette Hunter and Patricia Hill Collins (among others) forged theoretical reconnections to the full array of inclusions unleashed by an attention to intersectionality already richly promised.

When discussing intersectionality, keep in mind that it examines how (gender/race/sexuality/culture) intersect and influence multidimensional power relations. For example, intersectionality might be used to understand the impacts of the social on roles in a workplace (Faraday, 2021). Third-wave standpoint theory developed in a context of changing politics, cultures and economies. This is a feminism that is all about inclusivity and activism, promoting the voices of different people.” Those groups are not monoliths — Black women, LGBTQ+ people and folks with disabilities, among others. More recent examples include the election of Kamala Harris as the first female and person of color Vice President in need States, Global pandemic and Roe v. Wade down slide (Harnois, 2010). Indigenous Standpoint Theory: Responding to Western methods in research That attend directly to matters of domination and control over the levels of responsibility scholars have with respect to their subjects. Western modes of researching can position the researcher in the middle as the ‘one who knows’ and everyone else in community as simply ‘informants’ (Braun et al., 2013). Finally, such a concept is self-reference and researchers' interest instead of what are the people in their community want (Smith 2012). Moreover, IST highlights that Western ways of doing things could be ethnocentric and neglect indigenous values including community, mutuality and equity (Coram, 2011).

Such a methodological approach provides theoretical backing to the kind of research where Indigenous people can directly participate in every step of the way, as opposed to being “informants” only (Wilson, 2008). From the voice of indigenous scholars, the process of research should be collaborative and there ought to be an equal role for researchers and community members in terms of generating research questions, collecting data, analysis as well as ownership of findings. Such a view is respectful of the fact that different knowledge systems constitute legitimate ways of knowing and recognizes that other cultures and situations call for different methods (Kovach, 2009). This cultural reverence serves process of including the knowledge of all, black and white, poor and rich or educated uneducated, into what becomes a "knowledge" (Mkabela, 2005). The IST advise researchers to think about their positionalities and privileges relative to the people they study. In accordance with Indigenous protocol, researchers are required to respectfully declare who they are and why they are there. It is a mark of respect in traditional Australian First Peoples’ law and one that is vital when discussing issues such as sovereignty. The present author (an also achitectural fellow, “white middle-class” of course) makes the case for his position and why to deal with sovereignties of Australian First

Peoples, not the least whether there even is a valid sovereignty in the Crown (Ardill, 2013). Additional, it promotes a community based approach to knowledge acquisition as opposed to individual way and IST also appreciates that only together is it possible to live meaningful lives, where this kind of knowledge take part will be one in which groups form agreements Among other things, (IST) advocates for Indigenous research practices since non-Indigenous co-researchers may of had lived experience understand own life words Yet, there are interpretations on how ‘trusted’ non-Indigenous researchers could gain access even though such interpretations require engagement always respectful partnership building (Olsen, 2017). Lastly, IST sets a moral starting point that *focusses on the importance of trust, justice and fairness in promotional the conduct of researchers within communicative arenas, with research im.. bedded by working for inclusion, and to con.firm harmony (Chilisa, 2012).

Indigenous people, for their part, have always known the world to be something with which one is in relationship — and not just through stories but along the lines of Ancestor beings who tell tales about how a planet pulses with life and difference. But colonial powers had to shut those ideas down, so they re-stereotyped Indigenous people: Depicting them as one-dimensional stereotypes who doesn't have the depth or complexity of culture that animistic reality demands. Indigenous peoples were conceived as “exotic,” “simple” and “pre-civilised” in European myths, Wiradjuri academic Wendy Brady explains, reinforcing an colonial narrative in which it is acceptable to destroy a culture through the civilising mission or manifest destiny (Hussein et al., 2025). Despite the trauma and disruption of colonisation, Indigenous cultures survived because they endure more strongly even than death itself - their underlying affiliation with life is live and cannot be killed altogether (Kwaymullina, 2017).

According to standpoint theory, a standpoint is a position from which people view the world that (1) allows them to access knowledge of social reality and (2) enables them to establish social reality. This (socially, unequally determined) mental stance underlies comparing and judging objects or principles. Standpoints are not total views of reality, so standpoint feminism is compatible with other standpoints. This mode challenges the notion of truth and recognizes that there are alternative legitimate viewpoints, especially those emerging from marginalized groups (Rolin, 2009).

This theory, addressing the 'well' of marginalised groups in particular, contradicts the Western epistemology. At the heart of these have been notions of social positionality, cultural interface and embodiment – through such ideas Indigenous peoples can not only follow critical deconstructions of dominant knowledge system but articulate them in the standpoint they embody. It is not a blueprint to confirm oppressive institutions or advance Indigenous self-government.

3. An Analysis of *The Black Sea* by Rita Joe

"I shall not be silent in the land of ours with the whispering waters on black sea."

