

## The Cultural Politics of Renaming in Selected Native Canadian Poems

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**KEYWORDS:** Cultural erasure, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Mahikan, Colonial, Generative refusal.



<https://doi.org/10.51345/v35i3.957.g480>

### ABSTRACT:

Cultural erasure and land dispossession form the core of the settler colonization of Turtle Island (Canada), a colonization that seeks the production of colonial space through processes such as colonial naming which aims at erasing the presence of the Indigenous peoples, invalidating their cultures and claiming ownership over their lands. In their resistance to their cultural and physical eradication and the occupation of their land by the settler colonizers, the Indigenous writers adopt the revitalization of their languages as an anticolonial discourse of Indigenous cultural preservation. Many past studies investigated the decolonization processes in Indigenous Canadian poetry. However, renaming as a decolonizing act of Indigenous cultural revitalization is not approached in the selected poems. Thus, this article examines the renaming practices in Duncan Mercredi's "mahikan" (1991), Marilyn Dumont's "nomenclature" (2007)\* and extracts from Louise Bernice Halfe's book-length poem, *Blue Marrow* (1998). The article applies the ideas on naming expressed in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012), as well as the concept of 'generative refusal' which is conceptualized by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in her book *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (2017). The article concludes that renaming as it is adopted by the selected poets serves as a counter-narrative that unsettles the colonial discourse of Indigenous cultural erasure and land dispossession by reasserting the presence of the Indigenous peoples and their spiritual connections to their land and culture.

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## 1. The Cultural Politics of Renaming

Names constitute a significant aspect of people's culture, identity, and heritage. Young children learn names from early childhood, forming a deep spiritual bond with those names that will later shape their identity. Brewer et al. (2016) note that naming is a social construct used to define people, places, and significant cultural and political implications. The researchers add that renaming was one of the most important tools of American politics of assimilation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This practice was used to facilitate legal and administrative procedures and establish natives as legible to the state. Yet, the practice of renaming imposed European names which distanced natives from their identity.

For many cultures worldwide, place names pass stories down from one generation to another, revealing aspects of their history and ideology. George Seddon (1997) argued that the words of the landscape carry "cultural baggage" that may "imply values and endorse power relations" (p. 15). Place names are not merely functional; they are mostly symbolic conveying a cultural aspect that will deepen Indigenous people's connection to the land. In his paper entitled *Language and the Environment*, the linguist Edward Sapir argued that "the physical environment is reflected in language only in so far as it has been influenced by social factors" (1912, p. 227). In other words, the terms that people use to talk about their environment are deeply influenced by their culture. Additionally, according to Sapir, place names are the most reflective aspect of a person's physical environment and social context. In this vein, place names mirror our social experiences.

Moreover, place names reveal power relations in different regions since those who are most powerful force their names. As a result, the study of place naming occupied the attention of many researchers. As a branch of Onomastics (the study of proper names) in linguistics, "toponymy" studies the origins, meanings, and alterations of place names" (Giraut, 2020, p. 1). Over the past few years, instead of studying just the names themselves, many researchers have been interested in how the process of naming is affected by the social and political structure of the region (Giraut, 2020).

The process of naming or re-naming is an important aspect of colonizers' endeavor to impose their dominance over the land. One of the clearest instances of place naming occurred after the 1492 voyage which led the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus to “discover” the Americas. This so-called “discovery” initiated a period of rapid European colonization, exploration, and exploitation of the new world. History presented an oversimplified or biased version of this incident and circulating the narrative of Columbus’s “Discovery” promotes a Colonial perspective and disregards the loss of Indigenous people who were persecuted due to European colonization (Zinn, 2005). In her 2016 article titled *Cartographies of the Voice: Storying the Land as Survivance in Native American Oral Traditions*, Yi states that Christopher Columbus’s journal and his letters to Queen Isabella of Castile and King Ferdinand of Aragon exposed his intention to claim ownership over the land through the process of renaming (p. 2). In a journal entry from 19 October, Columbus writes:

After less than three hours’ sailing we sighted an island to the E. We braced up and headed for it, and the three vessels reached it before noon at its northern point, where there is an islet and a reef running off it to the N, and another between it and the island proper. The men from San Salvador whom I have on board told me that its name is Samoet; I have named it Isabela [sic]. The wind was northerly, and the islet I mentioned is on course for the island of Fernandina, on a line E-W of my departure point from there. From the islet the coast ran westward for twelve and a half leagues to a headland. I have called the cape here at the western end Cabo Hermoso, and it is indeed beautiful, round and with plenty of depth of water, with no shoals (qtd., in Yi, 2016, p.2).

