

## Violence, relation and beauty in Toni Jensen’s “Women in the Fracklands”

SILVIA MARTÍNEZ-FALQUINA

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### NATIVE AMERICAN WRITING AND RESILIENCE

In this article I offer a culture-specific and narrative-focused contribution to the current theory of resilience – which is gaining relevance in Indigenous studies in general and Native American studies in particular – based on an analysis of “Women in the Fracklands”, by Métis US writer and professor Toni Jensen. This autobiographical essay, originally published in 2017, became the starting piece of *Carry: A Memoir of Stolen Land* (2020), a memoir-in-essays composed of sixteen sections which weave personal narrative with history to draw a map of violence in America. It is mostly focused on contemporary gun violence, but also includes family and workplace violence, mass shootings, women’s rape, trafficking and murder, as well as the ongoing history of exploitation of Indigenous peoples and lands. The author, born and raised in rural Iowa, mentions her Irish descent and identifies as Métis through her paternal line (2020, 175). On interview, she has vindicated the presence of Métis people in the US, where she grew without literary role models until she read Louise Erdrich in her twenties (Smith 2021). The situation of the Métis people, or the mixture of an Indigenous tribe with French – sometimes Irish or Scots Irish – trappers and traders, is very different in Canada – her family is originally from Alberta (Smith 2021) – where they have been a government recognized Indigenous group since 1982. Although she embraces a positive cultural connection to her late grandmother and the memory of her care, songs and stories, the narrator’s relation to her parents – especially her violent Métis father – is complicated, to say the least. Jensen’s identification as Indigenous is thus presented as both inheritance and choice, for she finds a sense of community and purpose in her involvement with issues that have to do with Indigenous peoples in general and women in particular, like the Dakota Access Pipeline protests (NoDAPL) and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement (MMIW). Hence, her identification and activism under-

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score the common struggle of North American Indigenous peoples against the settler colonial forces on both sides of the border.

As my analysis of “Women in the Fracklands” sets out to prove, Jensen exposes the overlapping of violence against land and humans – with a special emphasis on violence against Indigenous women in and around fracking sites – and articulates relationality and beauty as signposts of activism and resurgence. I consider her unveiling of the Indigenous environmental ethics of interdependency an essential decolonizing imperative, insofar as it is the only potentially effective way to respond to the combined forces of settler colonialism, global capitalism and the sexism upon which both rest. Hence, in spite of the nature of the issues she deals with, Jensen resists pathologization or victimization and her stated intention is to transmit a sense of “the beauty of the landscape and the tribal history of each place” (McEwen 2020, 143). With this in mind, I examine how the text articulates the inextricable connection between bodies and places that characterizes Indigenous relational worldviews (Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2017), and thus participates in the necessary reconceptualization of Native American resilience.

In the context of indigeneity, and most clearly when dealing with climate change and its impacts, resilience is brought to the fore as a strength of Indigenous peoples which enables them to cope and prosper, and it is articulated in three fundamental themes, namely, adaptation, vulnerability and care (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2016, 131). Native Americans, specifically, have often been set as symbols of resilience in the face of genocide, as examples of “human survival and resilience under the most adverse conditions” (Grandbois and Sanders 2009, 578). These conditions include, but are not limited to, settler colonial strategies of dispossession (loss of lives and lifeways, stealing of lands, forced removal), assimilation (the allotment policy, boarding schools and the taking of children from their homes, urban relocation programs), and extractivism (exploitation of Indigenous bodies, lands and cultures), all of which leads to a legacy of historical transgenerational trauma that continues to this day. In the last few years, a considerable number of studies have been published about the resilience of specific Native American demographic groups, emphasizing kinship, culture, the sense of place, storytelling and spirituality as their main protective factors.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, some contributions to the theoretical foundation of Native resilience have been offered, like the braided resiliency framework, which accounts for “mind, body and spiritual forms of resilience” (Elm et al. 2016, 358). Needless to say, the various ways in which Native Americans struggle to thrive in today’s world while maintaining their cultural identity, as observed in the work of Indigenous scholars, artists and activists, still deserve more visibility. At the same time, the persistence of the sexist and racist structures of settler colonialism compels us to examine how resilience is highly compromised through rupture, dispossession and trauma. In light of the particular circumstances of the Indigenous peoples of the United States, we should start by reflecting on whether this is the most adequate frame to account for such conditions.

