

Truth and Reconciliation in Postcolonial Hockey Masculinities

Introduction

All of us have a relationship to sport, whether we like it or not; whether we are athletic or not; and even whether it is in the centre of our vision or more peripheral. In Canada, hockey culture is mostly inescapable, and it is well understood that hockey and Canada are frequently associated. It has become almost a truism to point to the links between hockey culture and nationalism, whether we think of Roch Carrier's *The Hockey Sweater*, Tim Hortons commercials, Don Cherry's "Coach's Corner," the *Hockey Night in Canada* theme song, the music of the Tragically Hip or Stompin' Tom, the 1972 Canada-Soviet Summit Series, or figures such as Bobby Orr, Rocket Richard, or Foster Hewett. When I teach "sport," I ask students to articulate their own sport history narratives, and these often pivot on gender. I have my own narrative. I spent the first twenty years of my book-saturated life avoiding sport, but also immersed in it as a spectator. My older brothers were on travel hockey teams until the end of high school. I saw most of their games, but never imagined myself on the ice; hockey was for boys, and it was violent. As Gamal Abdel-Shehid and Nathan Kalman-Lamb note, men "play the starring role in professional sport as athletes," and women "are consigned to the role of cheerleaders or dancers" (4). Of course, it is more complicated than this: some men assert their sport-masculinity through the accumulation of facts and statistics, and some women skirt the edges of sport culture, with book in hand and a good sightline, and still others are athletes themselves. In my early twenties I was an apprentice teacher in southern Africa, and had to choose an activity for Wednesday afternoon sports, a common practice in

many African countries. Naturally, I chose the least sporty option: ballroom dancing. It took me a few decades to begin to unpack the significance of weekly sports days. Like other postcolonialists, I was far more intrigued by Wednesday afternoon church, another colonial legacy.

It is assumed that hockey is unifying, “common mythology” (Blake 33) in Canada, but it is also a “contact zone” (Pratt) where “players” present competing narratives about the meaning of hockey, “our game,” in a post-TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) Canada. Here I stage a contact zone reading of two books about hockey, Stephen Harper’s *A Great Game* (2013) and Richard Wagamese’s *Indian Horse* (2012), that pays attention to the ways in which these divergent texts grapple with one another as they assert their own positions. The two books were published a year apart and each has national significance: Harper’s history was published when he was the sitting prime minister, and Wagamese’s novel was a strong contender in CBC’s “Canada Reads” in 2013 and has since been adapted as an award-winning film. Both Harper and Wagamese are hockey fans, but the commonalities stop there: Harper is a statistics and facts aficionado, whereas Wagamese is more concerned with human relationships and the ineffable in hockey. Harper presents a neat progress narrative (from amateur to professional hockey), while Wagamese refuses the conventional narrative of hockey development and progress, and tracks the movement away from professional to community-based hockey. In *Indian Horse* both hockey and masculinities undergo a process of truth and reconciliation, and hockey is provided a far more nuanced narrative than Harper’s text allows.¹ Before staging this exchange between Harper’s *A Great Game* and Wagamese’s *Indian Horse*, I offer some background on “Postcolonial Sport.”

Postcolonial Sport

In *Sport and Postcolonialism*, John Bale and Mike Cronin complain about the neglect of sport in postcolonial studies. They decry that books, not the body, provide the narrow lens through which “the postcolonial” is comprehended: postcolonial studies “overlooks bodily practices such as sport” (2). Jason Blake makes a similar claim about the twentieth-century Canadian literary scene: “while the literati chased distinctively Canadian themes to validate a new literature, they ignored hockey. They ignored the body in favour of the strictly cerebral” (23). In Wagamese’s novel *Indian Horse*, the protagonist, Saul, asks the priest who introduces him to hockey, “Are there books about it?” (56). Unusually, Saul is intellectual, creative, *and* athletic. Postcolonial

literature and theory's neglect of sport may be attributed to the focus on books and education as a way out of poverty and towards decolonization; for instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has closely scrutinized colonial education, but has never examined the culture of sport in Kenya—curious given the decades-long emphasis on running as a route out of poverty.² It is imperative and necessary to perform a critical analysis of sport and sport books—a point that Saul understands, as does Raymond Williams. In *The Long Revolution*, Williams explains that “sport and entertainment are as real as the need for art” (33). Both sport performances *and* sport narratives contribute to our understanding of colonialism and postcolonialism; and in the case of Harper's and Wagamese's texts, hockey reveals the ways in which Canada is a site of contestation.