Based on the above extract, Columbus knew that the land was already inhabited by natives and that it had its distinctive names which carry the cultural heritage of its people. Nevertheless, Columbus renamed the land from Samoet to Isabela as if by giving the land familiar European names, it became a legitimate property to European colonizers (Yi, 2016). Yi maintains that Columbus changed the name of the land that was given by the Taíno people to a Spanish name to impose the Spanish right to own the land (p.2). Furthermore, she adds that in a later letter addressed to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, Columbus says:

I named the first of these islands San Salvador, thus bestowing upon it the name of our holy Saviour, under whose protection I made the discovery. The Indians call it Guanahany [Taíno for “iguana”]. I gave also a new name to the others, calling the second Santa Maria de la Concepcion, the third Fernandina, the fourth Isabella, the fifth Juana. In the same manner I named the rest. (qtd. in Yi, 2016, p.2)

Columbus’ process of renaming reveals the European Colonial mindset. It shows the need to seize the land, impose the colonial culture, and wipe out all traces of natives. Williamson (2023) says that “European colonialism sought to inscribe order and meaning on non-European landscapes through the process of place naming” (p.1). According to Williamson, since the 1990’s Indigenous place names were “marginalized, erased or appropriated by colonial power” (p.1). For instance, settlers in Singapore renamed streets to reflect the perspectives of European power-holders (Yeoh, 1992). In Africa, the colonizers adopted new place names on maps to legitimize European colonization (Bassett, 1994). During the American annexation of Hawaii, Western names were inscribed on Hawaiian streets (Herman, 1999). The country of Colombia

and the province of Colombia cement British authority's place naming practices, including Queen Victoria by using the name Columbus as a symbol of European settler colonial triumph (Akrigg & Akrigg, 1997). All of these practices embedded colonial hegemony in the physical and cultural landscape of the colonized regions.

According to Beck (2021), to understand Columbus's place-naming practices, they must be contextualized from a European perspective. For Europeans, "the concept of creating a city or town was not one that they had thought about for a long time, particularly since the Roman invasion of Europe and, in the case of Spain, since the Muslim invasion of the peninsula in 711" (p. 9). Furthermore, Beck notes that Columbus initiated a naming enterprise unprecedented in Europe and sought European-based inspiration to come up with names. Based on that, it can be noted that through the process of place-naming, Europeans circulated the colonial idea of "terra nullius," a Latin phrase meaning "nobody's land." This concept rendered North America an uninhabited place, legitimizing European settlers' practices despite the Indigenous populations that had lived there for thousands of years before European colonization (Beck, 2021).

As a result of this ongoing oppression, Henry E. Fritz in his book *On Indian Assimilation* points out that in the face of the pressing Anglo-American culture, "the only practical and humane answer to the Indian problem was to assimilate the Indian into Anglo-American culture" (2017, p.19). He adds that the government issued the General Allotment Act of 1887 intending to assimilate Native Americans into the mainstream culture, yet according to Fritzs, this act had devastating consequences on natives and condemned them to a life of poverty. According to him, Native Americans were not equipped to adapt to the lifestyle of settlers which was in stark contrast to their lifestyle.

Since naming was utilized as a powerful tool of settler colonialism which aims at cultural erasure and dispossession, restoring the original Indigenous names serves as an effective decolonial strategy to reclaim Indigenous culture and identity (Gray & Rück, 2019). Many Indigenous nations nowadays are actively reestablishing their cultural identity by renaming their territories to restore their historical bond to the land. For example, in British Columbia, the Nisga'a Final Agreement led to the renaming of thirty-four place names from English to Nisga'a. Métis and Inuit peoples also have the legal authority to re-establish place names in their settlement areas, allowing for official recognition and changes to maps. Notably, the Eeyou of Eeyou Istchee (Cree Nation in Quebec) is leading a major Indigenous place name restoration project. Their Cree Place Names Program has developed a comprehensive database, documenting nearly 20,000 named places across their territory after extensive work involving oral histories and collaborative mapping. (Gray & Rück, 2019)