Resilience is both an extremely useful and promising concept and one that is ambiguous and controverted, to such an extent that, depending on how the main

elements of resilience – namely, heterogeneity and volatility – are “mobilized in different iterations of resilience, they can serve conservative or progressive political aims” (O’Brien 2017a, 41). Exposing the “alignment of the discourse of resilience and neoliberal ideology” (Fraile-Marcos 2020, 3) is especially important in this context, for viewing Indigenous peoples as more resilient because they have survived the terrible effects of colonialism may be used to obscure the present conditions of their oppression. In fact, resilience has been considered “a technique of neoliberal governance” (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2016, 135) which sets out the definition of “the proper and responsible indigenous being” (131) as “vulnerable, adaptive and caretaking” (139) and excludes “those ways of being that do not exhibit the expected essentialised features of indigeneity” (139). As a result, “[a]s long as indigenous peoples are reduced to resilient beings, they will not be political” (139). We should thus see them as so much more than merely resilient beings, and resilience should be reconceptualized to match their current political vindications.

In this respect, we need to challenge the understanding of the progress from trauma and dispossession to resilience and healing as a linear kind of narrative. These are all complex, dynamic stages that are constantly being defined and negotiated as part of a spectrum, colonialism is not over, and there is no original shape or previous stable system to go back to. Resilience is not a finish line, it is not a process that can ever be completed or fixed, and it is by no means the opposite of transformation, of the flow of life. We can continue by remembering that resilience is both individual and communal, human and environmental, and that the forces that require its activation are not only external but also structural. Moreover, “resilience as a discourse and as a concept itself cannot be universally secured through ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions” (Amo-Agyemang 2021, 7). Instead, we need to anchor the study of resilience “in the cultural, historical, and geographical specificity from which distinct notions of resilience emerge” (Fraile-Marcos 2020, 17–18). Last but not least, resilience should not be used by non-Indigenous peoples as a means to extract knowledge about human survival under adverse conditions in a way that apprehends indigeneity as a primitive, close-to-nature entity, or as an excuse for not taking responsibility for how neoliberalism benefits us. In sum, we need to listen to Indigenous peoples’ own resilience-building as opposed to trying to impose any critical frame on their lives, experiences or artistic expressions.

The connection of narrative and resilience has been emphasized by resilience theorists like Susie O’Brien, who claims that “resilience is a narrative, a collective fiction of the possibility for surviving present and future disasters” (2017b, 61), or Ana María Fraile-Marcos, who posits that “stories are not only repositories of ancestral knowledge but also agents of change intertwined with global processes” (2020, 12). In the specific context of Native American cultures, narrative has often been associated to identity and cultural survival, to such an extent that storytelling is generally considered the key to Indigenous literary activism and resurgence. Yet, from a non-Indigenous perspective, this association should be handled with care. First, underscoring the importance of the storytelling tradition should not be understood as referring to the past exclusively. Stories were never meant to be fixed or static; they

are dynamic, contradictory, changing, and they come in different expressive forms. Second, tying storytelling with resilience appears to affirm the centrality of stories to Indigenous life but “in practice, it arguably reinforces colonialism by simultaneously upholding stereotypes of traditional Indigenous culture and framing storytelling within neoliberal models of resilience” (O’Brien 2020, 43). Stories should not be “disembedded from the human and nonhuman relationships they express and reduced to tools for enhancing productive capacity” (43). Leanne Simpson also expressed her concern with the risk of making Indigenous resurgence merely cultural and obscuring its political component (2017, 49–50). Hence, it is important to highlight a definition of “resilience as embedded in Indigenous body and land sovereignty” (De Finney 2017, 11), and to remember that Native American stories are, above all, an expression of life as relationship.