The regulation of the body through sport and other disciplinary regimes was an integral part of imperial projects. John Hoberman identifies this complexity in *Mortal Engines* when he examines the tension between white and Black men's bodies in European imperial projects in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; white men felt both superior and inferior. There was a profound “ambivalence toward the physically impressive savage” (36-7). White men were scorned for their physically unimpressive bodies and lauded for their superior intellect and civility. In *Stickhandling through the Margins*, Michael Robidoux argues for the need for critical sport studies (22) in examining Indigenous people's subjection to racism (23-24) and their resistance (25). Sport was deployed as a means of control of recalcitrant populations across the globe, beginning in the nineteenth century and evident in the present moment in international governing bodies of sports (Bale and Cronin 3). This process is apparent in the management of Indigenous populations and bodies, but also in the regulation of white, normative bodies. For example, the Rhodes Scholarship (established in 1902) required that its recipients, “young [white] colonists” (Rhodes 23), were intelligent, but not “bookworms”; as well, they had to demonstrate “manliness” (36), mostly in the form of athleticism. While there were no Indigenous recipients of the original scholarship, there was emphasis throughout the colonial world on sport regimes: gymnastic displays at residential schools in Canada (see Forsyth) and track and field events in British-controlled Africa (see Bale and Sang), for example.

There is some excellent work on race, masculinity, and sport—and, in particular, the perceived deleterious effects of the Black male athlete on white men's mental and physical well-being, and the related concern that

Black men's apparent athletic superiority might expose the inferiority of white men. As Frantz Fanon points out, the Black male athlete is biological essence: "There is one expression that through time has become singularly eroticized: the black athlete" (158). Sports theorists, including John Hoberman and Ben Carrington, trace white masculine anxiety about the perceived athletic superiority of Black or Indigenous men. In *Mortal Engines*, Hoberman argues that the still-present white masculine anxiety is rooted in nineteenth-century paradigms; the contemporary response to that threat is the modern white athlete (61). In "Fear of a Black Athlete," Carrington focuses on representations of the Black male athletic body in contemporary media, and argues that this body's threat is managed through its representations as animalistic, eroticized; it has no agency or voice: "the *athletic black body* [is] a key repository for contemporary white male desires and fears about blackness" (93, emphasis original). Black male bodies, in particular, are described through "constant use of animalistic similes" (94), and are "sexualized and transformed into an object of desire and envy" (97). Canadian hockey *seems* to depart from this colonial pattern; after all, there is no obvious threat as the sport continues to be dominated by white players, *but* at the same time is seen to be increasingly inclusive and heterogeneous. These contradictions are evident in Canada's hockey icon, the CBC commentator Don Cherry, notorious for his anti-immigration, homophobic, and racist rants—and his celebration of Canadian hockey masculinity.³ In *Who Da Man?*, Abdel-Shehid argues that more non-white "players" threaten "the game" (54). The threat from outsiders is evident in media representations of non-white players.⁴

Blake points out the historical snobbery towards hockey in English departments and argues that we need to "read" hockey: "sports in general and hockey in particular were long neglected as subjects for serious academics" (Blake 5). Jamie Dopp and Richard Harrison echo Blake's sentiments. Canada is often represented as the "motherland" of hockey (Bidini 219); further, hockey *and* Canada are viewed as postcolonial and inclusive, but Wagamese and others complicate this favoured narrative. While Blake argues that hockey is unifying and that *participants* (broadly understood) share a common currency (27) and language (26), Dopp and Harrison point out that hockey is synonymous with Canada but is less unifying than many assume (8). In *Indian Horse*, Saul understands this latter point well: "The white people thought it was their game. They thought it was their world" (136). That hockey is "our game" is a refrain in everyday Canadian parlance, and it simultaneously posits possession and sharing.

While Blake argues that the CBC's weekly broadcast *Hockey Night in Canada* unifies the country (33), a key character in Wagamese's *Indian Horse* refers to it as "Honky Night in Canada" (137), a formulation that undermines Canada's and hockey's claims to inclusivity. It is telling that one of Saul's first memories with the priest, who is later revealed to be abusive, is watching *Hockey Night in Canada* in his room. It is far more menacing than its surface seems to suggest. At first, watching the game is "the personification of magic" (57), but later it becomes "the horror" (199).

