

MATRIARCHAL SOVEREIGNTY AND INDIGENOUS MOTHERING IN WILSON'S THE SEED KEEPER: A DECOLONIAL FEMINIST READING

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Abstract

This study analyzes *The Seed Keeper* by Wilson (2021) through two mutually reinforcing theoretical frameworks of Indigenous mothering and decolonial feminism. The study investigates decolonial narrative of matriarchal sovereignty. The research predominantly focuses on Indigenous mothers' communal role as cultural custodians. The research also investigates Indigenous mothers' agency against colonial erasure through imposition exploitative Eurocentric and patriarchal systems. Despite receiving ecofeminist and limited Indigenous scholarly attention, examination of Indigenous mothers as cultural sovereigns remains underexplored. The study addresses this gap by exploring Wilson's portrayal of Native American mothers as guardians of ancestral legacy. This research employs qualitative method for in-depth evaluation of novel through close textual analysis, to highlight centrality of Indigenous mothers in reclaiming Indigenous epistemologies. The findings of research spotlight indispensability of Indigenous mothering as alternative future of Indigenous communities against ineffective dominant Western worldviews. Innovative insights of this research hold potential to expand Indigenous scholarship through examination of Indigenous literary works, orienting matriarchal Indigenous perspectives. Besides its intellectual, social, cultural and contemporary significance, implications of this research also extend to development of culturally responsive directives for Indigenous mothers. The outcomes of research also highlight critical need of independent pedagogical systems to preserve indigeneity of Indigenous posterity.

1.INTRODUCTION

Indigenous literature proves to be facilitative forum of transformation and reclamation for Indigenous people. Indigenous scholars and novelists, majorly women contribute as driving forces to gain epistemic sovereignty for Indigenous scholarship. Inclusion of Indigenous mothers; embodiments of matriarchal sovereignty, in academic paradigm revolutionizes Indigenous discourse. Their integration empowers them to evolve as driving forces and agents of change who decolonize the Western patriarchal and dogmatic ideologies that marginalize Indigenous epistemologies and narratives. The present study strives to examine contemporary decolonial Indigenous literature that navigates the innovative ideology of Indigenous mothering as an alternative future against Eurocentric dominant worldviews. Kefi (2023) emphasizes Indigenous mothering as a spiritual and motivational site for all mothers to learn, to decolonize and to

reflect upon their ways of raising next generation. Sandowal (2024) defines Indigenous mothering as a sanctified obligation to nourish Indigenous generations by sustaining and rejuvenating ancestral knowledge systems against white settler colonialism. Within Indigenous ideologies, motherhood is not confined to traditional and biological aspects and extends beyond the discussion of giving birth, since it focuses on interconnected and collective practices of guiding succeeding generations. Balsdon (2024) posits resurgence of Indigenous mothering as declaration of victory against settler systems by reviving Indigenous identity, cultures, languages and expansion of Indigenous populations. Minthorn et al. (2025) highlights the urgency of acquiring higher education, doctoral research, collaborative and progressive Indigenous scholarship produced by Native women to challenge dominant narratives by presenting their Indigenous narratives.

Diane Wilson, along with being an environmental and pro-peace activist, is an acclaimed author whose Indigenous literary works cultivate dynamic seeds of Indigenous resurgence. *The Seed Keeper* is her latest novel that brought her significant recognition around the world. Zahra (2026) examines the novel as an excellent depiction of resistant struggles of Indigenous people, especially women across generations to protect their indigeneity. The novel represents journey of Indigenous women from being colonized to their decolonial reclamation of native epistemologies, narratives and experiences. The story revolves around multiple characters spanning different time periods, which showcases diversity of Indigenous people and their colonial experience. The novel embodies protagonist, Rosalie as a navigator of Indigenous life, stretching across her experiences of living with her father on their inherited land to being alienated in foster care, facing complications of intermarriage to her return to her Indigenous land to revive her relationship with her spiritual ancestry. Wilson (2021) incorporates centuries long spiritual lineage of Indigenous Dakota people and connection between Indigenous marginalized descendants and their colonized ancestors. The novel reflects colonial experiences of land dispossession, economic crisis, assimilationist exploitation of Indigenous children through forced separation from families and roots to experience evangelical alienation at boarding schools and ongoing isolation and disconnection in foster care. The novel through Gaby's character portrays itself as a piece of literature that is not only limited to its literary dynamics but extends beyond literary parameters, acting as courageous activism and judicial struggle against Eurocentric economic exploitation of Indigenous people and lands. The study scrutinizes *The Seed Keeper* as a brilliant manifestation of revolutionary and empowered roles of Indigenous mothers and their decolonial agency in reclaiming Indigenous epistemologies and matriarchal sovereignty. The novel also demonstrates colonial attack on pre-colonial egalitarian structures of Indigenous nations, which signifies novel as an apt literary piece to examine decolonial feminist practices against patriarchal gender systems (Zahra, 2026).

The research examines innovative ideology of motherhood proposed by Kim Anderson that opposes and criticizes dominant Western patriarchal ideology of motherhood for marginalizing idiosyncratic mothering experiences of Native American women and their distinct challenges of motherhood. Anderson's Indigenous ideology of motherhood, Lugones's decolonial feminist perspective and Wilson's portrayal of matriarchal sovereignty of Indigenous mothers, grandmothers and other female characters foster accurate synchronization between theoretical perspectives and literary illustrations. Anderson (2016) and Wilson (2021) navigate how roles of mothers are confined to domestic sphere within Western systems which operate upon nuclear family systems. Western mothers do not have autonomy over the matters regarding their children. Mothers are obligated to possess biological relationship with children to gain motherhood status. Indigenous systems, rooted in complementary, egalitarian pre-colonial structures, land-based ecological interrelationships and kinship systems redefine motherhood by acknowledging the crucial role of extended family members, especially grandmothers and elders in childrearing practices.

1.1 Background of the Study

20th century was plagued by racism while epistemicides, linguicides and resistance struggles of Indigenous nations to regain their epistemologies tormented 21st century (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Colonial hegemony of Western epistemology is considered root of all global crises (Naicker, 2024). Since the onset of modern era and European invasion of the Americas, colonialism advanced entrenchment of Western epistemologies as culminated worldview and cosmology, restricting knowledge solely to its scientific forms. Half a millennium later, with the enrolment of Indigenous individuals in universities and developing sense of self-worth, the resistant decolonial discourse emerged in 1980s in indigenous languages of nations that faced epistemic injustice for long decades (Arias, 2018). This epistemic swerve of writing back commenced reclamation of alternative worldviews of Indigenous communities, their systems, cultures and epistemologies which were earlier marginalized being labelled as ignorant and irrational. While political decolonization was achieved in mid and late 20th century, the early 21st century is categorized as an era which marked epistemic shift towards decoloniality of knowledge discourse and reclamation of Indigenous nations' identities and cultures (Ndlovu, 2025).

Contemporary global challenges unveiled limited efficacy of Western patriarchal systems as hegemonic worldviews and knowledge paradigm which were upholding global dominance through ongoing Eurocentric ideologies. Decolonial introspection accelerated exploration of diverse epistemologies in global South, enabling the de-legitimization of Eurocentric intellectual dominance. Legrás (2016) critiques even North American decolonial theorists of detached writing and misattribution due to their colonial influences. Addressing marginalized voices and diverse epistemologies and varied colonial experiences of Indigenous communities is acknowledged as one of emerging scholarly dimensions in field of decolonial literature. To redress theoretical gap, Legrás highlighted the critical significance of decolonial literary epistemology and experiential writings produced by Indigenous scholars and activists over abstract decolonial theoretical frameworks developed by North American intellectuals. Decolonial literature is regarded to be more powerful medium for its potential to incorporate diverse perspectives and various Indigenous characters which represented truthful depiction of lived Indigenous realities, embodied experiences and practices of Indigenous communities. In spite of all the published indigenous literary works and theoretical efforts, Indigenous scholarship was deliberately denied academic recognition and inclusion in dominant discourse.

Despite all resurgent efforts of Indigenous writers and activists to reclaim their cultures and identities, the colonial control of knowledge suppressed them. Even Indigenous scholarship also endured the dilemma of being camouflaged, erased and even blatantly misrepresented by Western academic authorities who controlled lettered city (Lee et al., 2023; Maddox & Ninomiya, 2025). Various Indigenous scholars pursued a significant intervention by focusing on decolonizing the epistemological approaches, analytical approaches and investigative research methods which they believed even decolonial academic studies failed to incorporate (Dei & Lloyd-Henry, 2025; Legault et al., 2026; Becerra, 2026). This radical step directed Indigenous scholars to feature Indigenous experiences and investigate such perspectives through indigenous research frameworks. Indigenous scholars employed the literary technique of reinscribing the narrative through published theoretical and literary works that centered upon indigenous epistemologies and their violent colonial experiences. They unravelled how European settlers, being aware of the complexities and strength of indigenous communities and their entrenched cultures transmitted through ancient legacies, dismantled and banned Indigenous epistemologies, in order to achieve all colonial objectives. Indigenous peoples were restricted from academic spheres and their epistemologies were obscured and labelled as inferior through colonization (Ninomiya et al., 2023).