Renaming some places becomes a necessity because of the racist and offensive connotations encoded in them. In February 2022, The Wilderness Society released *A Guide to Changing Racist and Offensive Names on public lands*. This guide proves that the U.S. still contains thousands of geographical places that bear racist connotations, sexual slurs, or names that honor individuals who killed, enslaved, and expelled Native American and Black people (The Wilderness Society, 2022, p.5). For instance, when people still use the name of Mount Evans in Colorado which honors John Evans, the facilitator of the Sand Creek Massacre that caused the death of over 150 Native Americans and destroyed their homes (The Wilderness Society, 2022). Consequently, Indigenous poets utilize renaming in their poetry as a powerful tool to reconstruct their identity and counter colonial endeavors to erase their heritage.

## 2. Renaming and Reclaiming in Duncan Mercredi's "mahikan", Marilyn Dumont's "nomenclature", and Louise Bernice Halfe's *Blue Marrow*

Duncan Mercredi is a Native Canadian Cree poet, storyteller and performer. His art is deeply rooted in his Native culture. In his poetry, Mercredi uses elements from his Native oral traditions such as storytelling to preserve his Indigenous identity. From his childhood, Mercredi was trained by his hookum, translated from Cree as the grandmother, who drew his attention to the significance of their Indigenous art of storytelling (Cariou, 2020). Because Mercredi was skilled in both Cree and English, he sometimes writes poems which integrate his Cree language with English in an effort to reclaim his culture by revitalizing his Indigenous language which faces the colonial threat of marginalization and erasure. This cultural reclamation through language revitalization is evident in "mahikan", a poem published in *Spirit of the Wolf: Raise Your Voice* (1991), in which Mercredi adopts renaming to unsettle the colonial discourse regarding the culture of the Indigenous peoples and their kinship with the animal world by reasserting the Indigenous knowledge and perceptions of the wolf. As part of his aim to reassert his culture and indigenize English, Mercredi intentionally broke some of the traditional Western rules of writing poetry by for example writing the titles of his poems without capitalization. This is also true in the case of Marilyn Dumont. The title of the poem, 'mahikan', an Indigenous Cree name which is translated to wolf, highlights the poet's use of Indigenous renaming to decenter the settler colonial wolf perceptions which rely on Western fables, fairy tales, fiction and other Western forms of cultural production which depict the wolf as ravenous, envious, ungrateful, cowardly, morally corrupt, dumb, evil, diabolical, greedy, cruel, villainous, cunning and oppressive. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012), Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes:

Naming ... is about retaining as much control over meanings as possible. By 'naming the world' people name their realities. For communities there are realities which can only be found, as self-evident concepts, in the Indigenous language; they can never be captured by another language (p. 159).

Therefore, through renaming Mercredi seeks to recapture the wolf's characterization and conceptualization which are based on his Indigenous culture, knowledge and worldview. According to Smith, "Naming the world has been likened ... to claiming the world and claiming those ways of viewing the world that count as legitimate" (p. 84). This means that the poet intends to recapture and reclaim the Indigenous 'meaning' of the wolf which was decentered by the colonial narratives. Mercredi starts his poem by establishing the spatio-temporal dimensions of the natural setting where the wolf:

... glides across fresh fallen snow  
barely leaving a trail in the land  
like a shadow in the night  
he blends in the dark landscape  
a movement on the ground catches his attention  
he stops, body quivering with excitement  
a rabbit frozen with fear suddenly bolts  
mahikan jumps to the chase  
zig-zagging across the frozen ground  
the two hurtle through the silent woods

mahikan never misses the rabbit's turns  
he could lunge and snap the rabbit's neck  
but he waits. (2-15)

In the quote above, Mercredi describes the wolf in anthropomorphic terms by repeatedly referring to it with the pronoun 'he'. In this way, the poet manages to decolonize the settler anthropocentric discourse which views man, by value of having human qualities, as the center of the universe and as an exceptional and separate entity from the natural world. Therefore, by using anthropomorphism which endows the wolf with human qualities, the poet decolonizes the notion of human exceptionalism and the concept of the human by recentering the interconnectedness of the human and the animal world which is the core of the native worldview. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith writes:

Decolonization must offer a language of possibility, a way out of colonialism. The writing of Maori, of other Indigenous peoples and of anti/post-colonial writers would suggest, quite clearly, that that language of possibility exists within our own alternative, oppositional ways of knowing (p. 204).

