

Rape, Bodily Presence, and “Still Activism”: Agency of Indigenous Women

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Abstract

The vulnerability of Indigenous women has been portrayed in Native American novels such as *Three Day Road* (2005) by Joseph Boyden, *The Round House* (2012) by Louise Erdrich, and *There There* (2018) by Tommy Orange. These three novels are similar in their portrayal of Native women who are raped, traumatized, and yet survive. Boyden’s Niska, Erdrich’s Geraldine, and Orange’s Jacquie go through sexual assault and rape either by non-Native white men or by Native men. None of them exhibit the types of concrete resistance we as readers might expect. Rather the victims seem to remain visibly indifferent to their physical assault and surrender their agency. However, despite having gone through such traumatic experiences, they do not stop living, neither do they let their bodies break down. Building on Kelly Klein’s “still activism” theory as a mode of protest, Judith Butler’s concept of how the body speaks politically, and Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of passive resistance, this essay examines these three characters’ apparent non-resistance to their assaulters and establish their silence, survival, and continuity as strong resistance to the sexual, mental, and historical violences that they have experienced.

Keywords: Indigenous women; sexual assault; resistance; bodily presence; still activism

Sexual violence to Indigenous women’s bodies remains an invisible stigma that denies the bodily integrity that Native women deserve. Because of prolonged exposure to trauma, including sexual trauma, throughout their histories, many Native women have developed a kind of outward indifference to such physical injuries that allows them to bury their unheard agonies. Though an active physical intervention is absent from these women’s responses to violence, their survival and persistence after a sexual assault are a form of resistance. The vulnerability of Indigenous women has been portrayed in Native American novels such as *Three Day Road* by Joseph Boyden, *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich, and *There There* by Tommy Orange. Written and published in the twenty-first century, these novels chronicle the persistence of agonized Native women who appear to us as non-resistant and silent. These three novels are similar in their portrayal of Native women who are raped, traumatized, and yet survive. Boyden’s Niska, Erdrich’s Geraldine, and Orange’s



Jacque go through sexual assault and rape either by non-Native white men or by Native men. None of them exhibit the types of concrete resistance readers might expect – such as fighting back, involving the legal justice system, or advocating for change. Rather, the victims seem to remain indifferent to their physical assault and surrender their agency. However, regardless of having gone through such traumatic experiences, they do not stop living, neither do they let their bodies break down. In this essay, I examine these three characters’ apparent non-resistance to their assaulters by using Kelly Klein’s theory of “still activism” as a mode of protest, Judith Butler’s concept of how the body speaks politically, and Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of passive resistance. This paper aims to establish their silence, survival, and continuity as strong resistance to the sexual, mental, and historical violences that they experienced.

Native American authors, critics, and ecofeminists such as Paula Gunn Allen and Leslie Marmon Silko promote the strong role of Native women as storytellers, which is essential for Native culture to survive. Allen emphasizes women’s role as mother, grandmother, Spider Woman, Thought Woman, or Yellow Woman in Native American tradition and folklore, who embody healing, survival, and continuance. Likewise, Silko connects women with nature and storytelling. While my argument does not disagree with their presentation of women, my discussion focuses on how women are treated in the Indigenous society where a woman’s body is thought to be the symbol of the community itself. While these women are the victims of non-Indian men’s animal instincts, they are equally victimized by Native men too. The criticism of this ironic social structure is clear in Sherry B. Ortner’s words: “woman is being identified with – or, if you will, seems to be a symbol of – something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself” (25). Thus, besides their role as storytellers, it is also essential to investigate how these women react to this double threat through their bodies. It is also required to reflect on how, without inciting action, they exercise restraint as a non-violent way of protest.

My project, as a whole, emphasizes the importance of Indigenous activism in women as a reaction to the violence done to their bodies and draws attention to the caveats in Indigenous feminist movements and tribal laws. I investigate the agonized women’s portrayals in these three novels and explore how their “let it go” stand after the rape exposes the futility of both the Indian criminal justice system and any feminist movement in Indigenous women’s lives. I suggest that we should reflect on and recognize the Indigenous women’s mistrust of the legal justice system, and see their apparent indifference to rapists as their self-devised apolitical action that speaks through their physical and psychological sustainability. Looking back to the long history of sexual violence against Indigenous women, it requires us

to rethink how these women can fight back when the legal system or any social organization fails to ensure them a secure life. Thus, it is essential to redefine their silence and indifference, and to reinforce the fact that these women should neither retaliate nor submit; rather the stillness of their bodies, even as individuals, has far-reaching significance.

