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Getting to Resurgence through Sourcing Cultural Strength: An Analysis of Robertson's *Will I See?* and LaPensée's *Deer Woman*

In this paper, I analyze two recently published graphic novels, *Will I See?* (2016) by Swampy Cree author David Alexander Robertson and *Deer Woman: A Vignette* (2015) by Anishinaabe/Métis author Elizabeth LaPensée, which depict their Indigenous female protagonists heroically fending off systemic violence by sourcing communally- and culturally-derived strength to act-out against aggressors. Using Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's thinking that sourcing strength from within community and culture enables Indigenous resurgence, I argue that these depictions encourage resurgence rather than reconciliation with the colonial settler-state; the reality of violence against Indigenous women is confronted by the Indigenous female protagonists, who turn inward for the strength to fight back rather than outward to the limited support of the Canadian state. In order to further think through how resurgence materializes as a response to trauma in these texts, I turn to settler scholar Dominick LaCapra's work to suggest that both graphic novels reinforce narrative and graphic depictions of "acting-out" to overcome

violence rather than "working-through" violence. I suggest that resurgence is practised through graphically and narratively depicting complex "felt" knowledges of violence (Million), and through restorying the texts with the spirits of Indigenous women who were murdered, to convey the complexity of resurgent responses and the reality of the resilience of Indigenous life. That these gestures are action-oriented, I argue, enables them to circumvent the reticence of the Canadian government to act on the recommendations of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG), which was concluded in June 2019, and which itself faced numerous delays in its completion. These graphic novels stand in contrast to general media and graphic novels that portray Indigenous peoples by way of reductive or harmful tropes. The themes of these graphic novels expand and elaborate on those of other Indigenous-authored graphic novels that focus on Indigenous histories and are situated within the canon of Indigenous-authored comics[1] that envision Indigenous people as heroes. I write this piece as a white female settler residing in the traditional territory of many Indigenous peoples and nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples.

While there has been an increase of Indigenous-authored graphic novels published in Canada, there are so far limited critical considerations of these texts. LaPensée and Robertson are among the many Indigenous authors who currently produce comics, authors who include, among others, Katherena Vermette (Métis), Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas (Haida Nation), Cole Pauls (Tahltan First Nation), Gord Hill (Kwakwaka'wakw Nation), Jennifer Storm (Ojibway), and Nahanni Shingoose (Saulteaux). Most of these authors depict empowered revisions to settler narratives of Indigenous history, systemic issues facing Indigenous peoples today, and strong, capable Indigenous protagonists. Indeed, in 2019, a landmark Indigenous-authored graphic novel anthology was published, *This Place: 150 Years Retold*, which portrays Indigenous perspectives on the colonial project and the strength of Indigenous peoples today. Despite the contemporary proliferation of Indigenous-authored graphic novels, two recently published anthologies of criticism on contemporary Canadian graphic novels, *The Canadian Alternative: Cartoonists, Comics, and Graphic Novels* (2018) and *Canadian Graphic: Picturing Life Narratives* (2016), each limit engagement with

Indigenous-authored graphic novels to a single contribution. In the closing of the introduction of *The Canadian Alternative*, editors Dominick Grace and Eric Hoffman write that the essays in the anthology "address the problematic treatment of aboriginal peoples, themselves as marginalized within Canada as Canadian comics have been within the larger comic world" (xvii), thus acknowledging the ongoing limited Canadian scholarship on Indigenous graphic novels.

