

6 “The Place Where the Hearts Gather”

Against Damage-Centred Narratives of Urban Indigeneity

Chapter Outline

This chapter examines the engagement of Indigenous texts by non-Indigenous scholars to demonstrate how narratives and other forms of cultural production by Indigenous artists challenges violence by settler colonialism in urban environments. The chapter further demonstrates the effect that Indigenous cultural productions can have on land-based practices, spatial relations and kinship obligations.

The chapter begins with an overview of the histories of urban Indigenous representations in literary texts. The author identifies that historical and political circumstances have led to the creation of a colonial interpretation that separates Indigenous peoples from cities. The result has been that Indigenous populations have been alienated in urban settings. In the literature, urban Indignity is approached from a point of shortcoming whereby individual identity is challenged. The author then reframes urban Indigeneity away from individual identity-focused study to one that concentrates on resurgent practices and examples of Indigenous cultural production in urban settings.

The chapter next introduces a method of moving from damage-centred readings to desired-based readings of Indigenous literature. The author suggests one way to do this is to examine narratives of urban Indigeneity that do not eliminate active Indigenous political and social lives. The chapter concludes by providing a desired-based example by exploring Leanne Simpson’s short story “Plight.”

Learning Objectives

- To recognize the damage-centred approach that exists in relation to writing about Indigenous urban experiences
- To understand how desired-based writing can challenge the damaged-centred approach
- To understand why writing has concentrated on individual identity of Indigenous people in urban settings
- To recognize the ways in which cultural production in urban settings can be understood

Study Questions

1. What has been the common way that urban Indigenous experiences have been depicted in literature?
2. How have non-Indigenous scholars engaged in Indigenous urban texts?

3. What historical and political circumstances have led to particular interpretations of urban Indigenous experiences?
4. How have Indigenous peoples been alienated in urban settings?
5. What is a damaged-centred approach?
6. What is a desired-based approach?
7. Why has writing concentrated on the individual identity of Indigenous people in urban settings?
8. In what ways can cultural production in urban settings present itself?
9. How can damaged-centred writings be countered?
10. What is an example of desired-based writing? Briefly explain its message.

Additional Resources

Readings

Howard, Heather and Craig Proulx eds. 2011. *Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian Cities: Transformations and Continuities*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

Lawrence, Bonita. 2004. *“Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

McCoy, Kate, Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie. 2016. *Land Education: Rethinking Pedagogies of Place from Indigenous, Postcolonial, and Decolonizing Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.

Peters, Evelyn ed. 2011. *Urban Aboriginal Policy Making in Canadian Municipalities*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

Porter, Libby and Janice Barry. 2016. *Planning for Coexistence? Recognizing Indigenous Rights through Land-Use Planning in Canada and Australia*. New York: Routledge.

Websites

National Film Board of Canada Urban Indigenous Proud Series
<https://www.nfb.ca/channels/urban-indigenous-proud-series/>

This site provides links to a number of videos that depict Urban Indigenous experiences in Canada.

Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study
<https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/urban-aboriginal-peoples-study>

This webpage provides surveys and reports on the experiences of Urban Indigenous populations in Canada.

Urban Programming for Indigenous Peoples

<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1471368138533/1536932634432>

This website provides information on the programming that the Canadian government has available for Urban Indigenous people. Note that 2017–18s demand for funding that in 2019 (July) Indigenous Services Canada nixed any new calls.