### **“THE WORK OF STITCHING YOURSELF BACK TOGETHER”: RELATIONALITY AS EMBODIMENT OF TEXT, BODY, LAND**

In Native American worldviews, relationality is foundational “to the nature of being” (Gonzales 2020, 2) and “to the world’s structure” (6), for “relationships formed the basis of reality” (1). Being is understood as being-with, which involves a sense of openness that includes all there is, animate or inanimate, other people, other creatures, the present and the past. Such emphasis on relations is made manifest most clearly in the Indigenous place-centered ethic that Glen Coulthard describes as “grounded normativity”, a mode of reciprocal relationship which teaches us about “living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, non-dominating and nonexploitative way” (2014, 60). This points to a culture-specific understanding of embodiment, since, as Simpson states,

the original knowledge, coded and transmitted through complex networks, says that everything we need to know about everything in the world is contained within Indigenous bodies, and that these same Indigenous bodies exist as networked vessels, or constellations across time and space intimately connected to a universe of nations and beings. (2017, 21)

Thus, in the Native American context, embodiment refers to the lived experience of peoples in connection to the land, and is articulated through storytelling. Pointing to the interrelation of narrative, place and bodies, “Women in the Fracklands” engages in a “body poetic” which, as Neil McLeod claims in his theorization of Cree poetic discourse, “connects our living bodies to the living Earth around us” (2014, 89). In his view, “[t]hrough relations, we are able to create the web of understanding of our embodied locations, and extend it to a wider context of collective historicity and through a poetics grounded in dialogue and an open-ended flow of narrative understanding” (94).

Relationality is the key motif of “Women in the Fracklands”, both at the formal level – with its articulation of an embodied aesthetics of resilience that emerges from a direct engagement with the world – and at the level of content, including a reflection on narrative as constructing reality and theorizing being as being-with. The text is segmented in six numbered sections, juxtaposing a variety of storylines

which combine personal and historical narrative. Jensen plays with generic categories, and the text is simultaneously memoir, essay, poetic prose, history, natural philosophy, ecological treatise and activist manifesto. It is made out of fragments which are stitched together through association, approximation and evocation. Interestingly, using the second person instead of an autobiographical “I”, the text requires reader involvement, calling on “you” to come to terms with the strikingly contrasted images of decadence and resilience that Jensen presents us with. This recalls Hertha Wong’s theorization of Native American autobiography as “community-life-speaking” (1992, 20), a definition which underscores its communal and oral nature. It also points to the “co-creative” nature of meaning in storytelling through the collaborative efforts of listeners-readers (Brill de Ramírez 2015, 4) which the reader-scholar is urged to have in the presence of Indigenous memoir, to allow them to come into relationship with and become part of the story (Portillo 2017, 9). Moreover, making language not only an artistic and activist tool but also a theme in itself, Jensen engages with dictionary definitions – the Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary accompanies her as she writes – to examine the different layers of meaning of certain words, and to connect one topic to another. All this is in tune with Native American women’s autobiographical discourses, more often than not “multiple-voiced life stories” which “cannot be confined by generic definitions of autobiography that are grounded in an individual privileged subjectivity” and “offer critical paradigms for rereading and unmapping indigenous multilayered histories and identities” (2).