Reflecting the themes explored by *Graphic Indigeneity: Comics in the Americas and Australasia*, Caddo scholar Michael A. Sheyahshe observes that many settler-authored comics depict Indigenous peoples as "pan-Indigenous," therefore ignoring the diversity of Indigenous cultures (44). Settler scholar Derek Royal further suggests that recent representations of Indigenous peoples in comics have reinforced harmful tropes, such as the "generic Indian, complete with loincloth, feathered headdress, and truncated vocabulary" (1). In her essay "Under the Shadow of Empire," Sandrina de Finney engages in a participatory research study with Indigenous girls to consider how they think they are portrayed in media. All report feeling ignored or portrayed negatively, with one participant saying, "Hello, there's a problem here, there's a lot of violence against us First Nations girls and women. A lot. It's a problem, hello. We're NOT shown to be strong, or beautiful, or even worth much" (20). LaPensée emphasizes in her essay "We Are the Superheroes We've Been Waiting For" how it is important to depict Indigenous women as strong and capable in order to create positive role models for Indigenous women and girls. She notes the canon of Indigenous artists who are imagining Indigenous women as heroes and writes, "We are at a critical point for recovering from and halting this violence. . . . [S]uperheroes are a beautiful way for us to imagine ourselves and then bring ourselves to a position of empowerment" (1). While LaPensée consciously situates her protagonist in *Deer Woman* within the category of Indigenous female heroes, Robertson's protagonist in *Will I See?* can also be positioned among these figures. Indeed, Robertson has published other comics with a focus on Indigenous heroism, such as the *Tales from Big Spirit* and the *7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga* series, as well as a YA fiction series, *The Reckoner* trilogy, that positions an Indigenous teenager as a superhero. Many of the graphic novelists mentioned above also

focalize warrior and hero themes in their works, reflecting the growing canon of Indigenous hero texts.

In *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman*, respectively, Robertson and LaPensée home in on the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Both the graphic elements of the texts and their subversive, dynamic plotlines articulate creative interventions and alternatives to the federal government's passivity in investigating and responding to the disproportionate occurrences of violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls, and also defy the harmful gendered tropes of traditional media representation. Each author states their motivations for creating their comic clearly in their opening. In the introduction to *Deer Woman*, LaPensée writes that there are over one thousand missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, and that her piece calls upon readers "to take a stance to change the fact that Indigenous women are the most likely to experience sexual assault on Turtle Island and to recognize the[ir] lack of rights" (3). Similarly, Robertson writes in his dedication that his comic is "[f]or the over four thousand Indigenous women and girls we have lost and for my daughters, that they grow up strong and in a safer place."[2] While *Deer Woman*'s audience seems to be the general public (the comic is a free download from its publisher Native Realities, and their website urges that the comic "be read by all who care about the experience of Indigenous women throughout the world!"), LaPensée also published the text in partnership with Arming Sisters, an organization that teaches self-defence techniques to Indigenous women, and the comic itself features a page outlining instructions for self-defence techniques (20); the comic therefore seems to be directed both at the general public to change public perceptions of Indigenous females being perpetual victims, and at Indigenous women themselves to help them learn self-defence. Correspondingly, Weshoyote Alvitre, illustrator and co-editor of *Deer Woman: An Anthology*, states in an interview that the digital mode of the text evades censorship of Indigenous issues typical in traditional media, and that their comic is meant to "bring awareness" but "[m]ore importantly, it is giving voice to these indigenous [*sic*] women" (Bras). LaPensée also explains that "there is a lot of hurt and a lot of broken feminine ideals in Native culture, especially currently," and that she believes that "deer woman teaches us self-strength" (Bras). Robertson states similar goals for *Will I See?*, describing to the CBC

his wish that it effects change and helps resolve the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women over the long-term and spurs action ("Winnipeg Artists").

The goal of increasing awareness and empowering Indigenous women mirrors the overarching objectives of the NIMMIWG, which engaged in a truth-gathering process of the realities of violence against Indigenous women and aimed to "[help] Indigenous women and girls reclaim their power and place" (*Interim Report* 3).[3] This inquiry had been demanded by Indigenous leaders for forty years prior to it being initiated in 2016 (Murphy). Further, there were multiple delays in its completion after it was launched. The final report of the NIMMIWG notes that the ongoing process of colonization is genocide, and that the implementation of its 231 Calls for Justice "must include a decolonizing approach" (170). However, in outlining how the Canadian government and other institutions and services within Canada can respond in ways that reflect the reality of violence against Indigenous women, the report clearly reinforces the concept of negotiating the protection of Indigenous women within the parameters of the Canadian state. While the NIMMIWG was concluded in June 2019, the Canadian government has yet to release an action plan with concrete steps to implement any of the recommendations of the report, which has earned the government criticism from the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), the most prominent Indigenous women's organization in Canada. As NWAC president Lorraine Whitman (Glooscap First Nation) has recently stated, "We need to have some action. The families of the missing and murdered women and girls and two-spirited [individuals], we're tired of talk. If you're going to talk the talk, walk the walk. And I'm not seeing that" (qtd. in Wright). In *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman*, the Indigenous female protagonists themselves are proactive in defeating systemic violence directed towards them. Both narratives suggest an alternate plan of action for Indigenous women that is not reliant on the Canadian government.

