

**RESEARCH PAPER**

Critical Discourse Analysis of Colonial Oppression Richard Wagamese's Indian Horse and Michelle Good's Five Little Indians

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide a postcolonial reading of Richard Wagamese's Indian Horse and Michelle Good's Five Little Indians using critical discourse analysis as a framework. Both works of fiction focus on the violent history of the Canadian residential schools which attempted to strip the indigenous children off their culture and abuse them in other ways. By applying a CDA approach, this research explores how the writers have presented the discursive processes of colonization, cultural genocide and the prevailing cycles of trauma amongst native people. The study is qualitative in nature where the text of the novels has been analyzed through the three dimensional model of CDA presented by Fairclough. The study shows various ways in which the native people have faced colonial oppression as depicted in the selected novels. The study recommends to explore the the novels through the theoretical perspectives of psychoanalysis.

Keywords: Indian Horse, Five Little Indians, Colonial Oppression

Introduction

The ongoing rehabilitation of Indigenous communities in Canada continues to be a colonial legacy that runs deep in the Canadian society. One of the most objectionable mechanisms of colonialism is the system of residential schools aimed at the cultural eradication of indigenous peoples by civilizing and converting their children to their own ways. Their system not only caused direct physical and mental abuse to the children but resulted in a psychological oppression, termed as historical trauma, which has been internalized in these communities. In these novels, Richard Wagamese's Indian Horse and Michelle Good's Five Little Indians, the topic of children of the residential schools is exposed along with the modern consequences of such colonial ideology. Indian Horse and Five Little Indians are important cases of the representation of the experiences of indigenous people who were deprived of their homes and culture. The true picture of native experiences reaches its climax in Richard Wagamese's Indian Horse. The novel tracks the tough life of a boy, Saul, sent to a boarding school away from his family where he is neglected and abused. Saul avoids his trauma through his love of hockey even though he wrestles with the effects of his wounded childhood at the end.

On the other hand, Good's Five Little Indians portrays the journeys of five Indigenous people who have survived a residential school and are seeking to reconstruct their lives despite the trauma. Additionally, through CDA, the research investigates the ways in which both of these novels conceal colonial oppression and shape Indigenous identities. It reveals the relationships between language and power, texts and ideologies, dominance and counter-dominance, control and survival, etc. Regarding the discourse of colonialism within these novels, this study aims at realizing the possibilities of the narrative, the growth of characters, and the aspects to the colonial worldview and its effects.

Literature Review

The history of Colonization tells many stories about people's history and literature serves as an avenue to tell indigenous people's experiences, histories, and struggle narratives. Critical Discourse Analysis is a method used to investigate situations where power relations, oppression and inequality in society are established, maintained and opposed in texts (Fairclough, 2001). When it comes to postcolonial literature criticism, CDA has shown how colonialism can be, and is, argued against and transformed within the condition of Indigenous culture itself. This literature review examines the use of CDA in the context of examining colonial violence with regards to Indigenous Canadians.

Sometimes, Indigenous literature involves Identity, Resistance, and Colonialism, which implies achievements and power. Writings do transform indigenous ways of being and spaces created in post-colonial histories are filled with indigenous voices (Ashcroft et al. 2007). They also feature Wagamese and Michelle Good are among these writers because such stories about indigenous peoples are not solely about destroying, and have a repercussion (King 2012).

The theme of residential schools that is portrayed in indigenous literature like those mentioned in *Indian Horse* and *Five Little Indians* is one of the most striking symbols of the colonial oppression. The main aim of these educational institutions was to transform Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian people who forgot their own languages, traditions, and families. Residential schools are mentioned in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada's (2015) report as one of the institutions that carried out cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples. In this regard, it is argued that those schools were trying to "kill the Indian in the child" (TRC, 2015). Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* in great detail describes the ugly side of the residential schools and the way they changed the identity of the native people beyond recognition

As Saul's journey unfolds, the narrative illustrates the systematic implementation of cultural erasure through language suppression and psychological trauma (Dion, 2009). Michelle Good likewise examines colonial institutions and the ongoing trauma of residential school survivors in *Five Little Indians*. Fairclough (2001) points out that discourse construes and is construed by power, social structures. In postcolonial studies, the practice of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enables the diagnosis of how colonial power relations are imbricated in language (Dion 2009).