Because the Native Americans’ relation to their lands is the ultimate settler colonial objective, the reconnection of Indigenous bodies to the land that the project of Indigenous resurgence is based on (Simpson 2011, 2017) is an essential element of resistance and decolonization. In fact, “Indigeneity centers on cultivating relationships in a given place in order to regenerate life” (Gonzales 2020, 3), which is exactly what Jensen’s text sets out to do. The correspondence of land, human life and language is established from the first scene, located in Magpie Road, which is part of the Little Missouri National Grassland in western North Dakota: “On Magpie Road, the colors are in riot. Sharp blue sky over green and yellow tall grass that rises and falls like water in the North Dakota wind” (Jensen 2020, 3). This scene of land echoing water is part of a larger map of storied places that Jensen is drawing in words through contrast and connection. Yet, the landscape is threatened by men in gear the narrator mistakenly takes as hunters, and as she tells us soon after,

Magpie Road lies about two hundred miles north and west of the Standing Rock Reservation, where thousands of Indigenous people and their allies have come together to protect the water, where sheriff’s men and pipeline men and National Guardsmen have been donning their riot gear, where those men still wait, where they still hold tight to their riot gear. (4)

Magpie Road and Standing Rock are connected through the violence of men in gear – sheriff’s men, pipeline men, National Guardsmen – as a response to Indigenous peoples’ defense of their bodies, lands and waters. The violent reaction from the au-

thorities that the water protectors at Standing Rock have met with is just the tip of the iceberg of the exploitative colonial and sexist political, social and economic structures. Not coincidentally,

Magpie Road is part of the Bakken, a shale formation lying deep under the birds, the men in the truck, you, this road. The shale has been forming over millions of years through pressure, through layers of sediment becoming silt. The silt becomes clay, which becomes shale. All of this is because of the water. The Bakken is known as a marine shale – meaning, once, here, instead of endless grass, there lay endless water. (4–5)

The shale, lying deep under layers of sediment as a result of years of pressure, is always in the process of becoming: from sediment to silt, to clay, to shale. Similarly, the power of time and the pressures of history are the factors that determine the nature of the land – and the people – today. Historical and cultural trauma “is passed down, generation to generation, [...] it lives in the body” (12–13). Yet, as the narrator admits, “On a road like this, you are never alone. There is grass, there is sky, there is wind” (13). It is precisely by connecting to the world around her that this narrator can find the language to express and recreate herself as a being in relation: “You wrote things down. You began the work of stitching yourself back together. You did this on repeat until the parts hung together in some approximation of self” (13).

### **“YOU CARRY THEIRS, AND THEY CARRY YOURS”: RESISTING WASTE BY NAMING TROUBLE**

The result of what Jensen describes as an overflow of crime – rape, human trafficking, and an epidemic of missing Indigenous women – is that Indigenous lands and bodies are treated as waste. However, there is no resignation to remain the “wasted lives” (Bauman 2004) or “ungrievable lives” (Butler 2004) that settler colonialism categorizes them as, and there is still place for examples of growth and regeneration. Thus, whenever lands and bodies are invaded and threatened, the reaction is to protect them by strengthening community. This is made most visibly in the water protectors’ camp to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) or Bakken Pipeline (2016–2017), which evidences how the seeds of resurgence are planted in the wastelands. It is obvious that the individual and the group – people, lands – are attacked together, that sexism and colonialism work together, so they must be denounced together, resisted together. In her exposure of how bodies, land and all beings are the victim of violence around fracking sites, bearing witness to sexist and racist events and giving literary voice to the victims, Jensen is connecting her memoir to testimonio, “an affirmation of the individual subject, even of individual growth and transformation, but in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle” (Beverley 1989, 23).

Described as a threat to birds, women and the land, men are the ones who violate this previously fertile land and convert it into a wasteland, a place of death:

Men drill down into the shale using water and chemicals to perform the act we call hydraulic fracturing or fracking. [...] In the Bakken in 2001, more than a thousand accidental releases of oil or wastewater were reported, and many more go unreported. Grass won't

grow after a brine spill, sometimes for decades. River fish die and are washed ashore to lie on the dead grass. (Jensen 2020, 4–5)

Due to greedy human action, the Bakken is thus the symbol of utter waste, compared to Chernobyl (9). Yet, “[t]he Bakken is not Chernobyl because the Bakken is no accident” (9). The extractive industry here is part of the unfinished business of settler colonialism, which treats Indigenous lands and bodies as waste through overexploitation and violation.