May and Deer Woman, the respective protagonists of *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman*, fend off systemic violence by sourcing strength from within their communities and cultures—this enables them to act heroically. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson suggests that accessing strength from within Indigenous practices is essential for Indigenous resurgence. She writes that

"we need to rebuild our culturally inherent philosophical contexts for governance, education, healthcare, and economy. . . . We need to do this on our own terms, without the sanction, permission or engagement of the state" (23). Simpson distinguishes Indigenous resurgence from reconciliation in her book *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, wherein she likens the process of reconciliation to an abusive relationship in which the abused is being encouraged to reconcile with the abuser.

The dynamic responses of the protagonists in *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman* could also be read as instances of what LaCapra terms "acting-out" in the framework for processing trauma that he elaborates in "Acting-Out and Working-Through Trauma"; by acting-out in response to the violence, the characters are pulled further from the possibility of the reconciliatory notion of working-through trauma, towards resurgent politics. Acting-out action that is dynamic and enacted against wholly evil characters can also be read as characteristically heroic, in contrast to working-through action that is diplomatic and benign. LaCapra writes of the difference between working-through and acting-out in the context of traumatic reactions to another incident of genocide, the Holocaust. He argues that acting-out is an impulsive repetition of a traumatic event whereas working-through is a process of progressing beyond the initial trauma to achieve healing (2). LaCapra acknowledges the issues of recursiveness and binarization in the acting-out approach and suggests that a working-through approach is more democratic and achieves more ethical outcomes (7). In *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman*, however, the female protagonists are made to continuously face violence against themselves and other Indigenous women. As they come to know the reality of violence against Indigenous women, they are not granted time to process the violent events. In being continuously called on to act-out to defend themselves against violence, while simultaneously understanding the realities of systemic violence, the characters are understood as being forced to dismiss the possibility of successfully working-through violence against Indigenous women. The confidence and skills they gain when successfully acting-out against known violence represents a rupture from the failed utopia of Indigenous-Canadian reconciliation and enables the possibility of resurgence.

May in *Will I See?* sources strength from within her community and her culture to fight against an attacker. May is a Cree teenage girl residing in an urban environment. At the beginning of the comic, panels show May finding small personal items like rings and keys, belonging to Indigenous women, which are overlaid with bloodlike smears and faded images of Indigenous women being attacked (Robertson 13). May's grandmother helps May transform the unease she feels about finding the items into self-assurance. May's grandmother suggests that they turn the items into a necklace that May can wear and affirms May's plan to name a cat that helped her find the items Chipiy (ghost in Cree) (22), implying that she is increasingly comfortable identifying with and accessing the strength of the lost women. Later, when May is attacked, her self-assuredness and her community-derived strength enable her to fight back. The necklace is featured prominently as May repeats "no" to her attacker. When he lunges at her, May acknowledges that he is "just a person" (42). May, in contrast, is a person who has spiritual connection to many other women in addition to herself. As she transforms into Chipiy to injure and defeat her attacker (40), she embodies and identifies with both herself and all of the other Indigenous women who had been attacked. After the attack, May and her grandmother source their shared and cultural strength to deal with the events. This strength allows them to decide that they will share the necklace and its stories with others, to honour the deceased and protect other women (51).

May's connections with elements of Indigenous spirituality also become a source of her strength in Robertson's text. After finding the items, May is told by her grandmother that lost Indigenous women turn into animal spirits who create flower blooms with each step they take. The spirit animals featured in the story are described in the endnotes of the comic for the virtues they embody which enable Anishinaabe understandings of Mino-Pimatisiwin, or the good life (51-52). After May defeats her attacker, her medicine pouch containing the items she found is opened; a sparrow carries seeds that root and blossom, while the spirit animals which May's grandmother says are murdered Indigenous women walk through the landscape (47-48). Knowing the spiritual proceedings of what happens when Indigenous women disappear seems to help May process the violence enacted against other Indigenous women and gives her strength. As she picks

flowers to give to her grandmother, May is further empowered, as it is said earlier in the text that the flowers, when picked, allow animal spirits to share their strengths (22).