According to Smith, decolonization is encoded within the Indigenous cultures. Therefore, these cultures must be revitalized and recentered. Apart from the title of the poem, Mercredi twice uses the Cree name mahikan within the text of the poem specifically in lines describing the wolf's chase of the rabbit. Mercredi reasserts the Indigenous "alternative, oppositional ways of knowing" through the chase between the wolf and the rabbit in the natural world. He re-invents the colonial predator-prey relationship in a way to reveal the wolf's real image in the Native worldview, which challenges colonial stereotyping and distorted image of the wolf. Smith explains "indigenous communities as part of the self-determination agenda engage quite deliberately in naming the [wolf] according to an indigenous world view... This form of naming is about bringing to the center and privileging indigenous values, attitudes and practices rather than disguising them within Westernized labels" (p. 128). During the chase, the wolf is stimulated to chase the rabbit because of the latter's sudden flight which is motivated by fear. Thus, the wolf's chase is a natural response and is true to many predators which are not demonized by settler colonialism (Williams, 2003). Despite the fact that the wolf "could lunge and snap the rabbit's neck/... he waits," [then] he trots away, glancing back only once/ he is not hungry tonight/ the run was only for the joy of life (21-23). According to Paul Williams in *Cultural Impressions of the Wolf (2003)*, "Wolves do not always kill their prey. Sometimes they appear to give chase for fun, or perhaps practice" (p. 64).

Here, Mercredi challenges the Western one-dimensional representation of the wolf as an unsympathetic, cruel, greedy and stupid killer to be decentered and eradicated along with the native wilderness by the colonial notion of progress. The poet aims to subvert the image of the wolf as greedy by separating greed from hunger. Mercredi wants to say that the wolves do not kill more than they need. This Indigenous reconfiguration of the wolf which is realized through using the wolf's Cree name undermines colonialism and legitimizes Indigenous cultural identity.

In her fight against the destructive impact of colonialism on Indigenous cultures, the Native Canadian poet, Marilyn Dumont is concerned with the damage done by colonial naming practices to Indigenous cultures, and the urgent need for Indigenous renaming which reclaims

Indigeneity. This process of renaming and reclaiming is best enacted in her poem, “nomenclature” from her 2007 collection which is entitled *that tongued belonging* (Beard, 2019). Dumont writes:

You say, <i>Canada</i> ,	I say, <i>Turtle Island</i>
You say, <i>grandmother</i> ,	I say, <i>Nokum</i> ,
You say, <i>General Dumont</i> ,	I say, <i>cousin</i> ,
You say, <i>Rupert's Land</i> ,	I say, <i>home</i> ,
You say, <i>treason</i> ,	I say, <i>self-defense</i> . (1-5)

The poem takes the form of two columns which expose the difference in naming practices between the colonizer and the colonized. In it, Dumont subverts the colonial power relations in which the colonizer acts as the speaker and the maker of language and discourse and in which the colonized is forced to act as the submissive listener. Dismantling the colonial power relations in the poem is enacted by ordering the poem in the form of ‘you say’ and ‘I say’ which reflects the poet’s belief in the right of the Indigenous peoples to name their land and reclaim their culture. The colonized in the poem controls the act of speaking by addressing the silent colonizer, defying and refusing to recognize his colonial naming practices, and offering her renaming practices as a resisting alternative. In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (2017), the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson speaks about her radical resurgent project which employs:

Nishnaabeg story as algorithm, as coded processes that generate solutions to the problems of occupation and erasure and to life on earth. It begins from a place of refusal of colonialism and its current settler colonial structural manifestations. It refuses dispossession of both Indigenous bodies and land as the focal point of resurgent thinking and action. ... It calls for the formation of networks of constellations of radical resurgent organizing as direct action within grounded normativities.... These are actions that engage in a generative refusal of an aspect of state control, so they don’t just refuse, they also embody an Indigenous alternative (35)

Despite the brevity of the poem, it investigates the danger posed by colonial naming to Indigenous cultures, and the significance of Indigenous renaming as a means of Indigenous cultural resurgence and reclamation. For naming to be an act of resistance that restores the Indigenous peoples’ presence, reclaim their right to their land and their spiritual connection to it, an Indigenous name which encodes Indigeneity must be used. In this way, renaming represents a break from the colonial past and a return to the Indigenous roots (Baker, 2009).