The contemporary research arena explores and addresses such undocumented and unaddressed Indigenous groups which were rendered invisible in academic paradigm (Ward et al., 2021; Maddox et

al., 2022). Out of all indigenous marginalized groups, Indigenous women, particularly mothers were the most oppressed group. Despite all decolonial resurgence, Indigenous women were deliberately excluded from feminist discourses. The reality of adverse impact of intersections of race, class, gender and historical background of colonial oppression of Indigenous women were ignored. Lugones (2010) initiated this decolonial feminist debate, that women of color belonging to global South were not given deserved scholarly attention. The Eurocentric myth of modernity and patriarchal systems of gender, grounded in capitalist and racist prejudices, prevailed since the onset of 21st century. The modern systems were intentionally imposed to exclude Indigenous women from feminist discussions.

Moreton-Robinson (2021) boldly critiques mainstream white feminism for wilfully rendering Indigenous women and their colonial experiences invisible. She exposes capitalist white feminism as a myth of representing entire womanhood and their struggles for freedom and equal rights. Mainstream feminists position themselves as global standard, which indirectly directs towards trivialization of Indigenous women and their distinct colonial narratives. Instead of imparting equal space to Indigenous women and considering their colonial and other intersectional realities, white feminists, owing to their racial and class bias, endeavour to undervalue Indigenous women and treat Indigenous epistemologies as secondary. White women overlook Indigenous women because they enjoy all the white privileges, even they savour entitlements due to colonial dispossession of Indigenous lands. Moreton-Robinson demands separate intellectual space for Indigenous women and their experiences of colonial subjugation, in order to heal their colonial traumas and to represent their unfiltered Indigenous narratives and reclaim their native knowledge systems.

Decolonial feminist discourse enlightened that Indigenous women were also primary targets of colonial violence, since most precolonial Indigenous nations were matriarchal. They venerated women for their significant roles and practices of transmitting Indigenous epistemologies across generations. Grandmothers, aunts, sisters, elders and extended family all played complementary roles in assisting childrearing, for they considered children as sacred entities who have descended from spiritual world and were considered the future of whole nation. Colonizers being aware of the significance of Indigenous women and their foundational roles in persistence of Indigenous nations, identities and cultures, they coercively targeted Indigenous women, mothers and children. The primary colonial act that Europeans performed to dismantle entire Indigenous systems was the forced child separation from their families, mainly, mothers. Indigenous children were forcefully admitted to residential schools where they were treated inhumanely. Indigenous languages were entirely banned to administer epistemic erasure. The term “matriarchy” was deliberately misconceived as a society ruled by women to foster biased proportions about it. Sulistyaningrum et al. (2023) opines that the term matriarchy was misinterpreted due to its etymological ambiguity. The suffix arche in term matriarchy carries two varied meanings in Greek, control and starting. The patriarchal theorists propagated dominance as its meaning while contemporary matriarchal theorists stressed that matriarchy meant “mothers from the beginning” with reference to the fact that mothers are the creators of nations due to their innate divine ability of giving birth and nurturing children.

The second dilemma that bore negative consequences to Indigenous cultural identity was land dispossession. Indigenous peoples whose entire lives were grounded in land-based ideologies, resources and kinship systems were coercively removed from their native lands and placed at small reservations which weakened them economically. Their land-based Indigenous systems of agriculture and reciprocal relationships between native people and nature were destroyed through settler industrial development. Encroachment of foreign industrial employees in Indigenous territories worsened racial discrimination, gendered exploitation and unemployment. Various assimilation policies and racist acts were feloniously implemented with the aim of eliminating all Indigenous systems. Along with all colonial enactments and mandates, the Eurocentric ideology of modernity and patriarchal gender systems were the most fallacious

and colonial-centered measures to demolish Indigenous social and cultural structures. Hogan and Liddell (2023) address that the imposition of patriarchal system of power majorly affected Indigenous women since many indigenous societies in precolonial times operated upon principles of matriarchal sovereignty based on flexible gender relations of Indigenous societies which were formerly egalitarian and complementary. Colonial policies of assimilation and evangelization strategies particularly aimed disruption of traditional family systems and gender roles for Indigenous women by devaluing prominence of Indigenous women in Indigenous religious ideologies and rituals. Boarding schools, foster care and prejudiced interpretation of Indigenous women diminished agency and maladaptive behavior also triggered violence against Indigenous women and children.

Hogan and Liddell (2023) recognize revival of Indigenous mothering as means of resilience and healing against perpetual colonial harms and patriarchal norms because indigenous mothers were innately devoted to keep historical memory alive for next generations. Indigenous scholars argue that Indigenous sovereignty can only be regained through reviving matriarchal structures. Anderson's foundational theoretical texts play significant role in rejuvenation of matriarchal sovereignty. She advocates that Indigenous mothers through their resilient and resistant practices have always been the agents of cultural transmission. She also claims that rekindling powerful matriarchal practices and by including Indigenous ideologies of motherhood within research praxis could lead to reclamation of indigenous epistemologies. This substantiates the rationale of present research which aims to explore the decolonial struggle of Indigenous mothers to reclaim their Indigenous identity and epistemologies to protect their future.

1.2 Research Gap

The research affirms Indigenous mothering as a decolonial intellectual space that engages with Indigenous epistemologies and investigates activist agency of Indigenous mothers, analyzing Indigenous mothering as site of resistance and empowerment against colonial dominance, Eurocentric assimilation practices and epistemic erasure. Despite its critical importance, the peculiar experiences of Indigenous mothers received less scholarly engagement. This study responds to the gap by applying two complementary theoretical frameworks; Anderson's ideology of Indigenous mothering and Lugones's theory of decolonial feminism on Wilson's *The Seed Keeper*. By investigating indispensable role of Indigenous mothers in dismantling colonial marginalization and Eurocentric dominance, the study represents Indigenous motherhood as an empowering locus of resistance, reclamation and recovery.

1.3 Research Objectives

The present study intends to accomplish the following objectives:

- To analyze the role of Indigenous mothers as cultural custodians in
- To examine role of maternal figures against persisting Eurocentric mechanisms of exploitation

1.4 Research Questions

This research investigates the following research questions:

1. How does *The Seed Keeper* portray maternal figures as guardians of Indigenous culture?
2. In what ways does the novel represent maternal resistance against Eurocentric structures?

1.5 Research Significance

The primary significance of this research stemmed from its substantial contribution to decolonizing dominant literary scholarship by foregrounding Indigenous group; Indigenous mothers and Indigenous epistemologies. The study offered historical significance, since it centered unmediated and authentic colonial history of Indigenous communities, which lacked scholarly scrutiny in contemporary literature. The study also advocated the incorporation of decolonizing academic methodologies by integrating

Indigenous, relational and embodied sovereignty in research. The study possessed social significance since it amplified Indigenous women's voices. It also carried cultural significance since the study represented Indigenous women as agents of cultural continuity who resisted colonial erasure and assimilationist exploitation and reaffirmed their indispensable and futuristic contribution in sustaining Indigenous cultures and ancestral knowledge across generations. The research expanded decolonial feminist discourse by directing its dimension towards inclusion of idiosyncrasies of mothering and its separate intellectual space in academic paradigm. This study explored marginalized ideology of Indigenous mothering and matriarchal sovereignty which had been previously excluded from mainstream feminist and motherhood discourses. The study posited contemporary significance as it engaged with lived experiences and real-life challenges like reclamation of Indigenous rights and epistemologies, regaining matriarchal sovereignty which are pivotal to current global debates regarding sustainability, globalization and validation of alternative worldviews other than dominating ones. This research offers theoretical and literary significance because it presents innovative examination of *The Seed Keeper* through two complementary theoretical frameworks; Indigenous mothering and decolonial feminism.

2.Literature Review

The research investigates limited scholarly attention towards Wilson's novel, *The Seed Keeper* (2021) along with scholarly inspection of intellectual discourse addressing colonial violence against Indigenous mothers through Eurocentric structures, mainly boarding schools and foster care system develops an enriching debate which renders a great argument as well as fosters transparency of research.

Mullet (2023) provides extensive explanation of storyline and themes of *The Seed Keeper*. Mullet claims that novel challenges dominant colonial discourse by representing resistance of Dakhóta women, mainly, Rosalie against colonial adversities that distorted entanglements of Dakhóta life and land. Almaarroof (2024) scrutinizes ecofeminist themes by highlighting that Wilson addresses significance of Indigenous women in traditional ecological practice of seed keeping, biodiversity preservation and environmental agency along. Analogously, Hamdi and Hassoon (2024) also examine novel through ecofeminist theoretical perspectives, centering on paramount connection between marginalization of Indigenous women and exploitation of natural world. Offering innovative interpretation, Al Walid (2025) investigates ecological and capitalocene crisis of anthropogenic era in the text. Divergently, Suarez (2024) interprets it as a novel that represents a pluralistic narrative of historiographic metafiction that portrays colonial violence across generations of Indigenous Dakhóta community. The novel has yet attained limited critical engagement which generates the research gap of the study. While novel has been analyzed through ecofeminist, ecological and historical context, the examination of novel as an apt decolonial text which fosters Indigenous mothering as an alternative system to resist unjust depiction of Indigenous peoples, their systems and narratives remains unexplored. The research explores this gap and scrutinizes text deeply by analyzing it through two integral frameworks; decolonial feminism and Indigenous mothering.