In *Deer Woman*, the protagonist Deer Woman similarly gains strength through understanding the enduring power Indigenous women have long demonstrated to overcome the gendered violence of colonialism. LaPensée writes in her introduction that the opening panel sequence depicts her own story of sexual assault. She states that the sequence is rewritten to determine what would have happened if "in that moment [of sexual assault], as a young Anishinaabekwe, I had transformed into the Deer Woman from the Sault that my mother told me stories about? What if . . . I had realized the Deer Woman in myself?" (LaPensée 3). Therefore, by transforming into Deer Woman within the comic, LaPensée answers her own invitation in the introduction and uses the power derived from the figure to know what she had not known about her own experience of sexual assault. Deer Woman is a character present in the mythologies of many Indigenous nations and peoples across North America including the "Sioux, Ojibwa, Ponca, Omaha, Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Muskogee, Choctaw, Oto, Pawnee, and the Iroquois," and is known for luring men away and stomping them to death (Russow 1). In the comic, Deer Woman is depicted doing just that, killing perpetrators of violence against Indigenous people—there is a sequence when she kills a police officer attacking an Indigenous man (LaPensée 16)—and serving as a symbol for the power within Indigenous people to resist violence. LaPensée also suggests that part of knowing the truth of violence is understanding its ongoing legacy from colonialism. She first imagines a different reality in a panel sequence presenting an out-of-plot reverie that relays, "there are days where . . . I remember what it is to be innocent again" (10). This feeling is fractured by a new perpetrator, and followed by a text bubble stating that "[the feeling] never lasts." However, her wholeness is restored on the following pages, which state that "in that darkness, who are we to look to but ourselves . . . you become the light" (11). Therefore, akin to May's flourishing through aligning with cultural and community-derived strength, Deer Woman illustrates thriving within the enduring spatial-temporal parameters of systemic violence, through *feeling* and *identifying* her own inherited strength as an Indigenous woman with spiritual knowledge.

As LaPensée aligns herself with the mythic figure to stave off attacks, she also invites other Indigenous women to do the same.

That May and Deer Woman gain strength to fight off systemic violence through identifying with their selves, communities, and spiritualities can be considered resurgent with respect to Simpson's theorization. The concept of connecting to Indigenous values to gain resiliency is evidenced in a quantitative study by Shanley Swanson Nicolai and Merete Saus, which compiles findings from interviews with people who work with Indigenous youth to gain insights on how young Indigenous people best cope with trauma (Nicolai and Saus). May practises Indigenous resurgence in her self-determined refusal to die at the hands of her attacker, in moments when she connects to her culture through discussions with her grandmother, and through simply existing. Similarly, Deer Woman acts as a resurgent force by connecting to her culture and perpetually deflecting attacks. Neither character chooses to reconcile with their abuser; indeed, both choose to destroy them. These acts align with Simpson's vision of the toxicity of reconciliation, and suggest that LaPensée and Robertson support resurgence. Both characters, in identifying with Indigenous community and knowledges to grow more resilient against systemic violence against their personhoods, illustrate the concept of resiliency through identification with Indigenous values as described in the study of Nicolai and Saus; these narratives could thus help presence the lived experiences of many Indigenous readers who have survived and moved beyond violence.