Thus, replacing the name “Canada” with the Indigenous name “Turtle Island” serves as an act of ‘generative refusal’ which generates an Indigenous naming alternative. Through renaming, Dumont aims at disrupting the colonial production of “Canada” as a “civilized” space which is partly defined by the lack or the absence of Indigenous peoples. The name ‘Canada’ signifies the erasure of the Indigenous cultural identity by conceptualizing the land through the colonizer’s myth of terra nullius, empty land (Baker, 2009).

Therefore, visibility and the presence of the Indigenous names on the page of the poem reasserts the visibility and the presence of the Indigenous peoples, their cultures and their sense

of belonging and kinship to their land. While discussing physical removal and cultural erasure in *AS We Have Always Done*, Simpson states:

The removal and erasure of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg bodies from land make it easier for the state to acquire and maintain sovereignty over land because this not only removes physical resistance to dispossession, it also erases the political orders and relationships housed within Indigenous bodies that attach our bodies to our land. The results are always the same: the fictitious creation of the Canadian mythology that if Indigenous nations existed, they did so in politically primitive forms in the distant past; that if Canada has any colonial baggage, it is also firmly in the past..." (p. 42).

For Dumont, renaming the Indigenous land as "Canada" reinforces the settler colonial discourse that seeks to create a settler colonial space aiming to culturally erase the Indigenous peoples by removing their bodies from their lands so as to maintain colonial control and sovereignty over them (Baker, 2009). However, 'Turtle Island' is the Indigenous alternative which reasserts a decolonizing space that restores Indigenous nationhood through decolonial articulations aiming at the return of Indigenous peoples' land bases, recentering their worldview and systems of governance, and the relinquishment of settlers' sovereign claims to those places (Cornassel and Bryce 2012; Coulthard 2014). The colonial place naming process aims at the transformation of Turtle Island to a colonial space that generates power and privilege, produces social hierarchies of belonging, and seeks the elimination of Indigenous peoples, nations and histories (Baker, 2009). Thus, the colonial space is constructed at the expense of deconstructing the Indigenous space because it entails the cultural erasure of the Indigenous peoples and their exclusion from settler nation-state which is structured through institutionalized power and privilege. Thus, using the name "Turtle Island" instead of "Canada" disrupts the colonial production of material and imagined spaces which deconstructs the Indigenous relationships to place and practices of self-determination (Baker, 2009)

The renaming of "Turtle Island" represents a shift from settler colonial sovereignty to the sovereign space of Indigenous nations. In other words, renaming "Canada" to "Turtle Island" represents a refusal to subsume the Indigenous nations of 'Turtle Island' into the state of 'Canada'. In the second line of the poem, the poet refuses the colonial name "grandmother" and imposes the Indigenous name 'Nokum' as part of "her politics of land and body dispossession" (Simpson, 2017, 42). Through reclaiming the close personal and social identifications with the land as 'Turtle Island' inhabited by people with indigenous names, Dumont seeks to reassert the sovereignty of her Indigenous peoples over the land and her sense of belonging to it. The use of the Indigenous name 'Nokum' helps relocate the Indigenous people to their land in a way which unsettles the dehumanizing colonial space (Baker, 2009).

Dumont contests the dehumanizing colonial narrative through Indigenous renaming aiming at the reclamation of the Indigenous spiritual family relationships which is encapsulated in the Indigenous name for grandmother. She also seeks to reconnect with her native home through family ties (LaDuke, 2005). By replacing the English name 'grandmother' with the Indigenous name 'Nokum.' which signifies the essential role played by native women in shaping, building, protecting and preserving their Indigenous nations, Dumont subverts the racist and sexist colonial discourse which relegates native women to a status of inferiority. Therefore, choosing the name 'Nokum' empowers native women by redefining their roles, from Indigenous

culture's perspective, as storytellers, healers, hunters and tribal leaders. Thus renaming serves as a counter narrative to the racist and sexist discourse of settler colonialism.