Five Little Indians by Michelle Good explores the lingering effects of trauma on residential school survivors, revealing how colonization persists in affecting the lives of Indigenous peoples long after their doors have been locked (Good, 2020) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework of Norman Fairclough, focuses on the relationship between discourse and power relations in social structures (Fairclough, 2001). For example, in *Indian Horse*, Metaphor and symbolism are employed by Wagamese to depict the stripping of human qualities from Indigenous identities in colonial discourses (Wagamese, 2012). Finally, the hockey rink as a repeated motif in the narrative represents opportunity and constraint; acting as a metaphor for colonialism's duplicitous character wherein structures of inclusion work to condition indigenous people into pre-defined roles through selective acceptance (Coleman, 2006). *Five Little Indians* illustrates a depiction of residential school survivors, the ways in which they manage colonial trauma and how these characters make it through to healing (Good, 2020) Survivance, a term coined by Vizenor (1999) to emphasize Indigenous survival in the erasure of colonialism. Good empowers his subjects to resist colonial narratives of victimization, thereby gesturing beyond the confines of their pages toward an emergent collective self-definition.

In Wagamese's novel *Indian Horse*, which is a story about how the protagonist Saul deals with cultural instability and uncertainty through persistence but more so his memory,

tradition being an integral component of that record. One of these stories is a critique about how Indigenous peoples have been portrayed as victims by colonial storytelling structures, and instead this needed to be centered on acknowledging the agency and resilience of Indigenous characters. Language is crucial in developing an identity and power in postcolonial discussions. Colonial authority, as Spivak (1988) identifies it, enforces the domination of particular languages whilst at the same time preventing indigenous voices from being able to speak out. The forced learning and suppression of Indigenous languages in residential schools was a critical strategy perpetuated under the colonial agenda of assimilation.

Material and Methods

This study is qualitative in nature and employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore the language of power relations embedded in the texts, while considering how the narratives either mirror, replicate or contest traditional colonial ideas in the selected novels. CDA provides a broad field of interdisciplinary methods to understand how language and discourse reflect and frame different forms of power, ideology, and social practice. In this respect, CDA is used to analyze how *Indian Horse* and *Five Little Indians*⁶ portray the colonization experience and resistance to it. This study uses the complete texts of *Indian Horse* and *Five Little Indians* as central data. This research involves a close reading of these novels to identify central themes, discursive patterns and narrative strategies that allow the colonial oppression, cultural erasure, as well the Indigenous resistance. There are three stage of analysis:

Textual Analysis: This is the first phase in which a close reading of both the novels as it helps to find out some major themes which deals with colonial oppression. The narratives tend to focus on the arc of a story, character growth and symbolic imagery that demonstrates how residential schools and the colonial system have left a permanent impact on Indigenous identities. This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how the language of the novels illuminate and deconstruct colonial ideologies in the second phase. The study points out the hidden power relations that exist in the text. The study also examines the way that the novels respond to colonial narratives by proposing alternative viewpoints of the Indigenous worldviews. Phase three includes a comparative study of the two novels to bring attention to their likenesses and differences in the representation of colonial oppression.

Results and Discussion

The study explores how the selected novels address the themes of cultural resilience, trauma, and recovery, providing insights into the many methods in which Indigenous narratives can resist and counter colonial power structures. By means of Norman Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this research investigates the representation of colonial oppression in *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese and *Five Little Indians* by Michelle Good.: The topics include text analysis (description), discourse practice (interpretation), and sociocultural practice (explanation).

Textual Analysis (Description): Language as a Tool of Oppression and Resistance

At the textual level, both *Indian Horse* and *Five Little Indians* use language to illustrate the trauma and cultural dislocation caused by the residential school system. Fairclough's approach to textual analysis highlights how specific word choices, sentence structures, and narrative techniques reveal deeper power relations and ideologies. In *Indian Horse*, Richard Wagamese often uses language that highlights the erasure of Indigenous identity. For example, when the protagonist Saul reflects on his time in residential school about replacing his language and culture. The text emphasizes the colonial tactic of substituting Indigenous knowledge systems with fear and silence. It is an instance of

ideational meaning, where the chosen words (e.g., “took,” “replaced”) are intentionally selected to illustrate the violent appropriation of identity and culture by colonial powers. In *Five Little Indians*, the dialogues highlight the internalized oppression when the children were taught to hate themselves, to see themselves as unworthy of love, unworthy of belonging. The text of the novel illustrates how colonial discourse instills feelings of inferiority in Indigenous individuals. The language reinforces colonial ideologies that portray Indigenous people as inferior and unworthy. Fairclough’s concept of relational meaning is relatable here, as the relationships depicted through this discourse (e.g., children versus colonial educators) reflect a power dynamic where one group exercises dominance over another. The novels also exploit language as a form of resistance. In *Five Little Indians*, one character expresses about his language culture and identity that show that language serves as a means of empowerment and reclaiming identity.