Moreover, this kind of violence is unambiguously gendered. As the narrator finishes photographing the grass that looks like water in Magpie Road, the two men she took for hunters – who are actually pipeline employees in their gear – make their second pass, revving and slowing, threatening her with a gun:

They are not bird hunters. This is not a sporting moment. The way time suspends indicates an off-season moment. The one in the button-down motions to you out the window with his handgun and he smiles and says things that are incongruous with his smiling face. (5–6)

The men are, in fact, hunting, and the narrator is the prey, in an area where “[t]he influx of men, of workers’ bodies, into frackland towns brings an overflow of crime” (6) which especially affects Indigenous women, raped, trafficked and murdered at alarming rates. Driving around the fracklands area to do research for a novel, the narrator draws a map of violence against women, talks to victims, stays in hotels, documents the sites of assaults and human trafficking. A parking space at the Wolfcamp Shale in Texas is full of trucks and “[i]n the morning, the parking lot is all trash can. Beer bottles and used condoms and needles, the nighttime overflow” (7). At a different hotel between South Dakota and Wyoming, upon witnessing the transaction of a roughneck and a hotel clerk, she illustrates the transient and ambivalent nature of survival and the objectification of women in the fracklands area, “a place that’s all commerce”: “The men sway across the lot, drunk-loud, and one says to the other, ‘Hey, look at that,’ and you are the only *that* there. When the other replies, ‘No, I like the one in my room just fine,’ you are sorry and grateful for the *one* in an unequal measure” (8). Part of her fracklands protocol is to take photographs of the rooms she stays in, rooms where women are bought and sold (6), then she uploads the pictures to a website that helps find women who are trafficked, who have gone missing.<sup>2</sup> She has learned to be patient and wait to perform this ritual until she has checked out of her room, “[b]ecause it is very, very difficult to sleep in a hotel room once you learn a woman’s gone missing from it” (6).

These individual efforts are the only way to try to keep herself and other women safe in a context where the police represents another form of state-sanctioned violence, as seen in the series of common questions in victim’s interrogation, shaped as accusations: “Why were you there on the road?; What were you wearing, there on the road?; Why didn’t you call the police?; Why were you by yourself?; What did you do, after?” (10–13). The narrator’s answers delve in details of violence against Indigenous women, who “are almost three times more likely than other women to be harassed, to be raped, to be sexually assaulted” (10), connected to her early memories

of violence – “Because your first memory of water is of your father working to drown your mother” (11) – or to violence against Indigenous peoples – the “water cannon” at Standing Rock, the dog cages in the Sheriff’s Department to contain the “overflow” of arrested protesters (12). All this is related to violence against the environment epitomized by the construction of the DAPL, but not limited to it. The violence on the land connects us all, affects us all, “[b]ecause everywhere is upriver or down” (11). This is why she is drawing this map of violence, unveiling its different layers and intersections: “Because these times make necessary the causing of trouble, the naming of it” (11). She does so by offering her testimony for the sake of the larger community, acknowledging her individual experience in connection: “Because all roads lead to the body and through it. Because too many of us have these stories and these roads and these seasons. Because you carry theirs and they carry yours, and in this way, there is a measure of balance” (11).

### “BECAUSE THEY LIVED, YOU CARRY THE NEWS”: COMMUNITY, HISTORY AND RESILIENCE

Part of the work of stitching the self back together comes from the inseparability of time and space, whereby Jensen connects these times with other times, the stories of which are all written on bodies and lands. The historical perspective is essential for her account of resilience, and being the descendant of people who survived entails a responsibility in the present:

Because to the north and west of Magpie Road, in the Cypress Hills of southern Saskatchewan, in 1873, when traders and wolf hunters killed more than twenty Assiniboine, mostly women and children in their homes, the Métis hid in those hills and lived. Because they lived, they carried the news. Because they lived, you carry the news. Because the massacre took place along the banks of a creek that is a tributary that feeds into the greater Missouri River. (Jensen 2020, 12)