The study also analyzes scholarly discussions regarding rationale behind Indigenous mothers and women being primary sites of colonial violence and assimilation. Richards et al. (2023) document that Native American women endured the highest rate of sexual violence due to colonization than women of any other ethnic and racial group. Demkiw (2023) unravels driving factor behind oppression and genocide of Indigenous mothers. They were selectively persecuted since they were considered origin of existence of Indigenous life. Indigenous mothers were not solely regarded as generative force but also as agents of Indigenous sovereignty who were entrusted with generational transmission of Indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous mother work is conspicuously recognized as a substantial threat to imperialist ideology, especially heteropatriarchy (Dowling, 2019). Miller (2020) examines how Indigenous women,

who were venerated as pre-colonial leaders and autonomous decision-makers of matrilineal societies endured systemic violence due to colonial oppression.

The major element that played significant role in destroying Indigenous systems entirely were the colonial strategies employed through assimilation apparatuses; boarding schools and foster care systems. Surface-Evans and Luna (2025) interpreted the rationale of the integral relationship between Indigenous mothering and the chief reason behind the colonial agenda of boarding schools. Exploring this interrelation unravelled that settlers were fully aware that Indigenous mothering was the primary governing structure and foundational framework guiding Indigenous community functioning within Native Americans. Separating children from families, especially mothers not merely aimed at physical separation or residential difference but breakdown of the entire Indigenous kinship systems. It did not solely mean separation of children but detachment of generations from their ethnic roots and identity. Richards et al. also (2023) highlight realities of colonization and historical trauma caused by sexual assault and boarding schools in Native Americans. Forced separation of children from their families and coercive admissions of Indigenous children in boarding schools were the driving factors of intergenerational trauma and amplified it two-fold by causing loss of identity and loss of familial connection as well. Boarding schools not just imposed assimilationist policies upon Indigenous children but also intended to indirectly dictate Indigenous elderly people through their superficially educated grandchildren. Settlers planned to control elderly people because they were aware of the significant role of elders in preserving and transmitting Indigenous knowledge across generations.

Dawson (2024) highlights that colonization distorted Indigenous ideologies, especially Indigenous mothering which was perceived as essence of Indigenous life. Dawson proposes that Indigenous ways of being could be reclaimed through decolonizing practices that reconnect Indigenous lives and principles. Dawson implicates reclamation of Indigenous mothering as practically attainable since colonization distorted Indigenous practices and values but they persisted despite damage due to gruelling efforts of Indigenous mothers to preserve Indigenous knowledge systems for their future generations.

The research through its innovative complementary framework brings two distinct theoretical lenses; Indigenous mothering and decolonial feminism into dialogue, navigating decolonial feminist discourse as groundwork for peculiar Indigenous narratives. Paramaditha (2022) envisions decolonial feminism as an evolving process which should not be construed as definitive resolution, owing to idea of learning from other resisters. Colonial discourse could be expanded through inclusion of eastern women and by navigating their ways of challenging dominant narratives and European epistemic authority. Also, through further exploration of more under-investigated feminist groups of resisters and examining their modes of resistance would progressively expand decolonial feminism. Investigating the accuracy of decolonial framework, Udenigwe et al. (2026) examine that voluntary organizational initiatives, pretending to work for welfare of girls and women of Global South through gender equality programs, were confronted for being deeply entrenched in European mechanisms of oppression; racism, capitalism and patriarchy. The analysis of documents of 17 advocacy projects unravelled that such programs operated upon Western bias, only validating European knowledge, labelling violence as cultural aspect while ignoring local realities, differences and sense of human rights. Udenigwe et al. also suggested implementation of decolonial feminist approach to make such development interventions. Application of decolonial feminism could make welfare programs for Indigenous communities more effective by dismantling Eurocentric bias, incorporating Indigenous voices, interrogating hidden power structures and centering on transforming change rather than temporary solutions. Nassiri-Ansari et al. (2025) scrutinize contemporary importance of decolonial feminism in unravelling and resisting Eurocentric colonial structures through comprehensive explanation of the difference between process of colonization and systems of coloniality.

While confirming marginalized status of Indigenous mothers, their distinct yet unaddressed decolonial narratives and significant resistant roles in regaining indigeneity across generations, these studies validate research gaps of study that despite gaining theoretical attention, Indigenous mothering and decolonial feminism as complementary framework has not attained scholarly attention. The research also offers unique matriarchal interpretation of *The Seed Keeper* as an apt decolonial text which fosters Indigenous mothering as an alternative system to resist Eurocentric colonial structures and unjust depiction of Indigenous peoples, their systems and narratives.

3. Methodology

The paper is derived from MPhil thesis of this article's first author focusing on two initial objectives and questions of the thesis. The research employs an innovative qualitative fusion of interpretative and analytical approaches for exclusive exploration of *The Seed Keeper*. The study implements two reciprocally enhancing theoretical frameworks; Indigenous mothering and decolonial feminism to investigate Wilson's portrayal of Indigenous mothers in the novel. The research implements close textual analysis aligned with research question to investigate two main female characters, identifying relevant themes, language, meaning, quotes and recurring instances of representation of autonomy of Indigenous mothers by focusing on tracing instances of Indigenous mothers' agency and resistance towards cultural erasure and patriarchal colonial ideologies within the text. The study exclusively relies on purely academic materials, mainly, the novel *The Seed Keeper* and two theoretical lenses; Indigenous mothering and decolonial feminism along with all relevant previously existing scholarship. While recognizing prolific presence of expanded thematic concerns of Indigenous ecological sustainability and ecofeminist aspects in novel, the study restricts its scope to analysis framed by unique fusion of Anderson's ideology of Indigenous mothering and Lugones' radical framework of decolonial feminism, particularly her concept of coloniality of gender. Together, these perspectives affirm Indigenous mothering as a decolonial futuristic ideology of Indigenous communities. This focused scope ensures depth and clarity in scrutinizing the novel through selected theoretical framework.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study employs Indigenous mothering as its major theoretical lens to analyze *The Seed Keeper* while drawing on decolonial feminism as a broader foundational framework that substantiated conceptual space for Indigenous-centered investigation. The study applies Lugones's theoretical perspective of decolonial feminism, mainly her concept of coloniality of gender and Anderson's ideology of Indigenous mothering to analyze the text.

Lugones developed decolonial feminist thought through revolutionary essay *The Coloniality of Gender*, in which she explicitly and systematically explains how European colonizers dismantled Indigenous systems and distorted social relations by imposing hierarchical gender systems. Lugones investigates decolonial thought in feminist dimensions upon tracing resistant attitude of colonized men towards greater racial discrimination and bias experienced by women of color. Lugones argues that even colonized men despite experiencing racism, fail to acknowledge oppression faced by Indigenous women, which diminish their sense of community and egalitarian structures while seeking liberation (Lugones, 2008).

Lugones employs Oyěwùmí's examination of ancient pre-colonial Yoruba culture to unravel that gender is historical, European and colonial creation, since Oyěwùmí (1997) did not find any traces of gendered divisions, even on biological basis within pre-colonial Indigenous societies. Western academic stereotypical representations divide Indigenous people into gendered binaries to gain colonial dominance (Lugones, 2008). Colonialism and interaction of Indian men with European men entirely ravaged diverse Indigenous systems to gain global dominance. Lugones also confronts 20th century feminisms for having prejudiced and racial bias against black and women of color. White feminism being bourgeois movement

only addresses issues of delicate and passive white women. On the basis of racial and sexual stereotypes, different physical strength and abilities, non-white women were exploited through coercive colonial labor and sexual abuse.

Lugones expands decolonial theory by examining ongoing coloniality/modernity discourse within Global South colonial, racial and gendered feminist background. Lugones addresses marginalized silenced voices and challenging experiences of all women of color (Schiwy, 2007; Lugones, 2010; Bhabra, 2014). Lugones's ground-breaking initiative demands space for decolonial and unfiltered narratives of Indigenous women who endure prejudiced colonial behaviours due to their race, gender and class and are treated as others in mainstream culture, academics and media. Lugones's laudable efforts validate Indigenous knowledge production by Indigenous women by explicating that European colonizers misrepresent Indigenous peoples especially women as others to maintain their epistemological supremacy and colonial power (Said, 1978; Prasad, 2003;). Decolonial feminism allocated knowledge pluralism, by according equal value to diverse epistemic frameworks. Lugones (2007, 2010) advocated that thinking has always been socially and historically embedded, thus enabling pluriversality of diverse epistemic systems (Manning, 2021).

This research majorly focuses on theoretical framework of Indigenous mothering proposed by Kim Anderson. Anderson perceived storytelling, Indigenous and ancestral teachings as acts of resistance and reclaiming sovereignty that ensured sustainability of Indigenous lifeways. Indigenous frameworks, did not solely regard mothers as passive nurturers. Instead, they were recognized as active agents of cultural transmission who safeguarded Indigenous languages, traditions and identity.

Anderson defines Indigenous mothering as a peculiar type of mothering which diverges from dominant patriarchal notions of Western motherhood. Anderson claims Indigenous mothering possesses great cultural pertinence and it is interpreted as a communal and reciprocal obligation. Anderson (2007) argues that Indigenous motherhood system being grounded within Indigenous epistemologies, is fundamentally divergent from patriarchal models of Western motherhood. Anderson (2016) elucidates that reviving Native maternal practices implies challenging, reconstructing and criticizing Western interpretations of motherhood. In Western context, identity and role of mother equated the role of a domestic servant with submissive dependency, without any autonomy. In Indigenous epistemologies, mothers are esteemed as creators having divinely potential of creating life. Mothers are accorded great respect, since they were culturally acknowledged as revered beings who were entrusted with consecrated social obligations that embraced establishment of nations and perpetual preservation of futures. Instead of being perceived as symbol of women's individual obliteration, motherhood, within Indigenous systems is regarded as an affirmation of leadership and women's autonomy.