Much of the academic and literary disdain for hockey is rooted in class differences, but hockey's class and race tensions are increasingly complicated. It requires more and more money and privilege to participate in high-level boys' hockey.⁵ (This is much different from when my brothers played, and my working-class parents scraped together money for the modest fees, hockey sticks, and other expenses.) Regardless, it is still considered a crass sport, preferred by rough working-class men and even women.⁶ A different kind of disdain exists on the side of hockey fans; at Toronto Maple Leafs home games, keen fans are frustrated by the exorbitant price of tickets and by attendees in suits occupying corporate seats who fail to return from concessions after intermission.⁷ A few scholars/writers have found themselves face-to-face with hockey's unfamiliar spatial and ideological terrain. There is a range of responses, some of them negative and others more celebratory. In 1955, William Faulkner was paid by *Sports Illustrated* to write a feature article on his experience of watching a hockey game at Madison Square Garden in Manhattan; the result was the poetic "An Innocent at Rinkside." More recently, Michele Landsberg and Kelly Hewson describe their respective exposures to sport frenzy through a gendered/feminist lens. Landsberg dismisses hockey as brute, while Hewson prefers to highlight her complex relationship to it as a feminist academic and Calgary resident (during the Flames' 1989 competition for the Stanley Cup). Hewson's location as a feminist scholar who is also an enthusiastic fan does not compromise her ability to understand that "inequality in the realm of sport . . . must be understood in relation to the histories of colonialism and capitalism that have come to shape the world as it is today" (Abdel-Shehid and Kalman-Lamb 3). Rather than argue, as Bale and Cronin do, that sports studies scholars need to wrest control of "the postcolonial" from "literature" folks and read sport itself, postcolonial critics need to read literary and cultural texts' vast and complex configurations of sport.

Hockey is a troubling symbol (or "fetish fascination," as Anne McClintock [27] would describe it) for Canada, and it needs to be understood as rooted in

gender and colonial paradigms. It is imperative to read hockey through a postcolonial lens. Like running and other sports, hockey involves the regulation of space (through lines, its geography) and time (through twenty-minute periods, penalty minutes); it is highly regulated, ordered, and policed. Allen Guttman asserts “the undeniable role of modern sports as a means of social control and imperial rule” (182), whereas Robidoux argues that hockey is a “vehicle of resistance against British and American hegemony” (*Men at Play* 221). Canada is central to hockey’s regulation and control: “Toronto” (the NHL’s video review headquarters) is often consulted during an NHL game (played in Canada or the US) to make a final decision about an uncertain goal or penalty, and this reinforces Canada’s status as the “homeland of hockey” (Blake 7). However, the NHL headquarters are in New York City and eighty percent of NHL teams are located in the US. Landsberg reminds readers that “[t]eam sports . . . were seen as a glorious tool of the British Empire, to impose the ‘rules of civilization’ on inferior peoples” (10); but some of the evidence might lead us to conclude that hockey is postcolonial, that it is challenging its white, imperial roots: the increase in multicultural rosters; the popularity of *Hockey Night in Canada: Punjabi Edition*; and perhaps even the relative softening of Don Cherry. This softening includes his famous on-air kiss of Nazem Kadri, the Leafs’ first Muslim player, as well as his changed position on Black player P. K. Subban’s “inappropriate” celebration of goals.⁸

Because there is no coherent or unanimous answer to the meaning of hockey, it makes sense to situate hockey as a “contact zone” where disparate narratives collide. My reading of hockey is as a site of conflict and tension, just like the game itself. In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt explains that

“contact” foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader’s perspective. A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other . . . and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (8)

Contact encounters are in part dialectical. Readings of hockey are disparate and conflictual—ranging from Landsberg’s dismissal of the sport as uncouth and “the route to male indoctrination” (6), to Faulkner’s celebration of its civility and beauty, to Al Purdy’s characterization of it as “this combination of ballet and murder” (26). The *arena* for the encounter between the *players*—Harper’s and Wagamese’s texts—in my reading is the TRC on the Indian Residential Schools.⁹ The *periods* might begin with Harper’s anemic

apology for the residential schools in 2008 and end with the presentation of the commission's final report in 2015, but we are now in *overtime*. Hockey is organized into three twenty-minute periods, and in the case of a tie, there is an overtime period ("sudden death"). Overtime is full of unpredictability, and during playoffs can run indefinitely. This is relevant to reading hockey texts and the TRC: a clear structure with a great deal of uncertainty and no possibility of predicting the outcome. Although disparate, both Harper's *A Great Game* and Wagamese's *Indian Horse* are hockey books that were conceived, written, and published during the TRC proceedings, and they both look back in order to understand something about the present. Harper looks back at the rise of professional hockey, while Wagamese's Saul looks back at the problem of professional hockey and instead opts for amateur and communally reconciled forms of both hockey and masculinity. The books' "contact" reveals a Canada that is dissonant, not yet reconciled.