George Ryga's writing, especially *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, talks about the specifics of Indigenous Canada however when one uses that to say something about Rita Joe and her poem things are very parallel. A short aside contextualizing Ryga's impact on Native representations in Canadian theatre would be sufficient. That is why here I have continued to centre Rita Joe's poetry, also though honouring other efforts her to record and advertise Indigenous voices. Her work deals with issues of Indigenous identity, loss, grief and spirituality, social justice and the history of colonization. These lines and themes are woven through a lot of her writing – punchy, image-rich prose that is winding full of symbols and metaphors. Joe's poem speaks to the themes of displacement, identity and the effects of colonization for Indigenous peoples. "*The Black Sea*" works as a hiding place where many indigenous people see it as hiding secrets in its water that remain only as memories for indigenous people. Joe addresses the challenges faced by these communities, including marginalization, displacement, disassociation from culture and witnessing devastation to their lives and ancestral lands. In evocatively poetic prose, she writes as a lamentation of the loss of a way of life and an (en)raptured longing to return home. And lastly, the poem is a lament of longing to be sustained in culture and identity built against historical oppression and erasure:

"The Black Sea

I will not be silent

In this our land, where the dark sea whispers.

I will not shelter Beneath a somber veil,

But will stand and shout,

I am here!" I upstand; My heart with songs am full.

A people Who have hurt and laughed, And played on the earth, Touched it on their hands, Heard things in the wind-- If I never see A thick football player Or a Butch With painted lips With dull hair What had somewhat once been of These people In me.

valleys and hills.

Amid The Black Sea,

We come here With our hands upraised

And our lungs breathing as one, To regain our narratives,

To remember our past.

I will not be silent. I will not hide. I am here! With The Black Sea beside me,

And the powerful people I have In me." (Joe, 2007)

The poem seeks to show certain themes such as resilience, pride, and resistance to the ways indigenous people face from the colonial power. Joe herself fights to revive her past, showing the strength when the indigenous people come together. "*The Black Sea*" is a remark for identity,

belonging, and self-determination from the lens of indigenous people. By using Indigenous Standpoints, the poem reveals how indigenous people live and reconnect with land.

Joe reassures herself through her own autonomy to have her voice heard and that she belongs to the land. Her voice is a prime example of presence and identity and also of how indigenous people have been marginalized or pushed a side. Joe's claim, "I will not be silent", reflects the social forces that try to silence the people and ignore their belonging (Cajete, 1994). The line "I'll stand up and scream really loudly, I'm here!" (Joe, 2007) is another instance of the theme above and a reaffirmation of rejecting to be silenced or ignored. Joe's words represent his presence that stands against the power that attempts to marginalize or reject them. However, in the poem the notion of Survival depends on the mutual help among individuals to regain their identity. Joe again repeats these words, "In this land of ours", to refer to the spiritual and cultural links between indigenous peoples and land where land is not only in the background, but part of one's self. The speaker asserts the right of belonging to this land where it carries people's memories, struggles, and celebrations. "O the soft flowing whisper of waters / Of The Black Sea" is an image that weaves intimacy between speaker and nature. Water is a strong life force across many Indigenous cultures (LaFromboise et al., 2006) – food and drink, survival and spirituality; all flows are contained herein. In the sense of that connection, the land is always remembered in relation to the history of indigenous people. The "whispering waters" symbolize solidarity and closeness and the notion of engaging with nature also reinforces that the speaker belongs to the land. Evidently, the line "to reclaim our stories" shows the significant role of storytelling for Aboriginal cultures. This reclamation stands for regaining the stories of the indigenous people suppressed by colonial power (Smith, 1999). This line to reclaim our stories allows them to get back their voice through resilience. This act of taking back is not only crucial for feeding resistance to colonial acts, but also a vital way communities play to reassert their identity.

"*The Black Sea*" also sheds light on memory, signifying the importance of who gets remembered. "To remember our past" explains how memory is essential for native people. It is through memory that traditions move to the next generation (Cajete, 1994). By emphasizing the centrality of memory, Joe is saying that in remembering the past one requires feeling self-empowered and having a sense of self. Remembering our Past underscores the significance of honoring Indigenous lived experiences when viewed in solidarity. This remembrance serves as a form of empowerment, bestowing them with strength, identity and connection to the land and to society. Black Sea teaches us that, reclaiming and resourcing of memory, are vital for Indigenous people to assert sovereignty over their identity and to empower themselves through a legacy of historical dispossession.

4. Conclusion

Rita Joe's "*The Black Sea*" captures the collective experiences of the Indigenous people who lost their identity because of the violent assault brought on their culture by colonialism. Reading the poem through the lens of Indigenous Standpoint Theory, Joe tries to regain her belonging to the land and demonstrates her people's strength to have their right back. Her poem describes the world as a site of violence, displacement, and loss of identity. Joe expresses her own experiences through metaphors to show her lost identity. The poem also digs deep into how indigenous people and land are inseparable in which their history is buried in the land. Moreover, "*The Black Sea*" challenges the ways in which over time, the dominant narratives have rendered Indigenous voice and agency, invisible or passive in mainstream society. "*The Black Sea*" discusses themes of resilience and fight for freedom within indigenous communities, and opens up avenues for future questions about resisting foreign power.

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