Will I See? and *Deer Woman* also include design elements that convey an experience of acting-out. The form of the graphic novel, however, enables readers to witness acting-out while also always giving the reader a degree of control over the way in which they process and witness the violence. Though acting-out might be the necessary or only response for the Indigenous protagonists in these texts, leading to a politics of resurgence rather than reconciliation, the event of reading instances of acting-out could also be difficult for the reader witnessing the unfinished worlding of resurgence. Debra Dudek, in "'Good Relationships Mean Good Lives': Warrior-Survivor Identity/ies in David Alexander Robertson's *7 Generations*," argues that Robertson uses the structure of the graphic novel, in which the past, present, and future of the narration is always evident and connected, to iterate how

the Indigenous protagonist in his *7 Generations* series finds healing through understanding the continuity of his life and relations, regardless of time (40). She also argues that the "sense of the graphic novel generally and the page specifically as continuous wholes" enables a conceptualization of an Indigenous worldview. In *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman*, the narrative wholeness of the graphic novel form defies potential discomfort, because the reader can glimpse at future action, therefore making the violent episode known to the reader before the event occurs. The Indigenous female reader could follow the process of Deer Woman and May coming to understand the systemic violence impacting Indigenous women and their strength as Indigenous women, through both reading the violent panels and simultaneously having full control to skip ahead or jump back to panels that affirm the control and power of the protagonists. These recursive violent instances would therefore be read as moments that require acting-out, which can be compartmentalized and understood within a broader narrative of strength. As mentioned, LaPensée asserts that it is important to depict Indigenous women as superheroes or powerful in media to reinforce an understanding of the strength of Indigenous women.

The acts of worlding, of bringing about resurgence that happens through women connecting to culturally-derived strength and acting-out in response to violence, are initiated through conveying complex felt knowledges of strength and anger to the reader rather than transmitting merely a felt knowledge of victimhood. Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) in "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities" critiques damage-centred criticism because it can create a one-dimensional narrative that hinders and neglects the strength and success of Indigenous peoples (1). In "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History," Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million also iterates this idea, saying that expressing a feeling other than victimhood to settler-colonial publics is important for the healing process of Indigenous peoples and can also be subversive to the policing of emotion by colonial governments (who first ignore Indigenous complaints and then expect performances of victimhood). She writes of the trauma of residential schooling that

> Native scholars, communities, and individuals were fairly in agreement that this pain that had the power to destroy them, individually and communally, would not be

> silenced any longer. It became their *story*. Feelings, including their anger, would and must reenter their accounts, which would be incomplete without them. . . . The successful struggle to rearticulate the colonial residential school experience as abuse was not a move to articulate *victimology*, it was a move to ground a present healing. . . . In court, Canada came short of officially narrating any historical culpability. So, if Indians captured public opinion, even momentarily, a case can be made that, for once, their own felt knowledge did speak itself. (Million 73, emphasis original)

Thus, for both theorists, part of the healing process for Indigenous peoples involves articulating all of the emotions experienced after a traumatic incident.

Both graphic novels convey very minimally narratives of damage, and instead express complex felt knowledges of temerity and anger to illustrate how Indigenous peoples can act-out and resurge; characters can experience violence, feel anger, and then move through to strength. The complexity of these narrations distinguishes the comics from the tragic storylines of Indigenous women typical in Canadian media. The emphasis on resilience in the comics also departs from the tone of the NIMMIWG. The inquiry predominantly focused on registering and responding to trauma narratives, with community narratives that were streamed live for the public and emphasized attending to the difficulties of reopening wounds for those speaking of their past experiences with sexual assault and violence.

In her work, Million expounds the importance of expressing anger for healing, particularly due to the tendency of settler-colonial academics to balk at the sentiment (labelling it polemic) while simultaneously perpetually imagining Indigenous peoples as victims (63, 67). While Deer Woman and May do not convey anger in responding to the attacks on their persons, graphically, both texts convey a sense of wrath. In *Deer Woman*, LaPensée has Deer Woman unleash violence on the attackers to supplant the expectation of victims being overtaken, narrating the sudden and staccato deaths of the attackers from the hooves of Deer Woman. While it is unclear if Deer Woman is acting in anger (it seems as though her actions are rooted more so in a sentiment of grim necessity), the illustrations are explicit, and in their gory detail, convey a sense of remorselessness akin to that witnessed in real-life accounts of violence against Indigenous women. This ambivalence is similar to that reflected in Canada's justice system, with its lack of convictions for perpetrators of violence directed towards Indigenous peoples, as evidenced by the recent acquittals in the cases of Tina Fontaine and Colten