Indigenous mothering even encompasses such women who opted not to produce biological children. The roles of Indigenous grandmothers, sisters, aunts and elderly women are accorded maternal status because they performed equal roles in preaching, preserving, nurturing and healing all native children, not just their own biological ones. Anderson also emphasizes that along with native doctrines of motherhood, Indigenous philosophies of gender were also contrary to the Western ones. Indigenous ideals of gender roles are rooted in flexible and complementary practices, since native men, women and mothers, fathers worked together to serve their nations, in order to reclaim and preserve traditional and spiritual stability of the universe. Anderson claims that Indigenous mothers break cycle of racist oppression and prejudiced behaviours of colonizers by deconstructing Eurocentric ideologies and raising their children in a way that they take pride in their Native culture and identity by discarding coercive teachings of boarding schools and foster homes (Lavell-Harvard and Anderson, 2014). This perspective facilitated the in-depth investigation of Dakota women's diverse practices in *The Seed Keeper* as manifestation of cultural, epistemological and matriarchal sovereignty.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section employs two theoretical concepts to investigate *The Seed Keeper* focusing on deliberately structured research questions. The first section analyzes how female characters from pre-colonial times to contemporary era continue to play their role of being cultural custodians by transmitting ancestral knowledge to their successive generations. The second section investigates how Indigenous mothers challenged and resisted Eurocentric colonial aims operated through various assimilation machineries; boarding schools, foster care systems, intermarriage and gender discrimination. The research examines how the novel represents struggles of Indigenous mothers within domestic and social spheres against Eurocentric norms. It highlights maternal activism of Indigenous mothers against Western colonial and patriarchal structures within professional praxis.

4.1 Matriarchal Sovereignty – Mañpiyamaza, Marie, Darlene and Rosalie; The Seed Keepers

One of the major objectives of this research is to examine how Indigenous mothers were venerated as cultural sovereigns, nurturers and guardians in Indigenous communities. Anderson (2000) proposes a nuanced and comprehensive explanation of what it really meant to be an Indigenous mother and why pre-colonial Indigenous societies acknowledged matriarchal sovereignty. Along with Lugones's (2007) critical discussions of gendered coloniality, the research examines Wilson's (2021) representation of Indigenous mothering while illustrating its foundational role in reclamation of Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous narratives and scholarship. Lugones's (2007) decolonial thoughts validate Anderson's claim that Indigenous communities follow egalitarian structures of existence, that culturally admit the male-female equitable relationship as the center of wellbeing of their lives, as Anderson states, "We sit together in a web of life, not in hierarchal structure that places one gender in a position of superiority and dominance (Anderson, 2016). Anderson explains the ideology of Indigenous mothering as an inclusive system, which involves all human and non-human relationships. It is not an ideology that solely focuses on women or mothers while minimizing the significance of native men, instead it recognizes both, men and women as equal halves of a wheel. It only accords more respect to the Indigenous mothers only due to their sacred responsibilities and potentialities of giving birth to new life and nurturing it. Indigenous mothers not only are just life givers they are cultural sovereigns as well, who guard the future of Indigenous generations.

Anderson (2016) elucidates Indigenous mothering as an ideology that is rooted within intergenerational, relational and reciprocal kinship systems. In Indigenous epistemologies, mothering is not a practice that is solely regarded to biological women, instead it is a holistic practice which encompasses all not only all Indigenous women; sisters, aunties, elderly women and mainly grandmothers, but also all native men and extended families. The assertion of authority of Indigenous mothers as matriarchal sovereigns also rests upon their innate abilities of not only producing children but extending their nurturing and healing care and responsibilities equally towards other men, women, children, husbands, fathers and their all relationships. Anderson (2016) draws contrast with Western motherhood that is dependent and restricted. Wilson's maternal characters, mainly Mañpiyamaza, Rosalie's great great great grandmother and Marie Blackbird's mother, is an apt embodied manifestation of Anderson's ideology of mothering as well as Lugones's decolonial beliefs. Wilson (2021) shifted back narrative to 1862 war time period to represent how Indigenous mothers struggled to preserve their indigeneity for future generations. At the time, when Native men were in the battlefield against settlers, Indigenous mothers took charge and looked after their lands, children and communities. Marie's mother when left alone with her two kids; Marie and Chaské while her husband went to fight against settlers, she alone is depicted as driving force, sole anchor of the entire family. Marie's mother, their only shelter and guardian during horrible times of war fear of being caught and displaced, along with nurturing her children, worked outside in the fields to gather food resources.

Wilson (2021) represents practices of an Indigenous mother through Marie's mother. Indigenous mothers not only nurture or care their children but also heal them through their protective practices of eliminating all fears within the hearts of their children and around them. Spirituality being seminal element of Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous mothers are also involved in spiritual ceremonies and performed several spiritual rituals, especially for the protection of their children. Like Marie's mother used to perform a spiritual ritual of wiping Marie's arms with cedar branches, tucking *čhaŋšáša* in her pockets for as spiritual protective measure. Marie's mother proclaims to the spirits, "Your memory will live on" (Wilson, 2021, p. 120). This implies her as a cultural custodian who promise her ancestors that their Indigenous culture, their memories, their practices will sustain through their descendants, especially mothers of their nation. She also used to pray quietly, talk to her ancestors and departed family members, teaching her daughter about how the mortal life is not the end for Indigenous people, but it leads to other phase of life, spiritual life which is eternal. She inculcates the belief of spiritual immortality in next generation by teaching her daughter through its practice. Anderson (2016) examines that Indigenous mothers are venerated and accorded matriarchal sovereignty for they carry the heaviest responsibilities from birthing new lives, nurturing them, protecting them to transmitting their Indigenous culture and practices into their children, for they are not ordinary children but future of their nation, ancestors and preservers of their indigeneity. Wilson (2021) illustrates that weight of Indigenous duties upon Indigenous mothers through a very heartfelt scene and image of Marie's mother who returns from woods, Marie describes her as, "carrying a heavy bundle of branches in her arms, bent over from the weight of the carrying sack on her back" (Wilson, 2021, p. 125). This image is the strongest testament of Anderson's ideology of Indigenous mothering that their authority, their matriarchal sovereignty is derived through their innate relational, kinship, ancestral, spiritual and mothering obligations. Wilson (2021) portrays this through Marie's mother's practice of instilling her Indigenous teachings within Marie, like she also despite being a young girl was like a mother to her little brother whom she looked after in her mother's absence, when she wants to woods and how she protects by standing in front of a stranger, an Indian soldier who enters her place to get water in her mother's absence. Marie mentions how their land-based lives, rooted in kinship systems and relationships with extended family were destroyed after settler invasion and war. Anderson (2016) rightfully venerates Indigenous mothers with the title of "life givers" not only for their children but for entire Indigenous nation. These scenes also portray Marie's mother's resilience and survivance, the accolades that a true Indigenous mother possessed being matriarchal and cultural sovereign.

Wilson (2021) highlights how war and settler invasion not only destroyed native lands but it reshaped entire Indigenous systems and epistemologies. As Marie mentions, when she hesitates to give water to the strange soldier, that war instilled fear of strangers within Indigenous people, the same ones who followed kinship systems, who used to offer food and water to every visitor; either the one staggered through blood or thirsty, stinking of smell or in any other dreadful condition. Marie also explains their egalitarian family systems, where her mother used to do gardening to cultivate lands while her father would hunt, both collectively nurtured the land as well their children through organic food, which hold highest significance in Indigenous epistemologies, since food did not mean just ordinary edibles to savour but something which holds Indigenous spirit for it is produced from their ancestral lands, food is a sacred entity for Indigenous people upon which they entire systems depends. Being cultural custodians, war, settler invasion and their Eurocentric assimilation policies and acts, increased the anxieties of Indigenous mothers. Wilson (2021) illustrates it through Marie's mother's worries about their land, food and future and being an Indigenous mother, being "a seed keeper", she took Marie to their land and dug up the seeds they had preserved beneath land. This Indigenous practice of seed keeping by Indigenous women again supports Anderson's claim of Indigenous mothers being life givers and Wilson's claim of Indigenous

mothers being the seed keepers, cultural custodians and future preservers, affirming the rationale of their matriarchal sovereignty in Indigenous communities.