Contact Hockey

Harper's text provides a comprehensive history of the Toronto Maple Leafs' "rise" to professional status, while Wagamese's text offers an eleven-page account of Saul Indian Horse's demoralizing experience as an Indigenous member of the Toronto Marlboros, the Leafs' farm team, and the colonial-racist politics of professional hockey in the 1970s. Professional hockey is a subordinate concern in *Indian Horse*. These Canadian hockey books are in tension with one another; they are grappling, as Pratt would put it, with the meaning and significance of hockey in historical and colonial contexts. Hockey is often represented as unifying ("our game") and metonymic of Canada, and on the surface it is tempting to read this unity through the two texts: both writers are national figures who adore hockey and choose to highlight it in their books. Harper, a white settler with deep familial roots in Canada, was born in Toronto in 1959; and Wagamese, an Ojibwe man from a family deeply troubled by residential school experiences, was born in northwestern Ontario in 1955 (he died in March, 2017). Harper completed two degrees in Economics at the University of Calgary, and Wagamese dropped out of high school to escape an abusive foster home, and then spent years enduring homelessness and battling addiction before finding his place as a writer and storyteller in the early 1990s. Moreover, their perspectives on Canada's colonial history and its effects are markedly different. Here I put their two texts into "contact" to demonstrate that hockey is a contentious game in which *players* disagree about its *truth*.

Hockey is neither homogeneous nor unifying, but a site of conflict and tension over its colonial-racist roots and reverberations.

Harper's *A Great Game* traces the shift from amateur to professional hockey in the early decades of the twentieth century. It is well researched and devoted to facts and statistics. Harper explains that he was "unusually interested in hockey history as a youngster growing up in Toronto" (287). Further, "[a]s a studious and rather unathletic boy, this pastime helped to compensate for [his] conspicuous inability on the ice" (287). Harper acknowledges the "project's researcher, Greg Stoicoiu," whose "contribution is significant" (287), and the publisher's blurb describes the book as "a scholarly triumph." As Robidoux argues in his analysis of hockey and imperialism, reason is "privileged as the only real basis for knowledge" (*Stickhandling* 17). Five years after his historic public apology for the Indian Residential Schools, Harper suggests that empire spreads civil values and is a program of rational development. The epigraph, from which he draws his un-ironic title, is attributed to a former president of the OHA (Ontario Hockey Association): "We have a great game, a great country, and a great empire." And chapter 1 is littered with untheorized imperial language: "As the song from the Disney musical *Mary Poppins* would so perfectly put it, it was considered a 'grand' time to be alive if you were part of the English realm" (2). There is repeated emphasis on the "change and growth" and "good times" that characterized the period. Essentially, it is idealized as fomenting the conditions necessary for hockey's progress and professionalization. There are sporadic and undeveloped references to Indigenous people and sports, and "deep social divisions" (18), but instances of hockey and racism are left unexamined. Janice Forsyth explains that in residential schools, having children play "the patriotic sport of hockey" helped to achieve "Native assimilation" (27). And Andreas Krebs points out that sport was "a means of civilizing the so-called 'savage,'" and "Canada's most high-profile sport, hockey, continues to play a role in reproducing colonialism" (82). Harper's text is an instantiation of what Pratt calls "anti-conquest," which she explains involves "strategies of innocence" on the part of the "seeing man" (9); the colonizer is represented as innocent of malfeasance.