Boushie. The painful deaths in *Deer Woman* are perhaps therefore a form of retaliation. The red hue of the blood puncturing the black and white panels further connotes shocking violence (and perhaps Indigenous-achieved justice, as the colour red symbolizes Indigeneity), and its inclusion seems to suggest the lack of care readers should have for the murdered attackers, who can be understood in the context of the comic as wholly "bad guys." While in *Will I See?* May does not respond in anger to the attacks against other Indigenous women (her response is distress), when she herself is attacked, she responds with temerity that permits her to fight off her attacker. As her cat draws blood when scratching him the statement in the panel below is affirmed, that these attackers are "just people," and therefore as susceptible to injury as the victims they pursue (Robertson 42). That panel is the only instance in which red is used to denote violence against a non-Indigenous woman, suggesting that May is healing from her belief that people like her are victims to a larger unassailable force.

The action in each comic is dynamically illustrated, which conveys power and anger simultaneously. In *Deer Woman*, the frame layout during sequences of Deer Woman killing men is laid diagonally, furthering the sense of action-to-action movement that is depicted in the panels (LaPensée 9, 13). In *Will I See?*, May is represented as possessing immense strength to defeat her attacker (with the help of her animal spirit, a domesticated cat). The panels mutate constantly in size and scope-of-focus, which provides an intensity to the entire narrative (Robertson 40). Both stories, in their form as graphic novels, serve as accessible entry points for a wide range of literacy levels into narratives of violence against Indigenous women, and *Deer Woman* further reduces barriers to access in its availability as a free download. All of these elements enable the transmission of felt knowledges of empowered Indigenous women who confront systemic violence. That the graphic novels present their protagonists systematically acting-out in response to violence, within graphic illustrations that convey felt experiences of rage, suggests that beside the panel-by-panel or moment-by-moment experiences of resurgence through rage, there exists a parallel reality where resurgence is also occurring through connection with culturally-derived strength.

In *Deer Woman* and *Will I See?*, resurgence is also demonstrated as the protagonists access power by aligning with the missing Indigenous women

that people the graphic novels. The texts account for Indigenous women vis-à-vis the failures of accountability of the settler state's system of justice by including these missing women and granting them the power to empower the protagonists; the resurgence illustrated in these texts thus nods or strives towards fuller justice outside of the texts. In "Affective Economies," Sara Ahmed discusses the concept of the absent presence of history, which enables historic affects to bind within subjects (119-20). Correspondingly, in *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman*, a historic absence of justice enables ongoing hatred to inhabit the bodies of the Indigenous female characters, perpetuated by misogynistic and racist aggressors. However, instead of erasing these bodies from the narrative (as is the case with the systemic crisis of missing women), Indigenous female bodies are re-presenced and reimagined as figures of strength in the spirit representations of missing Indigenous women in *Will I See?* and in the numerous potential victims in *Deer Woman*. Ahmed also discusses the affective economies that are produced through this continual sliding and sticking of affects within subjects along the contours of an absent history to reproduce the procession of events (120). Similarly, in *Will I See?*, May becomes a target for violence because she is an Indigenous woman, as do the Indigenous characters in *Deer Woman*. The graphic texts themselves, through their circulation, counter felt knowledges of hatred, an emotion which contributes to perpetuating the cycle of absencing Indigenous female bodies and centring disdain within existing Indigenous female bodies, and of victimhood, which would have the effect of centring powerlessness within understandings of Indigenous female existence.

The absent presence of history that determines the affects residing in different bodies seems to relate to LaCapra's concept of structural absence versus individual loss when applied to the history of insufficient justice for violence against Indigenous women. In "Trauma, Absence, Loss," LaCapra defines absence as transhistorical, and loss as historic (701). He warns against movements to view historical loss as structural absence because it inhibits necessary mourning processes and impedes healing (712). As documented in *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman*, the normalization of Indigenous women's disappearances engenders emotions that further promote the disappearance of Indigenous women. The expectation of this absence then overrules opportunities to mourn and investigate individual loss. The perceived