Additionally, stressing the role of 'Nokum' as a storyteller who preserves Indigenous culture and history subverts the colonial articulation of Indigenous peoples' history which renders them as either dead or out of the civilized notion of history. In other words, the poet seeks to dismantle the colonial myth of the empty land by reinhabiting it and reclaiming Indigenous history through Indigenous renaming which revives storytelling, memory and spiritual connections. It's important to note that inserting Indigenous names in English poems is intended to dehegemonize English and to subsequently destabilize the power relations and the conceptions articulated by settler colonial discourse by the value of their control on meaning production. In "nomenclature", this process of challenging English, the colonial power relations and knowledge production is not solely achieved by replacing English names with Indigenous ones.

Dumont also replaces the English name 'General Dumont' with the English name 'cousin'. She also replaces the English name 'Rupert Island' with the name 'Home'. This renaming highlights the poet's act of "reinventing the enemy's language". According to Joy Harjo, "to speak, at whatever the cost, is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction" (1999, p. 22). But writing and speaking do more than bear witness; they transform the means by which power is implemented. Harjo continues: "These colonizers' languages, which often usurped our own tribal languages or diminished them, now hand back emblems of our cultures, our own designs. . . . We've transformed these enemy languages" (1999, p. 22). Dumont transforms the names 'General Dumont' and 'Rupert Island' by using alternative names 'cousin' and 'home' which reassert Native kinship by reclaiming the spiritual interconnectedness of the Indigenous peoples with their families, ancestors and lands. The formal and the emotionally dry name 'General Dumont' is replaced with the less formal, the more intimate and the spiritually and culturally charged name 'cousin' which preserves Indigenous collective familial connections in the increasingly individualistic society of capitalism. In the same vein, the name 'Rupert Island' which connotes a colonial space was transformed into an Indigenous space of belonging, self-determination, sovereignty and cultural revitalization.

The kinship with the land by reasserting family connections through Indigenous renaming is clearly expressed in the poetry of another Native Canadian poet, Louise Bernice Halfe. In her book length poem, *Blue Marrow* which, according to Halfe, is inspired by a dream, spiritual communication with her ancestors, both living and dead, is conducted by performing ceremony to revitalize the Indigenous traditions and preserve their culture. To achieve her aim, Halfe opens *Blue Marrow* with a prayer to invoke the spiritual world:

*Glory be to okâwîmâwaskiy  
To the nôhkom âtayôhkan  
To pawâkan  
As it was in the Beginning,  
Is now,  
and ever shall be,  
World without end.  
Amen. Amen. (Blue Marrow 1)*

Instead of addressing a male patriarch, “the Father”, of the traditional Christian prayers, Halfe indigenizes her prayer by addressing female spirits given Indigenous names such as *okâwîmâwaskiy*, *nôhkom âtayôhkan*, and *pawâkan*, which she translates as Mother Earth, Grandmother Keeper of the Sacred Legends, and Dream Spirit. Replacing “the Father” with Indigenous names referring to Indigenous women dismantles the Christian patriarchal discourse which subjugates women to the male domination. Halfe adapts and reinvents the patriarchal Christian prayer by imposing on it her matriarchal worldview in which native women are not seen as inferior, unwise, weak and a threat to the rational Western world. Instead, Halfe reconfigures the colonial gender roles by reasserting the fundamental role of Indigenous women in the creation stories of the Indigenous world, the preservation of Indigenous peoples’ heritage and their future continuity. Thus, through Indigenous anticolonial naming practices, the poet seeks to heal the wounds of settler colonialism and restore elements of her Indigenous culture (Minor, 2016). Communicating with the ancestors through Indigenous language contributes to its vibrancy, conducts ceremony and storytelling, counters the colonial sexist and racist discourse, and reasserts the healing power of Indigenous traditions. In *Blue Marrow*, one of the speakers uses the Cree language to address the Indigenous grandmothers, asking them: “*pê-nânapâcihinân. / Come heal us*”/ “*ê-sôhkêpayik. kimaskihkîm / Your medicine so powerful*” (17). Using Cree when addressing the Indigenous elders, legitimizes, in Smith’s views, Cree as a vibrant means of communication and a powerful source of healing. Grandmothers and grandfathers are storytellers who transmit the Indigenous knowledge which is seen as sacred and as the future of Indigenous peoples (LaDuke, 2005). Grandmothers are also vital to the preservation of their cultures by fighting colonialism and raising the awareness of the Indigenous young generations toward the ecological damage caused by settler colonialism. They are also a source of strength for the Indigenous peoples to keep up the fight against colonialism by reconnecting with the land and their identity. To conclude, using the Cree language to rename Indigenous grandmothers and traditions serves as a decolonizing narrative aiming at the preservation of Cree People’s knowledge against the threat of colonialism (Minor, 2016).