Marie's mother guides her that must carry these seeds in case of displacement, so that we can have organic food in winter, cultivate seeds in spring and leave some of seeds hidden beneath land for their return. This implies the calculated resilience and futuristic brilliance of Indigenous mothers. Marie's mother, in order to teach her the practice of seed keeping and transmitting ecological knowledge, instructs Marie to cover the pitfall like she did last year using her grandmother's tools. This illustrates the intergenerational role of Indigenous mothers and grandmothers in preserving indigeneity for their future generations. Marie's mother also tucks seeds inside Marie's skirt's pockets as a futuristic practice to preserve their Indigenous seeds, ancestral culture, knowledge and indigeneity, in order to hide the valuables, their previous assets from settlers. This also portrays their decolonial efforts of reclaiming Indigenous epistemologies by preserving their Indigenous seeds. Wilson (2021) again aesthetically presents emotional yet culturally sensitive visual of an Indigenous mother through the image of Marie's mother, who balances herself while carrying her son on her back in cradle board along with hanged food around her neck. This aesthetical and emotional depiction of an Indigenous mother portrays the balance an Indigenous mother exhibited through her relational duties towards her children as well as her community. This accords centrality to indigenous mothers within Indigenous epistemologies. Marie's mother then gives Marie her grandmother's seeds and guides her to protect these seeds at any cost and Marie promises her mother to carry forward the legacy of Indigenous mothering. In doing so Marie's mother authenticated her title of being a true Indigenous mother, a seed keeper and a cultural custodian, who successfully transferred her legacy to her descendants and this is proved through Marie who carried forward her mother's legacy of Indigenous mothering along with the seeds of resistance and sustainability. Wilson (2021) illustrates this intergenerational cycle of Indigenous mothering through Mañpiyamaza's lineage; her daughter, Marie, her granddaughter Susanne, her great granddaughter, Darlene, her great great granddaughter, Agnes and then finally to her great great great granddaughter, Rosalie.

Marie sustains her Indigenous remembrance despite the worse circumstances of colonial oppression and her traumatic boarding school experience being a cook but she acknowledges her mother's efforts that aid her to preserve their seeds, identity and culture, as she stated, "every day I offered a prayer of gratitude for my mother's quick thinking, for the corn that has helped us through the winter" (Wilson, 2021, p. 201). She also mentions her mother's teachings of Indigenous ideology of mothering facilitate her strength of reclamation and sustainability, as she states her mother's final words to her, "you must love this child, that's the only way you can survive...This child is innocent, she is sacred...raise her to be a Dakhótawinyan" (Wilson, 2021, p. 209). Her remembrance is eternalized through continuous cycle of Indigenous mothering carried through her descendants which Rosalie a century later when she finds her mother in law's seeds and cultivates them in her husband's garden. Through Rosalie's character, Wilson represents most challenging form of Indigenous mothering within contemporary time period. Rosalie's challenges worsen due to her choice of intermarriage which distort her relationship with her son, who being assimilated to his father's lifeways due to its practical and economical gains.

Rosalie's quest for her ancestral legacy, finally culminates when she met her grand-aunt, Darlene. Since indigeneity is rooted within ancestral history and familial connections, Rosalie herself felt that just with the hope of having one relative alive was itself the onset of her self-realization, as she narrates, "I felt my life shaping itself into a new story" (Wilson, 2021, p. 303). Darlene helps her in realizing her self-worth by coming out of guilt for not being a true Indigenous mother to Tommy since she feels she failed to transfer indigeneity to her modernized son. Darlene, comprehending Rosalie's struggles to protect Tommy, she orders Tommy to accompany his mother on next visit. This shows Darlene's role as a grandmother to Tommy, by helping Rosalie in indigenizing herself as well as Tommy. Darlene narrates entire familial history, using her storytelling as powerful instrument of transmitting intergenerational

knowledge. Darlene assures her by saying, "You did the best you could. You had no mother to learn from. Your father passed too soon" (Wilson, 2021, p.311). Darlene emphasizes that having no family and then experiencing boarding schools, foster homes and intermarriage tormented Rosalie and worsened her struggles of practicing Indigenous mothering. Darlene transfers seeds; invaluable heritage of their ancestral mothers to Rosalie by saying, "Love them like your children, the way you love your son" (Wilson, 2021, p. 327). Rosalie regains reconnection to her ancestral mothers through seeds. Darlene also gives a cob of Indigenous corn to Tommy, which he put in his pocket and later his various visits to her mother's land, even just to get papers signed for capitalist purposes, Carlos affirms Rosalie that, "those seeds are bringing him home, too" (Wilson, 2021, p. 358). This affirms the validation of Indigenous mothering not only as a cultural legacy by an entire ideology, reclamation of all Indigenous epistemologies. Finally, despite first failed attempt at cultivation of seeds, Rosalie finally attains her journey of reclaiming her culture through the collective help of her community, she successfully bears fruits of her first cultivation at her native land which heals her, as she herself narrates, "I felt the comfort that comes with belonging to a circle, to a community" (Wilson, 2021, p. 354). Gaining responsibility of cultural preservation of seeds accord her the matriarchal sovereignty and she gains the recognition of practice of Indigenous mothering, as Anderson claims that the authority of mothers according to this ideology lies in profound responsibilities (Anderson, 2016).

Since, despite having distanced and disturbed relationship with her son, Rosalie maintains her identity and status of being an Indigenous mother by preserving seeds, cultivating land through organic, ecological, Indigenous methods. She fulfils her role, since in Indigenous epistemologies being life-givers, the relational and kinship duties of Indigenous mothers are not just limited to their biological children but to entire community, nation and future generations. This moment corresponds with Anderson's Indigenous matriarchal beliefs, that the relationship with mother is the foundation of phenomenon of reclaiming back Indigenous culture and identity.

4.2 Examination of Oppressive Mechanisms of Assimilation in *The Seed Keeper*

The research investigates its second research objective that how various colonial mechanisms of exploitation and coercive assimilation operate and their devastating impacts on Indigenous communities and epistemologies. The paper analyses role of various assimilation apparatuses mainly boarding schools, foster care systems, intermarriage and gender discrimination in dismantling precolonial Indigenous systems. The study highlights how these colonial strategies majorly affected personal and professional lives of Indigenous mothers and their relationships with children. The research scrutinizes maternal resistance and activism against these colonial aims, highlighting the ideology of Indigenous mothering and the robust role of Indigenous mothers as cultural sovereigns.

4.2.1 Assimilationist Boarding Schools; Traumatic Experiences in *The Seed Keeper*

The research examines that boarding schools were one of the greatest mechanisms of exploitation and assimilation of Indigenous children. Indigenous parents were forced to send their children to boarding schools or their children were coercively placed in schools where they faced assimilation, oppression, racism, starvation and sexual assault. The main agenda of boarding schools was to eliminate indigeneity. Wilson represents cycle of boarding schools from colonial to contemporary era through various characters in the novel. This cycle initiated with Marie and her daughter Susanne during colonial era, when Marie was hired as a boarding school cook while Susanne was admitted for her white schooling. Susanne is marked as first generation of Indigenous nation who went to boarding schools and were assimilated through so called progressive educational systems. But Marie had the seed of resistance inside her, as she stated, "we had heard stories of boarding schools, where they were punished if they used their own language" (Wilson, 2021, p. 204). Wilson also showcases her stark resistance towards assimilation when

Marie was questioned regarding her boarding school experience. Marie exposes how inhumanely settlers invaded their ancestral lands, shipped and displaced them like sacks of flour, how many Indigenous children were sacrificed, how they were treated in the name of civilizing mission, “what the white settlers called progress was a storm of fury thundering its way across the land” and were sent to reservations that “meant to pen is like the white man’s cattle” (Wilson, 2021, p. 201). Wilson designates her response as a ground-breaking testimony of truth, her honest narrative of oppression, as she further unravels about their oppressive conditions, “we are treated as children, ignorant and in need of teachers. I have watched my brother starve to death and my relatives carried off by sickness. No matter what salvation they say is waiting for me, I cannot forgive the death of so many children” (Wilson, 2021, p. 208). After Marie, Susanne survived boarding schools’ trauma, as children of their generation were assimilated through various ways, by being taught English language, learning Christian lifeways, reading Bible and hymnals and Marie stated the negative consequences of these exploitative assimilationist mechanisms were that the Indigenous children with engraved inferiority complexes started resenting their own culture and devaluing their families.

Wilson (2021) also chronicles boarding schools experiences of Indigenous descendants like Rosalie. Wilson illustrates how these assimilation mechanisms employed in boarding schools terrified Indigenous parents of successive generations. Out of apprehension of assimilation, many Indigenous parents protected their children and home-schooled them. Rosalie’s father was strong opponent of boarding schools, he believed, “Boarding schools had broken up families, including his own. He could not forgive the stealing of the generations of children” (Wilson, 2021, p. 139). Wilson validates Ray’s idea of boarding schools through Gaby and Rosalie’s experience of boarding schools. Anderson (2016) claims that reclamation can only be attained through healing traumas of boarding schools and rejecting their Eurocentric ideologies and colonial pedagogies. Lugones and Anderson also assert that shared experiences, similar dreams and forming coalitions are the profound elements that accelerate journey of resistance of Indigenous nations. Wilson (2021) portray this coalition through an Indigenous duo of Gaby and Rosalie. Gaby, Rosalie’s school friend and being only two Indian girls at school, they share experiences of racism, prejudiced treatment, similar dreams of moving to Twin Cities together and journeying across all powwows and entire year. Wilson (2021) represents resentment of Indigenous children who were compelled to study classic literature full of white ideologies, as an assimilationist tactic employed by boarding schools. These mutual experiences and relationship equate with Lugones’s idea of world-travelling, building academic relationships and resisting the norms together (Fernández et al., 2020). Gaby and Rosalie’s friendship also commence due to mutual experiences of prejudiced behavior at common boarding school. Gaby narrates how Rosalie face harsh mocking by white girls due to her weird appearance and for wearing unfashionable clothes on her first day at school. Rosalie due to being familiar and habitual of such racist behavior shows indifference towards it. Gaby notices Rosalie’s constant silence and loneliness. Gaby, being an Indigenous girl, belonging to kinship systems decides that few of brown girls in school must stay together to resist colonial oppression. Anderson (2016) also claims that journey of reclamation starts with first step to resist at foundational level against boarding schools which were primary and greatest assimilationist machinery that employed all Eurocentric ideologies. Anderson (2016) also believes in power of collective struggle as she urges Indigenous people that in order to revive their culture and identity they must draw inspiration from their pre-colonial kinship systems and form coalition to collectively resist colonial impositions.