As Sam McKegney explains in his analysis of media representations of Cree player Jonathan Cheechoo, "sports writing that is often perceived as politically benign can be racially inflected" (120). In *A Great Game*, white sport masculinity is coded civil and gentlemanly; it is white men who institute and obey the codes of hockey conduct. White sport masculinity is

presented as rational, peaceable, and good-natured. At one point, Harper uses the phrase, “[t]he proverbial stuff hit the fan” (14), presumably to avoid offending tender readers’ sensibilities. There is also coldness, a privileging of factual description, in the tone of Harper’s text—it wears its research heavily. A similar coldness is identified by Virgil, Saul’s teammate in *Indian Horse*, as more disturbing than passion and emotion: “I never knew people could be that cold” (136). Saul makes an analogous observation when he plays for the Marlboros: “These guys weren’t mean. They weren’t vicious. They were just indifferent, and that hurt a whole lot more” (163). In his article on *Indian Horse*, Jack Robinson links this coldness to rationality (95). Harper values reason in hockey, as he offers a record of the emergence of clear and now-familiar rules, and this is reminiscent of such imperial stalwarts as Cecil Rhodes: an example is that the four requirements for recipients of Rhodes’ eponymous scholarship (36) are pleasant and unobjectionable, but also in mathematical proportions (38).¹⁰ Harper’s text—like Rhodes’—underscores the veneration of imperialism’s goodness and rationality. Moreover, whiteness is assumed and privileged, rather than highlighted and interrogated.

In *Who Da Man?*, Abdel-Shehid argues that whiteness is often innocent in hockey narratives, and also under threat of death through usurpation from outsiders: “The perpetual deaths of Canada . . . whether in the areas of history, literature, or sports, are a cultural territorialization necessary within the logic of Canadian nationalism” (55). Further, “if Canada is dying, someone must save it, and that someone must really know what Canada is like, i.e. they must know the traditions” (55). And while white masculinity may be threatened with disappearance, there are strategies to ensure that it remains intact, including mythical hockey narratives of progress and endurance such as Harper’s *A Great Game*, along with other narratives that purport to be inclusive but are white dominant. These often take the form of media representations, including a popular Tim Hortons commercial that features an Asian Canadian father and his adult son at the grandson’s hockey game¹¹—racialized men are disciplined to conform to hockey’s white masculine norms (early morning practices, coffee cup in hand, admixture of stoicism and sentimentalism). Whiteness is always there—in Harper’s hockey narrative and elsewhere—even if it goes unacknowledged. Harper’s text is just one version of the game—but dominant and impactful; another is Wagamese’s *Indian Horse*, which tells a remarkably different but also contiguous story about postcolonial hockey and the communal reconciliation of masculinities.

When Wagamese first approached his editor with an idea for a novel about hockey, he was advised to place the story of hockey within a residential school context. Some critics, including Jack Robinson, have expressed concern about reading *Indian Horse* as simply a “hockey” book, instead of attending to its oral storytelling techniques (88-89). Fair enough, but Canadian literature needs beautiful, thoughtful, and nuanced stories about hockey, and not only fact-based and statistical analyses or ghostwritten accounts of hockey stars. A brief synopsis of *Indian Horse* reveals that it is about hockey, but also about more than hockey. The text opens with Saul in treatment for addiction at the “New Dawn Centre,” where a counsellor tasks him with writing his life story. He begins with origins and family, moves on to his abduction by authorities and experiences at residential school (where he is introduced to hockey); there is an account of his hockey career (from amateur to professional), but placed within the context of colonial racism; he records his collapse into addiction, the resurfacing of his memory of sexual abuse at school, and his return home to a re-visioned community, Indigenous masculinity, and a more equitable and pleasurable game of hockey. *Indian Horse* has a circular structure, and can be read as a quest narrative: the hero returns home after a series of adventures and is poised to make a valuable contribution to his community. Robinson chooses to ignore hockey for more important concerns—family, history of alcoholism, reconnection with land and ancestors—but hockey is imbricated with Saul’s quest for healing and reconciliation. It is not a factual account, and certainly not a neat progress narrative—which distinguishes the novel from Harper’s text and from more conventional first-person hockey narratives.¹²

The question is whether *Indian Horse* is a hockey book or if hockey is marginal to its main concerns. Hockey may not be the consistent focus, as it is in Harper’s text, but it is key to understanding Saul’s story of recovery. Here we need to read “what happens when hockey happens,” in Dopp and Harrison’s helpful formulation (14). In *Indian Horse*, hockey is both complex and contradictory; some other writers articulate a similar ambivalence. Dave Bidini, in *Tropic of Hockey*, expresses mixed feelings about hockey and violent masculinities, and includes himself as an example (118-23, 200-05). Krebs also positions himself as an example of the ways in which “hockey continues to produce colonial relationships in Canada by maintaining the hegemony of a White masculine subjectivity to which all other subject positions must refer” (81), and “even those (such as myself) who attempt to maintain a critical distance are susceptible to its allure” (100). This