### 3. Conclusion

Naming forms the core of the colonial discourse which involves the removal of the Indigenous peoples from their lands, and their cultural erasure. The settler colonizers of Turtle Island adopted place naming practices to claim ownership of Indigenous lands by transforming them into a colonial space to which the Indigenous peoples do not belong. They also aimed at suppressing indigenous resistance by disconnecting Indigenous peoples from their cultures through erasing their languages. On the other hand, Indigenous Canadian writers such as Mercredi, Dumont and Halfe are aware of the decolonizing potential which is encapsulated in Indigenous renaming. Mercredi seeks to recenter the Indigenous knowledge system and culture by using the Cree language to reconceptualize the wolf. In his poem, “mahikan” Mercredi unsettles the colonial discourse regarding Indigenous peoples as primitive and the wolf as evil. Through the Indigenous renaming of the wolf, the poet reclaims the way this animal is perceived from an Indigenous perspective. In “nomenclature,” Dumont sets the decolonizing process of indigenous renaming and reclaiming in opposition to the colonial process of naming and claiming. She replaces the colonial name “Canada” with the Indigenous name “Turtle Island”. She seeks to reassert the Indigenous people’s presence and their cultural reclamation by dismantling the colonial production of space through place naming practices which maintain Indigenous sovereignty and their belonging to their land. In addition to renaming places, Dumont aims at reclaiming Indigenous familial ties which are essential to

their connection to the land. Thus, she uses the Indigenous name “Nokum” instead of the name “Grandmother”. The renaming practices in the extract from Halfe’s *Blue Marrow* also serve as a decolonizing act to subvert the colonial racist and sexist gendering of Native women as weak and inferior by stressing their vital role in preserving their cultures.

## السياسات الثقافية لإعادة التسمية في قصائد مختارة من السكان الأصليين الكنديين

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الكلمات المفتاحية | المخو الثقافي، ليان بيتاساموساك سيمبسون، ماهيكان، استعماري، الرفض المولّد.

<https://doi.org/10.51345/v35i3.957.g480>

## ملخص البحث:

يشكل المخو الثقافي وتجريد الأراضي جوهر الاستعمار الاستيطاني لجزيرة السلحفاة (كندا)، وهو استعمار يسعى إلى إنتاج فضاء استعماري من خلال عمليات مثل التسمية الاستعمارية التي تهدف إلى محو وجود الشعوب الأصلية، وإبطال ثقافتها، والمطالبة بملكية أراضيها. في مقاومتهم للإبادة الثقافية والجدسية واحتلال أرضهم من قبل المستوطنين المستعمرين، يتبنى الكتاب الأصليون إحياء لغاتهم كخطاب مناهض للاستعمار لحفظ الثقافة الأصلية. لقد تناولت العديد من الدراسات السابقة عمليات إنهاء الاستعمار في الشعر الكندي الأصلي. ومع ذلك، فإن إعادة التسمية كفعل من أفعال إحياء الثقافة الأصلية لم يتم التطرق إليها في القصائد المختارة. وعليه، يسعى هذا المقال إلى دراسة ممارسات إعادة التسمية في قصيدة "ماهيكان" لدنكان ميركيريدي، و"التسمية" لمارلين دومونت، ومقتطفات من قصيدة لويز بيرنيس هالف الطويلة "نخاع أزرق". ويطبق المقال الأفكار المتعلقة بالتسمية التي عبرت عنها ليندا توهيواي سميت في كتابها "منهجيات إنهاء الاستعمار: البحوث والشعوب الأصلية" (2012)، وكذلك مفهوم "الرفض المولّد" الذي صاغته ليان بيتاساموساك سيمبسون في كتابها "كما كنا دائماً: حرية الشعوب الأصلية من خلال المقاومة الجذرية" (2017). ويخلص المقال إلى أن إعادة التسمية كما اعتمدها الشعراء المختارون تعد رواية مضادة تزعزع الخطاب الاستعماري المتعلق بمحو الثقافة وتجريد الأراضي الأصلية من خلال إعادة تأكيد وجود الشعوب الأصلية وعلاقتهم الروحية بأرضهم وثقافتهم.