Discourse Practice (Interpretation): Narrative Techniques and Intertextuality

The second level of Fairclough’s model investigates into the discourse practice, exploring how the messages of the novels are created, shared, and received in wider socio-cultural frameworks. This level involves scrutinizing narrative structures, intertextuality, and how the texts interact with prevailing discourses surrounding colonialism and Indigenous identity. *Indian Horse* features a first-person narrative, allowing readers to intimately experience Saul’s thoughts and feelings. The narrative is structured episodically, starting and concluding with Saul’s reflections on his identity. This structure is crucial as it reflects the continuous struggle for identity in colonial settings, where individuals must navigate their Indigenous heritage alongside the pressures to conform. Fairclough’s CDA shows how this format engages with the larger discourse of cultural resilience. The intertextual allusions to Indigenous spirituality, cultural traditions, and the sport of hockey act as forms of resistance against colonial narratives that attempt to shape Indigenous identities in Eurocentric frameworks.

In *Five Little Indians*, Michelle Good presents a polyphonic narrative that links the viewpoints of five different characters. This multi-voiced technique captures the variety of Indigenous experiences and counters the oversimplified portrayals of Indigenous trauma. The interaction among these voices forms a counter-narrative that pushes back against the prevailing colonial discourse. Fairclough’s idea of interdiscursivity is apparent here, as the novel incorporates various discourses, colonial oppression, resilience, trauma, and recovery, resulting in a rich narrative that challenges simplistic colonial classifications. Both novels engage in intertextuality, referencing actual historical events, policies, and the cultural ramifications of colonialism. For example, the residential schools depicted in both novels are shown not merely as isolated incidents but as components of a broader system of cultural genocide. By linking personal narratives to wider historical contexts, the authors underscore the systemic nature of colonial oppression.

Sociocultural Practice (Explanation): Colonial Ideology and Indigenous Resistance

This third aspect of Fairclough’s model involves an analysis of the other social practices in relation to the novels and how these are in turn impacted by those practices. This aspect focuses on how the stories replicate and subvert the belief system and power relations that form part of colonial systems that are relevant to current discussions on reconciliation and decolonisation. *Indian Horse* and *Five Little Indians* both are from a Canadian cultural concern that is becoming more focused on the wrongs through truth and reconciliation processes.

The novel *Indian Horse* works against racism in the Canadian society and at the same time gives hope for the native community. Saul’s transaction in hockey demonstrates how Indigenous ability is recognized as acceptable on condition that it conforms and conform to White, European standards but faced discrimination and racism on the basis of

skin color. It is at the climax where the concept of struggle in Fairclough as an interactional regime can be seen as describing a confrontation between colonial ideology and Indigenous attempts; at the ethnographical level, at regaining their cultural agency. On the other hand, *Five Little Indians* builds upon this critique further and looks into how colonial trauma impacts the characters and the multiple forms of resistance they use. Thus, activism, community building and reconnection with traditions as experiences make the characters skeptically defy colonialist notion that reduces them to victims.

Conclusion

Applying Fairclough's CDA model shows that both *Indian Horse* and *Five Little Indians* are not just personal stories of trauma but are stories that are deeply rooted in a larger socio-cultural dialogue that questions colonial authority. The research illustrates how the novels contribute to a wider critique of colonial ideologies by examining the textual elements, discourse practices, and socio-cultural contexts of these novels. It also illustrates how they (novels) help to resist the colonizers' purposes while, on the other hand, exhibiting the resilience and survival of indigenous cultures. These two novels both endorse Fairclough's concept of critical discourse by exploring the underlying power structures in language, and narrative in addition to presenting counter-narratives. By the focus on the cultural erasure, identity struggles, and recovery, these texts are significant in the ongoing discourse regarding reconciliation and decolonization in Canada.

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