Gaby initiates the effort of friendship by asking their social studies teacher to allow her to sit with Rosalie, a newcomer. Gaby describes how Rosalie’s cold behavior, but she finally gets to know her name and she also tells Rosalie her name and informs her about staying with her Auntie Vera. The contrast in Gaby and Rosalie’s personality, marks another validation that young Indigenous children who stay at foster houses and Indigenous children like Gaby who still have the warmth of their relationships. Auntie Vera

is a nurse who treats diabetic Indigenous people, since diabetes was common disease amongst Indigenous people. Gaby tells about Rosalie to Vera and she informs her about Rosalie's father. Gaby also mentions her brother, Anthony who hit an accident due to being intoxicated with alcohol. It represents Indigenous men who turned to drugs and alcoholism to deal with their colonial traumas. Anderson (2016) also examines that native men, who lost their autonomy due to colonial control resorted to drugs and alcohol which was yet another assimilationist habit which Native men learned from male whites. Gaby also mentions how her brother Anthony was spoiled in the company of his European friend, Earl White. European influence distorted Indigenous values and culture. Wilson (2021) also portrays relationship and interaction between Indigenous girls and European boys through Earl and Gaby. She also illustrates theme of intermarriage through Rosalie and John's character. Gaby plans to meet Earl at Rosalie's place and when she tells her that she wants to visit her house, her baffled response implies mutual prejudiced behavior all Indigenous children survived in foster care. This shared experience birth emotional bond between Gaby and Rosalie, who perceives that, "Girl had a wound, she kept hidden away, like all of us, like all Indian alive today" (Wilson, 2021, p. 60). Like Wilson, Anderson also highlights that shared experiences of prejudice and marginalization strengthen the emotional bonds between colonized Indigenous people, who survive, resist, heal and then construct their identities together. But Earl and Gaby's relationship and Gaby's pre-marriage pregnancy lead her towards residential homes for unmarried teens and distanced both girls. Wilson (2021) portrays how colonial systems regulated even personal choices and decisions of lives of Indigenous people. Wilson's representation aligns with Anderson's navigation of distortion of Indigenous systems due to colonial regulations and imposition of patriarchal norms of sexuality which accorded shame only to the women in matters.

Wilson (2021) masterfully portrays intergenerational cycle of horrible experiences of boarding schools and their intergenerational traumas. Tommy, being contemporary generation also faced it in his school which Rosalie got to know when she visits his school to discuss Tommy's confused state, due to mixed identity and having no relationship with his grandparents. Rosalie gets to know that children throw names at Tommy "savage", "redskin" and "crazy horse" (Wilson, 2021, p. 161). This illustrates how Indigenous generations still face racist and prejudiced behavior at boarding schools in contemporary times and they cannot reclaim their Indigenous epistemologies without healing their traumas and resisting such inhumane treatment. Wilson (2021) demonstrates that despite boarding schools' experiences, Indigenous people resisted colonial ideologies. She portrays it through Gaby's character in school when a teacher thinking to intimidate Gaby for her inattentiveness, questions her to name the lands which were involved in Traverse des Sioux treaty, she instantly replies rebelliously, "My land. And you're standing on it" (Wilson, 2021, p. 86). This rebellious attitude towards an authoritative person like teachers encapsulates the strength, resilience and bravery of Indigenous young people. Anderson and Lugones refer to these people as the ones who have innate power of resistance, which cannot be eliminated even through coercive mechanisms of assimilation.

4.2.2 Rosalie's Dilemma of Foster Care: Assimilation Systems and Indigenous Resistance

Foster care systems have been labelled as the most exploitative Eurocentric mechanisms of assimilation of Indigenous children to evangelical ideologies. The major aim of this system was to eliminate indigeneity under the banner of child welfare systems in North America (Newland, 2021). Settlers gained their colonial agendas through foster care policies which allowed settler intervention, Indigenous children were separated from their Indigenous lands and families and forced into foster systems, where they lived with non-Indigenous families and such families were given funds and cheques by state for assimilating Indigenous children and for their basic necessities while Indigenous children were brought up in little money, living even without basic human rights and necessities. In such houses, Indigenous naive children also learned abusive behaviours, gender inequality and all ills of white systems. As the woman from whom

Rosalie get as only alive relative's contact number mentions, "Even Congress finally admitted that separating so many Indian children from their families was one of the biggest tragedies affecting our communities today" (Wilson, 2021, p. 302). Settlers camouflaged this phenomenon under the civilizing mission, which Lugones (2007) believe colonial powers achieved through their mythical representation of modernity, which solely validates non-Indigenous lifeways. Lugones (2007) also argue that colonial gendered systems of modernity caused breakdown of Indigenous communities and their pre-colonial lifeways. Anderson (2016) also labels foster care systems as assimilationist machinery and claims that reclamation of Indigenous epistemologies can only be attained when traumatic experiences of foster homes can be healed. Since, these foster care systems embedded inferiority complexes and caused lateral violence in Indigenous colonized people (Anderson, 2016).

Wilson (2021) portrays the assimilation phenomenon of foster care systems through Rosalie's character, who was sent into foster care upon her father's death. Rosalie endured violent behavior of non-Indigenous families during her stay at foster homes, while she mentions her mother's spiritual presence as her only solace in such perilous time period. Rosalie narrates her dull yet hard routine at foster homes. Through Rosalie's character, Wilson (2021) illustrates the foster systems, their assimilationist strategies, prejudiced behavior against Indigenous children. Wilson portrays experiences of two foster houses through Rosalie's character. The first foster house followed Eurocentric patriarchal family. The owner treated his wife like a servant, burdened with responsibilities for all domestic chores and performing all duties towards their husbands. Forcing Indigenous children to live in patriarchal foster systems and to corrupt their innocent minds by compelling them to learn Western lifeways was the main agenda of foster houses. Rosalie, fortunately having strong Indigenous roots was not influenced by her foster parents. Rosalie narrates how women were mistreated and oppressed which led them towards drinking habits. Wilson (2021) also explains how Indigenous ways were misinterpreted, especially through the incident of Rosalie's effort to prepare mouse stew for dinner since she had nothing to eat and was bored of eating tasteless food at her first foster house. But, her hunting and skinning of mouse, her hands spattered with blood scarred her foster mother, who called the cops and discarded Rosalie into another foster house. This incident evidently explains how Indigenous people and their culture is still misinterpreted, labelled as wild, animalistic only because it seems irrational and scary to white people. Rosalie faced even worse treatment at her second foster house. She describes her foster mother, Shirley as a witch who inhumanely treated her like a servant. Rosalie performed domestic chores like mopping, washing clothes, babysitting her foster mother's younger children, only having leftovers to eat and she used to live in a small, one room dreary basement used as a storeroom where she had no privacy and her presence in that house was ghostly, since she was overlooked because her existence did not matter. Rosalie always used to find job so that she could leave foster house. The only acquaintance that she had at foster house, were the books like *Speaking of Indians* (Deloria, 1944). Book reading was a habit that she inherited from her father who owned many books. Similarly, Rosalie used to buy books from different thrift stores and read them whenever she got, either in kitchen or upstairs. Fostering the idea of salience of Indigenous scholarship, Hanson (2020) argues that Indigenous literature performs primary role in decolonization of Eurocentric norms and reclamation of Indigenous epistemologies. Deloria's book represents Indigenous depiction of Dakota culture, descriptions of Native American origins and their enriched epistemologies. Such Indigenous scholarship helps displaced Indigenous people to stay connected to their native roots.

Wilson (2021) highlights the presence of Indigenous sense of resurgence and retaliation within Rosalie, which is depicted through various defiant and rebellious acts she performs during her stay at foster house. Like, despite Shirley's strict surveillance and control, Rosalie continues her search for job and economic independence. She even gains inner satisfaction by performing little acts like cutting Shirley's sweater to annoy her. Shirley's inhumane behavior instil the desire of revenge against her foster mother. Wilson (2021) portrays contrast between Indigenous mothers who had innate instincts of mutual care for all

children, even those with whom they had no biological relationships. This contrast synchronizes with Anderson's claims regarding Indigenous mothering practices based on kinship and care (Anderson, 2016). This contrast evokes even more sympathetic feelings towards Indigenous children who lost their Indigenous mothers and were forced into the care of cold-hearted foster mothers. Rosalie tells her friend Gaby about Shirley's mean, racist and prejudiced behavior towards her, as she narrates, "She's two-faced. Acts nice on the surface. Spies on me, reminds me that I'm too tall, too dark, too ugly. Dumb. Lazy. That without her I'd be living on the street." (Wilson, 2021, p. 60). Rosalie's treatment at foster house represents prejudiced treatment all Indigenous children and young people endured at foster houses.