This reference to a massacre that occurred in Canada near the US border, where both Canadians and Americans were involved, points to the Indigenous peoples’ common struggle against the forces of colonialism, and to survival as a political act of resistance. Moreover, the narrator thus uncovers the different layers of violence and historical trauma that converge today, establishing a direct line between past and present, her Métis ancestors and their descendants. By connecting rivers and people, she acts as a symbolic tributary, writing to denounce and overcome inherited trauma, and to fight for justice. Clearly, survival is both individual and communal, and it includes people and rivers, the dead and the living, past, present and future: “Because these times and those times and all times are connected through lands and bodies and water” (12).

This sense of self in radical relation to others is the key to Jensen’s activist response to settler colonial wasting, and it allows her to end on a positive note in the final section of her text. Here she describes Standing Rock during the NoDAPL protest as a place of struggle where one risks becoming a past-tense body, freezing in a blizzard, being bitten by police dogs, dying of hypothermia after being shot with the water cannon or struck by a tear gas canister. The irony of having water cannons used against



the water protectors in the harsh North Dakota winter serves to highlight institutional violence against the NoDAPL protesters. It also enhances the idea of incongruity introduced in the previous description of the men who chased the narrator while driving in the fracklands, whose smiles showed no correspondence with their words and intentions. Such incongruity – or the inconsistency of things that are expected to be in correspondence – cannot be said to be fully overcome in the end, of course. Yet, the text offers a restoration of a sense of correspondence based on a relational conception of time and an emphasis on community which becomes the key to this narrative of resilience.

In spite of violence, then, this is also a place where the people gather “to pray, to talk of peace” (14); where the protesters welcome helpers from other tribes and conditions; where life flows and single moments can be precious and hopeful. At Standing Rock, the narrator accounts for the making of a home, which may be temporary yet beautiful. As she says, “You sort box upon box of donation blankets and clothes. You walk a group of children from one camp to another so they can attend school” (13). These children may be treated as waste by settler colonial powers, as less valuable than the cows who are allowed to graze on this land and protect their calves (14), but they also signify regeneration and continuity. In this place of violence, the narrator vindicates the way “the days pass in rhythm” (13) and life never stops flowing: “The night before the first walk, it has rained hard and the dirt of the road has shifted to mud. The dirt or mud road runs alongside a field, which sits alongside the Cannonball River, which sits alongside and empties itself into the Missouri” (13–14). Rain mixes with dirt, which shifts to mud, which becomes part of one river, then another. The narrator does not romanticize – the water is not always clear or clean – but posits that we can always count on constant transformation. The flow of time, an important motif in this part of the text, is associated to resilience, as seen in the integration of the narrative present with the near future, which she introduces by means of prolepsis:

On this day, it is still fall. Winter will arrive with the Army Corps’ words – no drilling under Lake Oahe, no pipeline under Lake Oahe. The oil company will counter, calling the pipeline “vital,” saying they “fully expect to complete construction of the pipeline without any additional rerouting in and around Lake Oahe.” The weather will counter with a blizzard. After the words and the blizzard, there will be a celebration. (14–15)

The narrative moves back and forth in time, anticipating the good news about the pipeline to come in the following winter, which will again turn into bad news for the protesters. These transitions point to a story which cannot be accounted for in linearity, because it is larger than single individuals or a specific community. It is a story of struggle and resilience which continues even if we know there will be ups and downs, even if we cannot be certain about the final outcome.