Since the 1980s, feminists in the United States such as bell hooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and Patricia Hill Collins have denounced the racism of white feminism and the lack of attention it pays to issues of class and race. The postcolonial feminist writer Chandra Talpade Mohanty questions the colonialist discourses of white feminism toward women of the so-called third world through their victimizing representations. Yet not much has been done to promote indigenous feministic approaches, nor is there enough scholarship on this subject. The complexity of Indigenous feminism has already been discussed by Cheryl Suzack et al. in *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*. According to them, concern for Indigenous autonomy makes feminist research “often appear to be irrelevant to the concerns of Indigenous communities” (2). Moreover, the imposition of western patriarchy has diminished Indigenous women’s position, power, and experiences. This concern is apparent in Emma LaRocque’s emphasis on Indigenous feminist politics and Fay Blaney’s observation that “a key goal of Indigenous feminism must therefore be ‘to make visible the internal oppression against women within our communities’ as well as in the dominant society” (qtd. in Suzack et al. 3). Thus, I bring attention to these women’s inner power of resistance to sexual assault and also explore the necessity of its acknowledgment.

The after-effects of sexual assault or rape on women burden them with unspeakable trauma. In Indigenous societies, “many Indigenous women endure the prolongation of a structure in which abuse and violence are the ‘norm,’ lacking the necessary support from the justice system, male chiefs and council members, and society at large” (Mitchell and Ezcurra 209). According to a study done by the Department of Justice in May 2016, “out of the 2,000-plus Native American and Alaskan Native women surveyed (who lived both on and outside of reservations), 56 percent had experienced sexual assault and rape; the report blamed the high rate of sexual violence on a ‘flawed tribal court structure, little local law enforcement, and a lack of funding’” (Arnold). Responding to this structural oppression, Sarah Deer, an anti-violence activist and scholar, asserts that the “people who are violently assaulted should be the central focus of our criminal justice system” (xi). She also states that “rape is a fundamental result of colonialism, a history of violence reaching back centuries ... rape is a crime against humanity” (x). In a recent article, Valerie N. Wieskamp and Cortney Smith argue that “regarding sexual violence against Native women, the discourse of settler colonialism renders Native bodies as disposable

and blames Native women for the violence committed against them in ways that disguise the influences of structural oppression” (73). They explore how “survival – a rhetoric of resistance that emphasizes empowerment by asserting Native presence and rejects dehumanizing narratives – provides an important resource for communities struggling with the effects of violence ... [and] enhances the voices of Native women who experience sexual assault and rebuffs the notion that violence against their bodies is a non-event” (73). Another scholar Igor Primorac, in the article “Radical Feminism and Rape,” emphasizes that rape is not just sexual assault; it is a violation of a woman’s right to bodily integrity, her personal autonomy, and thus, a violation of personhood (499). Yet, most of the actions or laws are restricted to theories without any practical consequences. Most of the rape cases are either not reported or the raped victims are offered romanticized sympathy. What remains ignored is that these women need both collective support and recognition of their resistant spirit to decolonize the concept of rape. In Sarah Deer’s words, these women “deserve a tribal-centric response to their experiences ... a response that centers a contemporary Native woman in her unique place and time” (xiv). In line with these scholars’ critiques, I will analyze how Indigenous women’s survival and bodily presence can be seen as a stronger mode of protest even though they appear not to raise their voices or demand counter-action through concrete or organized protests. I also examine how the stories of their trauma and healing logically reflect the survival of their body, identity, and community.

Trauma, Healing, and Rape of the Metonymic Feminine Body

According to the Native Americans, their traditional stories have a “healing” power. N. Scott Momaday finds an interaction between language, storytelling, and place, because, for him, “the place of infinite possibility is where the storyteller belongs” (112) to preserve the history. Leslie Marmon Silko also states that “if you don’t have stories, you don’t have anything” (xxvi). For Jace Weaver, traditional storytelling is the medium by which the storyteller “participates in a traditionally sanctioned manner in *sustaining the community*” (42). Hence, the Native Americans struggle to keep themselves and their history alive among posterity. The elders enliven the forgotten past by reminding their children of the connection between their identity and the place they belong to. This tribalism is centered on creating culture and community. It is a strong feeling of identity with and loyalty to one’s tribe or group denying self-sufficiency as the ultimate aim or the notion of “every man for himself” and preaching the individual’s responsibility for the common good. The American Indian tribes, as Paula Gunn Allen states, “do not celebrate the individual’s ability to feel emotion” and they are alien to the concept of “private soul at any public wall” (63). The sacred aim of their life is the “intermingling of breaths” and merging the personal into the public to seek reality in harmony and to fulfill the meaning of