Throughout the novel, Wilson (2021) employs various natural things, especially trees, plants and weather to harmonize with Rosalie's situation. Like, Rosalie describes Elm trees outside her foster house, at the edge of road, in such a congested space that its roots could not spread freely due to intoxication caused by car smokes. This description of tree is dichotomous to Rosalie's situation at her foster house. Tree and Rosalie both deserve to be placed at their Indigenous land where they could freely prosper and breathe fresh air. Rosalie's condition represents experiences of all Indigenous people who had been placed within foster care. Observing external environment, Rosalie narrates that all buildings and white faces seem similar to each other, which shows lack of individuality of settlers who follow similar trends. Rosalie keeps finding jobs to get herself rid of foster houses before her eighteenth birthday. When asked about her plan to change foster home, she replies, "I'd rather be on the streets" (Wilson, 2021, p. 50). Her reaction represents resentment of young Indigenous people against foster care systems. Finally, she reads about a job of corn detasseling, and instantly decides to avail it.

Rosalie narrates about Shirley's resentful behavior towards her. She mentions embarrassing moment how she had no money even to buy bread because Shirley used to steal from her pocket due to her hatred towards her. Barb, the girl at the counter mocks her for not having twenty-five cents. Barb derogatorily says, "everyone knows you people are just a bunch of drunks on welfare" (Wilson, 2021, p. 52). Barb's reply show collective hatred and prejudice of Europeans towards Indigenous people and it also illustrates how mercilessly young Indigenous people survived oppression, humiliation, starvation, economic dependency and racism in foster care. A person standing behind Rosalie gave her money to buy bread, showcasing how Indigenous children in foster care used to survive upon charities. Rosalie like other Indigenous children at foster houses, joins various tiring jobs after school to meet their needs. When Rosalie's foster mother gets to know that she has been doing a job and getting her first pay tomorrow she becomes extremely furious and demands her money, but Rosalie resists in an aggressive yet cathartic manner by slapping Shirley when she hardly pulls her braid. Finally, Rosalie escapes her foster house but endures rainy weather, sleeps at river bank entire night. Rosalie's dire need of a place to live and such harsh conditions compels her to accept John's marriage proposal against her own wish not to marry a settler, since her father warned her in her childhood about all devastating consequences of intermarriage, especially danger of losing indigeneity, as Ray claims, "otherwise we'll end up with water in our veins" (Wilson, 2021, p. 97). Through Rosalie's helpless situation, Wilson (2021) represents how native women were forced to marry settlers to get economic dependency, suppressing their indigeneity just to get a place to live. These experiences align with Anderson's claims that Indigenous people can only regain their indigeneity by healing their traumas endured at foster care, because these systems instil fear, sense of inferiority and direct their lives under colonial pressures within Indigenous people (Anderson, 2016).

4.2.3 Tensions of Intermarriage; Indigenous mothering and Maternal Activism in *The Seed Keeper*

Rosalie's reclamation journey transforms dynamically through the onset of her maternal journey. This element again magically synchronizes with Anderson's academic journey as well, as Anderson herself accepts that her academic journey was markedly reconstructed upon the commencement of her journey of motherhood. Her maternal journey aroused her empathetic feeling towards all Indigenous mothers who faced systemic marginalization in mainstream feminist discourse (Anderson, 2016), as Lugones also

claims women of colour's exclusion from feminist discussions stimulated her decolonial thought of advocating space for women of global South in mainstream scholarship as well as media. Wilson (2021) represents Rosalie's maternal metamorphosis through her radical act of cutting her hair, which implies leaving her past behind, regaining her new version, as she narrates, "In her place was a new self, a woman who was harder and stronger, who was ready to become a mother and raise a child" (Wilson, 2021, p. 142). Rosalie's decision of giving birth to new life is not just producing a child, but stepping the reins, entering into new phase of being an Indigenous mother, carrying forward the legacy of her grandmothers; ancestral seed keepers. Rosalie's pregnancy, producing a new generation with Iron Wing blood itself is the most empowered act of resistance against colonial powers and also an act of reclamation of Indigenous epistemologies. Wilson (2021) again reflectively draws parallels between restoration of Rosalie's connection with land through cultivation of seeds and Rosalie's pregnancy as rebirth of indigeneity and Indigenous legacy. Wilson (2021) intricately links her pregnancy period with germinating period of seeds, in order to establish the innate relationship of Indigenous nations with their native lands. It also validates matriarchal sovereignty of Indigenous mothers over Indigenous land and lives.

Wilson (2021) portrays that journey of Indigenous mothering is more perilous for contemporary Indigenous women who are involved in intermarriage, for they have to fight against all odds to reclaim their Indigenous lifeways. Since, Rosalie perceives significance of indigenizing a child meant to regain indigeneity of an entire generation. Rosalie faces serious challenges in reclaiming Indigenous ideology of mothering. The tension starts from her husband John and Rosalie's conflict of naming their child. Rosalie, being aware of significance of name in Indigenous epistemologies, strongly desires to give her child Indigenous name, as her first act of reclaiming Indigenous identity but John opposes, out of societal pressure. Rosalie argues that it holds no importance what name a child has on official papers and being a mother, she would not surrender to any pressure. Since, she was aware of horrific consequences of assimilation Indigenous nations had previously faced and also because she also knew strength indigeneity carried and challenges children of mixed identities endured, as she states, "generations before me had been silenced, forced to hide their ceremonies and language underground, deep in the wood, carrying this knowledge as a lifetime to the culture, I wasn't giving up on my son" (Wilson, 2021, p. 187). Rosalie's determined attitude truly portrays her as a successful Indigenous mother who starts reclaiming her values, culture and identity for her son, future of her nation. This marks Rosalie's first act of resistance as Indigenous mother against assimilationist acts. Later, Gaby's visit after Rosalie's baby (Thomas) and her love and care towards Rosalie's child again validates Anderson's ideology of Indigenous mothering which involves aunties and elderly women in mothering praxis.

Despite present challenges, Rosalie continues to nurture her son in five years, who grew up enjoying her company in farm, which was flicker of hope for Rosalie. But their economic conditions keep worsening, which compels Rosalie to find a job and she finally gets a job of writing obituaries, which can be spotlighted through Anderson's and Lugones's perspective, an act of gaining pedagogical space. Rosalie seems to be a magical manifestation of Anderson, since Rosalie's life echoes with Anderson's personal academic and motherhood journey and also validates her claim that writing can be employed as a form of resistance and healing practice. Gaby, another mother, also secures her position in college as practiced Indigenous activist against settlers and their capitalist and detrimental industrial developments. Gaby seems to be an embodied manifestation of Lugones's decolonial feminist ideas and also represents her profession of being an activist fighting against exploitation of natural waters. Gaby's activism of saving water for their Indigenous grandchildren is another act of reclaiming Indigenous epistemologies. Gaby and Rosalie's mutual new experiences of being mothers, activist, journalist, writer; gaining academic, pedagogical and activist forums enhancing their friendship again aligns with Lugones's idea of world-travelling and her claim that resistance is a relational and communal practice (Calderón 2023).

Anderson claims that Indigenous epistemologies can be reclaimed through Indigenous ceremonies, for they were best opportunities to reconnect with Indigenous community. Wilson (2021) portrays it through Mankato powwow event, an Indigenous cultural gathering where Rosalie and Gaby decided to meet and to pass down their friendship to their sons, which represents Indigenous mothering practice of reconnecting their children, next generations to Indigenous kinship systems. As Gaby describes such cultural events like powwow as, “a social gathering, but it’s also a way of honoring your ancestors” (Wilson, 2021, p. 169). Rosalie and Gaby’s friendship represents an inspirational decolonial union that catalyses employment of decolonial ideology of Indigenous mothering, aiming to preserve their Indigenous land and legacy for their generations. Gaby informs Rosalie about her activism against international farmers who were contaminating their river and roots only for their materialistic and capitalist gains, risking Indigenous lives. Gaby’s activism motivated Rosalie, as Gaby stated, “you may be living on farm, Rosie, but you still have to think like a Dakhóta” (Wilson, 2021, p. 172). This implies dual role of Indigenous mothers; nurturing children, protecting land and community.

Wilson (2021) represents another important event in Rosalie’s life that illustrates difference of parenting perspectives; John follows Western parenting while Rosalie practices Indigenous parenting, which leads their lives towards more conflicts. One day, Rosalie and John’s house catches fire through someone’s burning cigarette on their newly polished kitchen table. As both of them wake up due to smoke, they both rushed, out of confusion Rosalie thinks John is going to protect their son, Tommy while Thomas believes Rosalie rushes to protect Tommy. But Rosalie when comes downstairs and sees kitchen burning, she pulls up fire extinguisher, and after extinguishing fire she instinctively and instantly saves seeds, when John realizes it he rushes to save Tommy. John’s terror and his harsh questioning causes Rosalie to collapse due to overwhelming phase of guilt, mental turmoil and fear of defamiliarization as she realizes John’s bewildering attitude towards her. Rosalie herself did not comprehend rationale behind her instinct of saving seeds over Tommy. Rosalie remains confused even after Gabby’s explanation to her that sometime Indigenous mothers are compelled to take such hard decisions, out of their innate instincts of collective care for their communities, as Gaby stated, “We have to see beyond and be prepared to do whatever is needed to save our people, even if it breaks our hearts” (Wilson, 2021, p. 178). Gaby’s explanation resonates with Anderson’s claim that Indigenous mothering is not limited to only biological children, being life givers, Indigenous mothers have to protect entire nations (Anderson, 2016).