Although, expectedly, we are not offered a closed, happy ending, the narrator exerts her control over the story to water the seeds of resilience and leave us with the possibility of hope. The protester community at Standing Rock is a sign of collective power, proof of how when people come together for something fair and urgent, things change for good, even if change is not always visible. After anticipating the fu-

ture of the struggle, the narrator comes back to the narrative present and to the beauty of the single moment:

This bridge lies due south of the Backwater Bridge of the water cannons or hoses. But this bridge, this day, holds a better view. The canoes have arrived from the Northwest tribes, the Salish tribes. They gather below the bridge on the water and cars slow alongside you to honk and wave. Through their windows, people offer real smiles. (15)

As opposed to the incongruence of the gunned men who threatened and chased her earlier, these smiles mean exactly what they are supposed to mean: there is a direct connection between the inside and the outside, the signifier and the signified. The water protectors are all fighting together for a common purpose, caring for the land and for one another. The result is correspondence, beauty. The final paragraph enhances these ideas and connects them to ritual in relation to nature:

That night, under the stars, fire-lit, the women from the Salish tribes dance and sing. [...] You stand with your own arms resting on the shoulders of the schoolchildren, and the dancers, these women, move their arms in motions that do more than mimic water, that conjure it. Their voices are calm and strong, and they move through the gathering like quiet, like water, like something that will hold, something you can keep, even if only for this moment. (15)

Thus is a single moment made into a momentous event which places great value on beauty in spite of violence, and which changes the focus from pain to agency and self-empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

“Women in the Fracklands” is an important contribution to autobiographical writing by Native American women “who tell and write their stories of survivance” and articulate “a place-based and land-based language”, whose “autobiographical discourses express communal storytelling practices that embody ancestral identities across multiple regions, times, and spaces” (Portillo 2017, 17). It also offers an interesting, culture-specific view on Indigenous resilience which articulates the ethical, epistemological and ontological value of Indigenous relationality, challenging the settler colonial logic of categorization, and becoming a decolonial tool of self-awareness and empowerment. The text exemplifies how the complex integration of body, text and nature that articulates contemporary Native American identities is both rooted in place and in a constant journey; grounded in tradition and intent on living in the present and the future. Understanding that we are relational beings in connection to the world – including other beings, the land, stories, and history – is a call to remain both humble and hopeful. We know that making people and lands into waste is not a mere side effect of settler colonialism and neoliberalism; it is right at the center of this ongoing exploitative project, which is not only racist but also deeply sexist. As Jensen denounces in “Women in the Fracklands”, bodies, lands and waters are being violated; yet, it is possible to react against their invasion and proposed destruction in an alliance that emphasizes agency and regeneration, denouncing the present conditions of oppression and thus reinforcing sovereignty on a par with resilience. The Salish women the narrator admires at the end of the text

are much more than simple victims or waste bodies, although obviously this is part of how they are treated. Yet, here they are, dancing together, reinforcing the group, mimicking and conjuring water, bringing an ocean to the middle of this wasteland, showing, as Leanne Simpson would say, that “after everything, we are still here” (2011, 12), and demonstrating the beauty of resistance, and the resistance in beauty.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See for example Grandbois and Sanders 2009; Elm et al. 2016; Burnette 2018; or Tolliver-Lynn et al. 2021.
- <sup>2</sup> See <http://traffickcam.com/about>.

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## **Violence, relation and beauty in Toni Jensen's "Women in the Fracklands"**

Métis. Native American women's autobiography. MMIW. NoDAPL. Relationality. Resilience. Toni Jensen.

Through a close reading of Métis US writer Toni Jensen's "Women in the Fracklands", a stand-alone chapter in her memoir-in-essays *Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land* (2020), this article aims at making a culture-specific and narrative-focused contribution to the current theory of resilience. It does so by emphasizing Jensen's denouncing of violence against Indigenous bodies and lands – particularly women in and around fracking sites – and her articulation of the Indigenous value of relationality as the embodiment of lands, bodies and language. The resulting account of resilience is both individual and communal; simultaneously based on the connection to place and history and focused on the present and the future; affirming sovereignty and becoming a decolonial tool of visibilization and empowerment.

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Silvia Martínez-Falquina  
 Associate Professor of US Literature  
 Department of English and German Philology  
 Faculty of Arts and Letters  
 University of Zaragoza  
 C/ Pedro Cerbuna 12  
 50009 Zaragoza  
 Spain  
[smfalqui@unizar.es](mailto:smfalqui@unizar.es)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8054-095X>