good life (Allen 63). Even under the domination by outsiders, these tribes cohere through their songs, ceremonies, legends, sacred stories, myths, and tales. Weaver affirms that “there is always something beyond the dominating systems . . . there is always an alternative” by which the oppressed people survive (11-12). They employ storytelling as an effective tool for community building and, thus, as the best way to transfer the legacy of tribalism among the new generation or urban Indians.

This tribalistic attitude fights the myth of “vanishing Indians” and carries their “grief” orally or in written forms to avoid “psychic suicide” as a way of healing (Weaver 43). However, the Native communities keep experiencing their historical trauma through other forms of violence. While these communities aspire for psychic healing through the protection of their cultural territory, the white intruders treat the Native woman’s body as the easiest way to pollute the sanity of their tribalism. This rape of Native bodies in Indigenous societies is not only a physical assault; it is a metaphor that is historically connected to colonialism. In colonial discourse, “the forced penetration of the virgin land” is metaphorically seen as an act of sexual penetration through which they justify colonial expansion as a positive phenomenon (Sharkey 18). Therefore, as ecofeminists claim, “rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked both metaphorically in shaping worldviews and materially in shaping women’s everyday lives” (Mies and Shiva xvi).

In Indigenous society, rape of Native women by non-Natives has a symbolic meaning other than just sexual violence. Following that trend, recent critics identify Louise Erdrich’s *The Round House* as a tale of an entire community seeking vengeance on a single person who poses a common threat. As the central female character Geraldine is raped by the white man Linden Lark at the round house, her son Joe, consequently, takes vigilante action by killing that person, which receives indirect support from the community. Declaring the round house as a metonymic feminine body, Bender and Maunz-Breese write: “In violating Geraldine within the precincts of the round house, Lark simultaneously profanes the sacred feminized body representative of the Ojibway tribe and culture. This is rape not only of one woman but of an entire community” (145). Erdrich herself calls it a novel about her crusade against rape. In the Afterword of this novel, she declares that “the tangle of laws that hinder prosecution of rape cases on many reservations still exists” (319). Though many organizations are working to restore justice and security for Native women, the novel, set in 1988, hints at the continuance of this sexual violence perpetrated by white men. In Julie Tharp’s words, this story is about “both the trauma of sexual violence and the trauma of being denied justice” (26). Tharp focuses on the loss of tribal jurisdiction to protect Native women from sexual violence and criticizes the knots in the system of justice. She interprets Geraldine’s silence as Erdrich’s intentional challenge to awaken the readers’ conscience. Erdrich presents her

characters as being well familiar with the laws because it will allow her “to make real world critiques without damaging the verisimilitude of the novel” (Tharp 29). While all these critical discussions highlight the essential problems in the Native American community, Geraldine’s continuity after the physical and mental shock rarely gets prominence.

The same negligence of a Native woman’s survival is apparent in discussions on Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road*. Niska’s story as a windigo killer is revealed to us through her three-day journey home with her nephew Xavier after World War I. Niska, as a girl, never compromises with anything. By inheriting her father’s spiritual gift, Niska lives in the bush alone because she “had a gift that others wanted and needed” (154). Eventually, she chooses a Frenchman, the *wemistikoshiw*, for a mate despite her mother’s warning that “*wemistikoshiw* were not to be trusted” (152). Using her shamanic practice as an excuse, the Frenchman leaves her forever. This leads Niska to discover through an old woman in the Indian part of Moose Factory that the Frenchman “has a taste for red meat that he can’t satisfy. There are little half-French, half-Indian children running around this place that he refuses to claim” (157). Yet, her sudden meeting with this man makes her forget his past and falls into his trap after being drunk. He rapes Niska in the church near the reservation school, where “a man takes a woman to be his forever ... a holy place” (160). Niska’s realization of being raped comes when he utters: “I fucked you in a church ... I fucked the heathen Indian out of you in this church I fucked your *ahcahk*, your spirit” (161). According to Susan K. Moore, “Niska embodies this feminine source of life, but also that which threatens paternal authority (symbolized by the school and church). Indeed, as a healer, visionary, and windigo killer, she is positioned at the boundary of the sacred, between semiotic authority and symbolic law” (73). Thus, while Niska’s rape symbolizes the rape of the Indigenous community, it also reflects how her body and her healing power pose a threat to the western patriarchal system. Yet, the critics limit Niska’s role in this novel to someone who brings a cathartic effect on Xavier’s life through storytelling, and thus, her survival of rape remains an invisible and unrecognized incident.