structural absence therefore inscribes absence on the bodies of Indigenous women, a perception and repeated occurrence that is dialectically sustained through the sticking of racist and sexist hatred onto Indigenous women and that is maintained through the failures of the Canadian justice system and the Canadian citizenry to adequately address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Robertson and LaPensée illustrate the absent presence of justice for Indigenous women and the problem of perceived structural absence that results in passivity. Robertson achieves this by illustrating in multiple instances the traces of Indigenous women, first individually during moments of assault, and then together as ghostly figures (6, 8, 9, 27), and also with the naming of the cat Chipiy. An attempt to resolve and properly mourn the disappearances of these women is alluded to at the comic's end when May's grandmother asserts to May that they will share the necklace comprised of the items of the missing Indigenous women, so that they may be remembered. Similarly, in *Deer Woman*, the sites of would-be assault are remembered and presenced through the visits of Deer Woman (LaPensée 9, 13, 15, 17).

I have argued that these acts of peopling the graphic text with reminders of the struggles of Indigenous women to defend themselves against violence can also be read as instances of resistance, which could then engender resurgence. Tuck and Klamath scholar Angie Morrill, in "Before Dispossession, or Surviving It," theorize the dispossession of sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and consider how the presence of Indigenous women "haunts the map drawn by his hand" (1). Morrill and Tuck write that "when I told you that I will probably haunt you, you made it about you, but it is about me. The opposite of dispossession is not possession. It is not accumulation. It is unforgetting. It is mattering" (2). The inclusion of the spirits of women who went missing in *Will I See?* and the sites where women were attacked in *Deer Woman* can be read as acts of mattering, or unforgetting. The concept of haunting as being not for Canadians but rather for Indigenous peoples themselves could be understood as promoting resurgence, rather than a reconciliatory politics. In this scenario, Indigenous communities and women would focus on healing and growing after a history of violence against Indigenous women rather than focusing on ensuring adequate reactions from settler Canadians to violence against Indigenous women. In *Will I See?*, the link between the haunting of the texts and strength is made explicit

through Chipiy; as May transforms into Chipiy to defeat the attacker, she draws upon the strength of all of the other Indigenous women illustrated in the text. In *Deer Woman*, when Deer Woman assumes her form of strength to attack aggressors, she is similarly attuned to the strength of all of the women represented in the story, who can access the same Deer Woman for strength.

In "The Impossibility of a Future in the Absence of a Past: Drifting in the In-Between," settler scholars Sonja Boon and Kate Lahey draw on the writings of postcolonial scholars to theorize the concept of drift. They suggest that drift can be understood as resistance to colonial gestures of capture and containment, and that it "reveals the artifice of the worlds we currently inhabit, in the process of making new worlds possible" (32). *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman* can be understood as texts that reside within the drift of Indigenous writings that aim to re-world through retelling stories that resist the one-dimensionality of non-Indigenous media that depicts Indigenous experiences. These texts move towards re-worlding by illustrating graphically and narratively their protagonists as heroes who source strength from within their cultures and communities to act-out against systemic violence, in order to support resurgence. Resurgence is further practised within these narratives by conveying complex felt knowledges and peopling the stories with missing and murdered Indigenous women to incite reader responses that recognize the strength and anger of Indigenous women, and to pivot them towards justice and accountability. These turns to resurgence in *Will I See?* and *Deer Woman* counter the focus on reconciliation of the NIMMIWG, while the dynamism of the stories counters the languorous pace of the inquiry and the lack of real action thus far on the part of the Canadian government towards ending the crisis. As we follow May and Deer Woman through their stories and lives fighting off systemic violence through gaining support from their communities and sourcing cultural wisdom, we witness Indigenous joy and success that is accessed from within, and that everberates outwards to readers—working a resurgence that exists and accrues irrespective of settler intervention.

NOTES

1 I use the terms "graphic novel" and "comic" interchangeably within this paper because David Alexander Robertson calls his piece a "graphic novel" and Elizabeth LaPensée calls her work a "comic."

2 The disparity in estimated numbers reflects the historic failure of authorities in accounting for the violence. For further reading, please see www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Fact_Sheet_Missing_and_Murdered_Aboriginal_Women_and_Girls.pdf.

3 The NIMMIWG cannot attempt to solve outstanding cases of missing Indigenous women, nor provide monetary compensation to families. This process is different from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was able to provide monetary compensation to survivors of residential schooling.

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