Even after Rosalie’s return John seems to be a stranger to Rosalie, while she continues her struggle of imparting Indigenous teachings to her son. She starts explaining him ecological Indigenous knowledge, telling him her father’s Indigenous teachings, spending more time with Tommy around plants, instilling instincts of care and kinship for humans and non-humans, especially children. Rosalie guides Tommy that humans are obligated to take care of tiny entities, like mouse by giving corn. Despite her efforts of indigenizing her son, she feels John’s estrangement and mistrustful behavior towards her regarding their son. Tommy also misunderstands his mother, as Rosalie narrates, “Thomas grew up believing that I had given up on him. And that is what he cannot forgive (Wilson, 2021, p. 189). Through Rosalie’s character, Wilson represents modern challenges Indigenous mothers face to transmit indigeneity to their children. Inter marriage posited as the gravest threat as analyzed through Anderson’s perspective.

4.2.4 Indigenous Mothers’ Epistemic Agency in *The Seed Keeper*

Lugones’s theoretical framework of decolonial feminism and concept of coloniality of gender are employed to investigate challenges Gaby and Rosalie endure in their professional spheres. Indigenous systems were egalitarian where women were accorded equal space in domestic as well as public and professional spheres. Wilson (2021) portrays it through empowered Indigenous female characters and supportive male characters like Ray. While in modern time period, due to dissemination of patriarchal Eurocentric ideologies, Indigenous women face gender-based inequalities and injustices (Lugones, 2007).

Anderson (2016) also claims that gender is a colonial product, since no hierarchies existed on basis of gender in pre-colonial Indigenous communities. Wilson (2021) portrays exclusion of Indigenous mothers from mainstream intellectual space and decolonial pedagogy through characters of Gaby and Rosalie, who despite their tiring efforts to reclaim their epistemic autonomy are subjugated by modern men, like Ralph, Schafer and Mayor. Gaby and Rosalie's share struggles to save river, natural waters from contamination due to fertilizers and their capitalist interests through imposition of new leasing methods by offering loans by mortgaging their lands, innovative farming methods and mainly use of genetically altered patent seeds through capitalist companies like Mangenta. Through modern farming methods and ecological offers of patent seeds, settlers only wanted to eliminate Indigenous, ecological and economic autonomy. Being aware of potential futuristic threats and negative consequences of employing Western ecological methods, Rosalie's resistance is another act of resisting colonial exploitation. Both characters face marginalization in their respective professions. Gaby wants to resist Eurocentric modern ecological destruction through her legal agency while Rosalie decided to resist it through her intellectual powers, but their spaces were restricted.

Wilson (2021) represents it through a heated argument with capitalist corporate executives, reclaiming their right of interrogation, being part of the society, instead they were compelled to endure marginalization, Indigenous censorship through rigid attitudes of company leadership who gave unsatisfactory responses and Gaby and Rosalie were not allowed to ask more questions. This highlights how Indigenous women face gendered epistemic marginalization. Rosalie, being aware of Gaby's struggles, as she mentions, "I knew Gaby had met with stiff resistance from all of the newspapers she had approached" (Wilson, 2021, p. 215-216). Rosalie wants to publish article regarding detrimental effects of these developmental projects upon Indigenous nations, but editor Ralph always disagrees and denies permission. Ralph argues that their editorial office was economically supported by such advertising sponsors and their task is to praise them and he would not allow her such risk, since it will endanger their revenues, as he himself accepts when Rosalie asks her then who would hold such companies accountable, he replied, "We leave it to the scientists and politicians. Somewhere down the road, somebody will have to figure out how to fix it. And when that happens, we'll make it our goddamn headline" (Wilson, 2021, p. 214). This portrays how they misrepresent and side-line truthful Indigenous knowledge and narratives featured in mainstream scholarship and media on the basis of economic and colonial interests. It turns even worse when Rosalie through her research investigates that this company had made pretentious claims and finds various lawsuits against it, she writes an entire article about it with the intention to raise awareness, to save their Indigenous waters, land and ecological systems, fulfilling her responsibility of cultural sustainability towards entire nation and future descendants, being an Indigenous mother but all are efforts get destroyed. While she awaits the publication of her evidence-based, well-researched regarding highly exigent matter, she is left devastated when she finds out in the morning, how Ralph had subverted her efforts, as she narrates, "Ralph had written a glowing editorial praising the new mayor" (Wilson, 2021, p. 223). This represents how patriarchal Western authorities manipulate and distort entire research, "Ralph had gutted it; all of my research was gone" (Wilson, 2021, p. 234). This infuriates Rosalie and finally she quit her job. Wilson (2021) very truthfully represents Lugones's decolonial feminist thoughts regarding gender and modernity through Rosalie and Gaby's characters that Indigenous women were deliberately marginalized, since she believes that all experiences of all Indigenous women are based on lethal intertwined marginalizing factors; gender and race. Colonial conceptions of gender and complexities of intermarriage increased Rosalie's anxieties and her guilt of not being able to indigenize her son and John's death led her to breakdown, but even her breakdown itself proved to be her first step towards her reclamation and self-realization journey.

Conclusion

The matriarchal and decolonial analysis of Wilson's *The Seed Keeper* (2021) establish constructive results creating an important domain for future research within Indigenous, decolonial and matriarchal scholarship and field-based research for Indigenous communities. These results address the research questions while accomplishing the robust objectives and simultaneously responding to defined research gaps.

The investigation of novel through complementary theoretical framework of Anderson's Indigenous mothering and Lugones's decolonial feminist stance of coloniality of gender illuminates first finding while answering question of the research that Wilson represents Indigenous mothers as embodiments of matriarchal sovereignty who navigate challenges of Eurocentric colonial and patriarchal world within domestic, social as well as professional domains. Rosalie endures persistent decolonial struggle to protect her son, Tommy from Western systems of parenting, education and religion at the cost of her mental peace and her marital prosperity despite having John as her only relationship and his house her only place to live. Rosalie's maternal resistance did not falter even after enduring her own son's hatred towards her. This encapsulates the emotional strength and resilience of Indigenous mothers in reclaiming Indigenous epistemologies while resisting against Eurocentric structures of exploitation. Rosalie's act of saving seeds from fire rather than her son represents Indigenous mothering as a futuristically sustainable practice and alternative system that challenges Western systems. It also validates her Indigenous instinct of mothering which is not only limited to biological children but extends across generations. This finding also affirms the gap that matriarchal and decolonial reading of *The Seed Keeper* offers innovative interpretation of the novel which previously remained completely unexplored.

The second finding illuminates the maternal agency of Indigenous mothers against assimilationist apparatuses; boarding schools, foster care systems, intermarriage and gender discrimination. It highlights that colonial traumas can only be healed through practice of Indigenous system, mainly Indigenous mothering which validates reclamation and sustainability of Indigenous epistemologies. The third finding highlights the claim that practice of Indigenous mothering and maternal resistance is not confined to domestic spheres it also encompasses professional spheres. Rosalie and Gaby encounter gender discrimination, systemic and epistemic exclusion which confirms that Indigenous communities endure such marginalization through imposition of Eurocentric structures in all spheres of life. The collective as well as personal struggles of Rosalie and Gaby in their respective professional, journalism and legal departments against Eurocentric industrial exploitative systems to protect their Indigenous lands, water bodies and ultimately the wholistic well-being and sustainability of their future generations designate Indigenous mothers as maternal activists, affirming their roles within current global issues. This finding also rejects the claim of universality of Western Eurocentric ideologies, since such Indigenous issues can solely be successfully resolved through Indigenous ideologies. The finding also validates the anticipated outcome of this research that inclusion of Indigenous mothers as activists within intellectual spaces, mainly decolonial and futuristic Indigenous and motherhood discourses to reclaim Indigenous epistemologies.

Recommendations and Future Implications

Since the present study specifically focuses on a single literary Indigenous text, *The Seed Keeper* (2021), closely examining it though particularly designed integrated theoretical framework of Indigenous mothering and decolonial feminism, future researchers could expand this inquiry by analyzing other literary works through this complementary theoretical framework. The study might direct attention towards developing culturally responsive initiatives and policies for Indigenous mothers and their wellbeing. It also holds potential for developing separate educational systems for distinct Indigenous communities based upon Indigenous epistemologies for Indigenous children to preserve their indigeneity.

Comparative studies could further extend the investigation of phenomenon of cultural reclamation and practices of Indigenous mothering focusing different Indigenous groups within diverse geographical contexts. The research might also lay the groundwork for empirical research that would contribute to the psychological and traumatic studies by accelerating healing phenomenon of Indigenous communities through future research and initiatives inclusive of diverse perspectives and contextual realities.

Declarations

The authors declare that this research is original and has not been published or submitted for consideration elsewhere.

Authors' Contribution

The article is based on the first author's MPhil English Literature thesis. The first author conducted research, analysis, interpretation, and writing. The second author served as corresponding author in a supervisory capacity only, providing academic guidance, critical review, and final approval of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to academic integrity and cultural sensitivity. All sources have been appropriately acknowledged, and the analysis is grounded in textual evidence and relevant scholarship.

AI Use Statement

AI tools were used solely for language refinement. The authors retain full responsibility for the research, analysis, interpretations, conclusions, and overall integrity of the work.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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