While Niska’s rape is perpetrated by a non-Native in Boyden’s *Three Day Road*, Tommy Orange’s *There There* presents a sixteen-year-old girl named Jacquie who is raped by a Native youth, Harvey, on an island near the reservation in Alcatraz. Being just a teenage girl, Jacquie could not fight it and, after returning home, she “went to sleep in the cell” as she usually does and “the days just passed, and nothing happened” (57). Her sister Opal convinces Jacquie not to abort the baby she is carrying. Opal’s words that “It’s not over. We can’t just give up, Jacquie” create hope of agency (60). As the story advances, we see that Jacquie suffers from this trauma throughout her life, which makes her isolated, causing her to desert her

daughter Blue who is the consequence of that rape, and eventually leaving her grandchildren from another daughter, Jamie, in Opal’s care. After forty-two years, Jacquie meets her rapist Harvey at a conference in Phoenix, and both drive together toward Oakland to attend the powwow. Orange writes: “Jacquie can’t remember a day going by when at some point she hadn’t wished she could burn her life down. Today actually, she hadn’t had that thought today” (152). Jacquie recovers from the trauma that kept haunting her since she was sixteen years old. Her rape cannot be called symbolic of community rape, but Jacquie goes through the same traumatic moments as all other women do. While most discussions find the dilemma of urban Indians as the key concept of this novel, *The Guardian* defines this novel as one of compassion: “Harvey, the bumptious MC of the powwow, and Jacquie bring to the novel a strong element of compassion. The two of them reconnect after a fateful encounter decades before during the Occupation of Alcatraz.” However, no discussion emphasizes Jacquie’s continuity and persistence as a significant strength of her character; rather her alcoholism gets prominence. Thus, I focus on these three characters’ still mode of resistance that not only keeps them alive but also preserves the foundation of their Indian communities.

“Still Activism” as a Mode of Resistance

As a mode of protest, the body exercises enormous power and asserts the reality of existence. Susan Leigh Foster, a choreographer and scholar, approaches “body as articulate matter” because physicality plays a significant role in “constructing both individual agency and sociality” (395). She describes “active stillness” as “not a state of non-action but rather a kind of motion” (412). Her approach resonates with Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violent passive resistance, the concept of *Satyagraha*, a forceful means of achieving socio-political goals without using violence. Gandhi uses “passive resistance” as the English version of his philosophy of *Satyagraha* to refer to resistance by inertia or refusal to comply, as opposed to resistance by active protest or physical fight. In Bhikhu Parekh’s words, Gandhi aimed “to reach out to and activate the soul of the opponent” by compelling and forcing to negotiate (68). While Gandhi sees non-violent resistance as both moral and political virtue to attain justice, Foster finds the physical presence and motion as a powerful means to protest. Similarly, photographer and activist Kelly Klein also asserts the power of stillness by saying that the body has the power to interrupt regimes of capital and subjectivity through non-violent means, which she calls “still-activism.” This still-activist body, for her, is “an alternative mode of being” (211). The same assertion is echoed in Janet Fiskio’s words: “Both kinds of bodily presence – movement and stillness – perform the resistance and continuance of Indigenous sovereignty” (102).

Hence, I investigate this form of resistance – a kind of still-activism – among the

three literary characters portrayed in the three Indigenous novels under discussion here. These characters are neither shown as still activists nor are they shown as demanding any change or protesting on the street against any crime. Most of the scholarly and critical discussions define these women as suffering from traumatic experiences silently after being raped. However, I prove that their silence and survival testify to their passive resistance through stillness, bodily presence, and continuity, which can be termed as “still-activism.”