ambivalence means that hockey is open to re-visioning; reconciliation can be instigated in this moment of transition. In her chapter in *Aboriginal Peoples and Sport in Canada*, Forsyth explains that for some residential schools survivors, sport was the only positive experience in the schools, but they are reluctant to share this for fear that it diminishes the brutality of the school experience (16-17). Significantly, “Sports and Reconciliation” is a key section in the TRC’s “Calls to Action,” and this was integral to the mounting of the North American Indigenous Games in Toronto in July 2017: “We call upon all levels of government to take action to ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games, including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada). Sport and hockey, in *Indian Horse* and well beyond, are integral components of the truth and reconciliation process.

Wagamese and other Indigenous writers reveal that sport and the arts complicate narratives about the residential school experience. One notable example is Tomson Highway’s account of learning to play piano (Eigenbrod 291), as well as his more recent and shocking praise of the residential school experience:

All we hear is the negative stuff, nobody’s interested in the positive, the joy in that school. Nine of the happiest years of my life I spent at that school. I learned your language, for God’s sake. Have you learned my language? No, so who’s the privileged one and who is underprivileged? (Ostroff)

Saul’s account of his residential school experience is mixed, but not apologetic like Highway’s contentious remarks. Initially, he offers an account of the abuse of other children, while he is loved and mentored by a young priest who introduces him to hockey: “His warm hand made me think of my grandmother’s touch” (59). Later, he revises that narrative when he realizes that he was a victim of sexual abuse by the priest: “I thought of my grandmother” (198) and played hockey to cope with “the horror” (199). The priest and hockey are synonymous—both are part beauty and part violence, although the latter dominates by the end of the novel. Even the fundamentals of the game itself are paradoxical. Bale and Sang explain that Western-colonial sport—with its focus on geometric lines, timers, and rigid rules—transformed Indigenous knowledge systems and bodily practices (98-99), but for Saul there is beauty in hockey’s order and discipline. In fact, he describes his ability to understand that whoever “control[s] a measure of space . . . control[s] the game” as a “vision” (58), a gift he inherits from his great-grandfather. For Saul, the

game's lines and rules are not violent and colonial, but commensurate with his own Indigenous history and location. Other lines, such as the invisible racial lines in arenas, are far more pernicious: "I started to see a line in every arena we played in. It showed itself as a stretch of empty seats that separated the Indian fans from the white ones" (137).

Those segregation lines increase as Saul moves away from the "salvation" (62) offered by the game and towards the professionalization that Harper argues is inevitable and rational; Saul experiences a reversal of Harper's progress trajectory. Saul plays happily at school, until he is recruited by the town team and begins to learn that white players think hockey is "their game" (92). This is a refrain throughout the text, a riff on the usually positive "our game." When he joins an Indigenous team, the Moose, Saul witnesses the older players beaten and humiliated by white players at a diner who are clearly threatened by the superior skills of the young Indigenous men. Significantly, Saul's recruitment is a kind of rescue operation on the part of the team manager, Virgil; it is a strategy to remove him from residential school. Saul is later scouted and recruited by the Toronto Marlboros. The Toronto press labels him the "Rampaging Redskin" (165), and he eventually conforms to the label's attendant expectations: "the press would not let me be" (163). This is a clear demonstration of Carrington's point that racialized athletes are "either *sub*-human or *super*-human" (108), and also demonstrates McKegney's description, in *Masculindians*, of "the settler North American appetite for depictions of Indigenous men that rehearse hypermasculine stereotypes of the noble savage and the bloodthirsty warrior" (1). When Saul plays hockey he is seen as "taking scalps," "the stoic Indian," and "a painted warrior" (163). Exhausted from the effort of battling and succumbing to stereotypes, Saul leaves professional hockey, a moment in the narrative that is immediately followed by a short chapter on two girls who are abused at the school. It is a significant, but in some ways inscrutable chapter, at least until the end of the novel when Saul's own story of abuse emerges. After a circuitous journey, Saul returns "home" to the Moose and the town of Manitouwadge. Saul's hockey story interrogates the narrative of progress and development.¹³ As well, it underscores McKegney's argument in *Masculinidians* for complexity over simplicity in representations of Indigenous men (7).

Saul returns home to Manitouwadge and hockey, but not to a static past. He is at the end of his quest, but the progress achieved is not conventional in the terms that Harper outlines for hockey's narrative: Saul moves away

from professional status and riches, and humbly towards a renewed sense of community. People have aged, and the town has a brand-new expensive arena. This is a community that cannot be located in a static past of outdoor arenas with rough ice, a bracing wind, and chicken wire as puck barriers—the hockey of Saul’s youth. Unlike Faulkner’s spectator view, something is not lost when hockey moves indoors. On the last page Saul enters the ice to play a game of hockey that includes at least eighteen players, many of them “young girls and older women.” Like shinny, there are only two rules: “Gotta hit the post to call it a goal. No raising the puck” (221). This arena is the site of the reconfiguration of hockey, as Robidoux points out: “It is critical to move beyond notions of resistance or accommodation and begin articulating how First Nations expressions of hockey destabilize existing knowledge systems shaped by modernity” (*Stickhandling* 27). This new arena is the site for a redemptive narrative for hockey. And hockey is a healing metaphor, as Fred Kelly, Saul’s coach and foster father, explains to him:

“But our healing—that’s up to us. That’s what saved me. Knowing it was my game.”
“Could be a long game,” I said.
“So what if it is?” he said. “Just keep your stick on the ice and your feet moving.”
(210)

They are set to play a re-visioned game. Bale and Cronin caution that the manipulation of sport conventions risks defeat (5, 6), but this isn’t a concern here; this is an informal game beyond the scope of the NHL. The game at the end of the novel is a demonstration of what Pratt calls autoethnography, “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s terms” (9). In *Indian Horse* professionalization is not the goal, but inclusion and community. When Saul asks Virgil, “How are we gonna play the game?”, Virgil responds, “Together . . . like we shoulda all along” (221).

Unlike Stephen Harper’s *A Great Game*, which fails to recognize the depths of hockey’s (and Canada’s) violent socio-political history, Richard Wagamese’s *Indian Horse* exposes that history, but reconstitutes hockey in the present moment—as Canada reckons with the TRC and tensions over the celebration of its sesquicentennial—as a game that can be meaningful and restorative when played outside of national concerns and in the community of Manitouwadge with Indigenous players only. It is a game of pleasure and interdependence, and everyone is on the ice—men and boys, women and girls, old and young. Here the spectators enter the ice. Reading these two divergent and contrary texts in the contact zone of hockey and Canada is

critical and necessary if we are to reckon with the imprint of the past on the present, and negotiate a more just future and thus fulfil some of the core recommendations of the TRC on the Indian Residential Schools.

NOTES

- 1 Wagamese was highly critical of Harper's post-apology approach to Indigenous issues and reconciliation. See Wagamese, "Aboriginal reconciliation: An open letter to Stephen Harper and "Harper takes us for fools."
- 2 See Bale and Sang; Burke.
- 3 See Aykroyd.
- 4 Sam McKegney explores a similar contradiction in a study of Jonathan Cheechoo: "Cheechoo's story [is] one that hockey reporters, and Canadians more generally, love to tell and retell, yet they feel the need to place Cheechoo in a subordinate role in that tale" ("The Aboriginal" 114).
- 5 See Mirtle and also Gruneau.
- 6 See Landsberg.
- 7 See Seglins et al.
- 8 See also Sheema Khan's *Of Hockey and Hijab: Reflections of a Canadian Muslim Woman*.
- 9 There has been extensive criticism of the process (which is beyond the scope of this article), but the focus was on reckoning with a violent colonial history and moving towards "reconciliation" with disparate groups, namely settlers and Indigenous peoples.
- 10 Rhodes' four requirements included the following: (i) "literary and scholastic attainments"; (ii) "fondness of and success in manly outdoor sports such as cricket football and the like"; (iii) "qualities of manhood, truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for the protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness, and fellowship"; and (iv) "moral force of character and of instincts to lead" (36).
- 11 See Tim Hortons, "Jump the Boards with Sidney Crosby and Tim Hortons" and "Tim Hortons True Stories: Proud Fathers".
- 12 There are numerous examples of first-person hockey narratives (Ken Dryden, Gordie Howe, Bobby Orr), and increasingly, narratives that offer more intimate retellings of a life in and outside of hockey (Theo Fleury, Jordin Tootoo).
- 13 Fred Saskamoose, the first Indigenous player in the NHL, tells a similar story of refusal. See "Fred Sasakamoose."

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