In Boyden’s *Three Day Road*, Cree native woman Niska’s rape by the Frenchman in the church is a crucial scene. The Frenchman treats her like a “squaw whore” and justifies his sexual assault as Christianizing a heathen through rape. She recalls how she ran away and says to Xavier: “I crouched and sobbed, afraid that his magic had killed my family’s fire inside of me, and it was only then that I realized he was a spell-master of some kind and he’d stolen my strength” (161). Despite being a girl who used to lead an adventurous life, she prays hard to regain her spiritual power. Niska says: “I prayed harder for purification until the pain became ecstasy ... I tried not to think of that night again. A sense of peace came over me as I prepared for another winter alone in the bush” (162-163). Her mother later informs her that the Frenchman had gone mad and committed suicide. Niska says: “She watched me for a reaction, and when I did not give her one, she finished her story” (163). Niska has already erased the rape from her mind and learned to find “ecstasy” in pain. This is an incredible psychological strength that lets old Niska share her experiences with her nephew Xavier. Niska’s rape is much more profound in the novel apart from simply the traumatic effect it has on Niska. On the one hand, this rape is symbolic of the white culture raping the Native American culture, seeking to eliminate their “heathen” belief systems; on the other, Niska’s indifference to this rape and silent return to bush life reveals the failure of the legal system that, instead of preventing the rape, prepares the women to accept it. Thus, Niska’s survival and continuity act as a concrete denial and silent response to the white rapists who neither could kill her nor bend her; rather, her still bodily presence articulates her resistance, motion, and humanness.

Generational sexual trauma and women’s bodily rejection have also been pictured by Louise Erdrich in *The Round House*. Narrated from the perspective of a thirteen-year-old boy Joe, this novel exposes the hollowness of the American judicial system which still practices racial discrimination regarding justice for indigenous people. The central character Joe, perceiving the inability of the tribal legal system to bring his mother Geraldine’s rapist under trial, deploys the traditional practice of “wiindigoo” justice to ensure justice not only for his mother but also for the whole reservation community. Geraldine, after being raped in the round house by a white man named Linden Lark, makes herself aloof and silent. Yet, the issue is more complicated than

it appears. Erdrich situates the rape of Geraldine by a white man at the round house to highlight the American judicial pitfalls that advocate racial superiority of white men. Geraldine, in spite of being an employee in the tribal registry office and her husband Bazil, in spite of being a respected tribal judge, fail to achieve justice. Neither could they fight strongly, nor they could dare to violate communal values. The inaction of the State Government and their indifference to the sexual violence inflicted on Native women lead Joe to become a vigilante by taking revenge against the criminal without legal approval. The silence of the tribal court and the Natives in his community forces Joe to grow up quickly and to understand that there is no hope of justice.

However, most of the discussions around the novel highlight the fact that the criminal justice system in America denies the human rights of justice to the Native Americans. While this issue demands continuous action, I draw attention to the fact that Geraldine’s silence after the rape incident entails deeper meaning that needs to be addressed and exposed. As Geraldine’s son Joe says, “She went rigid and closed her eyes” (10) but does not tell who the rapist is. While Joe and his father both feel that the criminal “should be found, punished, and killed” (12), Geraldine remains silent, and does not ask for any intervention. She refuses to talk to the FBI agent Soren Bjerke. Joe says: “There was no movement or sound from my mother. Bjerke tried again. But she waited us out. She didn’t turn to us. She didn’t move. It seemed an hour that we sat in a suspense that quickly turned to disappointment and then to shame” (151). The description of the rape scene that she later shares with her husband Bazil and son Joe demonstrates the level of violence she had encountered. Geraldine avoids the imminent death that Lark initiates by pouring gasoline on her and escapes from the round house. Her consequential silence shows her inner trauma and frustration with the legal system, but she does not let the sufferings destroy her. She recovers slowly, begins “regular hours at her office” (212), and does not resort to alcoholism. Even when Joe avenges her rape by killing Lark, we do not see any excitement in Geraldine. She utters: “Lark’s trying to eat us Joe. I won’t let him, she said. I will be the one to stop him” (248). I want to assume that she stops Lark (symbolically all sexual assaulters) by her bodily presence and survival. She maintains her indifference and keeps life going. This intentional indifference to sexual assault deserves more scholarly attention. The long-accepted belief that “nothing will happen” does prove that neither the legal system nor feminism could reach the bottom of this stigma. Yet, these Indigenous women do not surrender their bodies after the rape. They let their body and mind survive the invasion and violation. Though we do not see any active motion, their continuity is their motion – a passive act of resistance that we should acknowledge.

We see the same role assigned to the raped woman in Orange’s *There There*. While

we sympathize with Jacquie for being victimized, her actions as a grown woman raise a concern. At a conference on the Native women's safety in Phoenix, she meets the old Harvey again. As an immature girl, she let the rape go, but as an old woman, she still lets it go. Harvey seeks to apologize and justifies their past by saying: "The reason is we're both fuckups and the Indian world is small" (115). This leads them to take a drive together. In a text message, Jacquie informs Opal that she has met "*Harvey, as in: father of the daughter I gave up*" (108). When Opal asks what she is going to do, Jacquie says "Idk." After some initial indifference, Jacquie starts behaving normally with Harvey. While as an outside reader we want to see Jacquie react, she presents herself as a strong woman in front of Harvey. Her indifference, continuity, and bodily presence cannot but humiliate Harvey. The body that he expected to shatter is still alive and in motion. This indifference or non-resistance of Jacquie's unfolds the failure of the theories and concerns shown for Native women so far, on one hand, and the strength of these women's bodily presence on the other. This persistence attests to the fact that the feminine body is not so fragile to be broken down; rather it has enormous power to speak and act. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the activists, scholars, and critics to make the rape survivors in American Indian communities feel their worth with much more gravity so that the rape victims do not resort to alcoholism or commit suicide.

Persistence and Body as Performative

The bodily persistence articulates a form of resistance that can be seen in Indigenous women's survival through sexual violence. In Gerald Vizenor's view, survivance means the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb survive, "to remain alive or in existence" (19) – "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion" (1). This notion of bodily survival and presence has also been theorized by Judith Butler in a lecture held in Venice in 2011 where she discussed how the "body 'speaks' politically" without any vocal or written language and asserts the performativity of the body that necessarily does not need to be present in a public space or appear to others. In contrast, Giorgio Agamben defines the exclusion of body from political action as "bare life" and demands physical appearance in the public space to be part of plurality. Rejecting this notion of "bare life," Butler states that "it is not that bodies are simply mute life-sources that counter existing modalities of power. Rather, they are themselves modalities of power, embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action ... these bodies are productive and performative" (Butler). Thus, while many native women do not join political action in a public space, they yet perform their resistance through their body language. For instance, Niska in *Three Day Road* returns to nature to live her life, persists throughout the long periods of time, attains the strength to tell her rape story to her nephew, and engages in acts of continuance through passing her traditions along. She gets support from nature

and reenergizes her body. Similarly, Geraldine in *The Round House* returns to her family and gradually adapts herself to her usual official life. While her silence and tears demonstrate her agony, it also demonstrates her power to persist. The assaulter of her body, as we see, can only be truly punished through her continuity that she does being supported by her sense of belonging to a family. A similar performativity is seen in Jacquie in *There There*. Though she cannot fulfill her motherly duties and becomes an alcoholic, she fights with her trauma, learns to persist, and becomes a substance abuse counselor. Her work supports her persistence and without any verbal attack, she defies Harvey’s male ego. Thus, her bodily presence and survival themselves act as an agency. Moreover, her presence at a conference on the theme “Keeping Them from Harm” can be seen as a living example of a Native woman’s bodily resistance by defeating the suicidal tendency.

A body suffering under violence and trauma persists and resists. To echo Butler, to persist individually is to resist politically too. Butler responds to Hannah Arendt’s theory of “concerted actions” as political resistance and asserts that to disregard the significance of the individual body is to devalue their political agency and without appearing to someone, the body can exist politically. These three characters in the novels are representative of those Native women who suffer but survive. Though they are not seen to assemble for plural political action, they establish a perspective by existing bodily as a “being” for the others.

Referring to the three above-mentioned literary characters, we can deduce that these women not only preserve themselves but also protect the Native social structure through their sustainability. Moreover, in the Indigenous community, the women’s survival of rape means more than any political action. As a private body reflects the public body and rape is not only an individual but a public assault, their persistence also represents public existence. Thus, these women exhibit their agency in saving and surviving. Niska, Geraldine, and Jacquie do not kill or destroy life. Instead, they create life; they give birth to generations through their bodily existence. This bodily return after being sexually assaulted certifies their agency which does not fall into any traditional categories. So, we cannot establish them as feminists, activists, or political agents, but their agency resonates in their silence, in their survival, in their indifference, and in their persistence. Their non-resistance hides inside itself their passive resistance, their activism that is still, yet performed. It is, therefore, essential to re-configure the stillness and sustainability of Native women’s body that speak louder than words and resist more strongly than action. While their agonies remain unheard and invisible, I suggest that their power of survival must be recognized while they also continue their protest against the inactive Federal laws and Tribal laws for the protection of Native women.

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