

Exploring the Relationship Between Postcolonial and Indigenous Literary Criticism in Challenging Colonial Narratives and Reclaiming Cultural Identity

Dr Pardeep Kumar

Department of English, Govt. College Bahadurgarh (Hry.)

Email: pkjamdagni13@gmail.com

Abstract:

The focus of this study is the relationship between postcolonial literature and Indigenous literary criticism as critique on the colonial narratives and recovery of identities. This research has explored the historical erasure, cultural representation, stories, and collective Indigenous sovereignty as a focus of the critical approaches, by reviewing qualitative sources like journals, articles, literature papers and peer-reviewed studies. This is an attempt to draft a summary of the analysis that was conducted on the current study and based on this analysis, it can be concluded that postcolonial criticism has contested the imperial ideology and unequal power hierarchy, whereas Indigenous literary criticism is on ancestral knowledge, cultural continuity and the self-determination of communities. The study indicated common goals and major differences in the theory of the two approaches. This research has demonstrated the importance of an Indigenous-centred critical framework which draws on an integration of both perspectives, with the preservation of Indigenous cultural identity and interpretive authority.

Keywords: Postcolonial criticism, Indigenous literary criticism, colonial narratives, cultural identity, sovereignty..

INTRODUCTION

Colonial literature often reinforced imperial power by representing Indigenous communities as culturally inferior and overlooking their histories, identities, and traditions. Postcolonial criticism challenges these representations by examining colonial ideologies and unequal power structures, while Indigenous literary criticism emphasises communities' authority to define their own histories and cultural identities (Buffoli, 2025). However, challenging colonial stereotypes does not automatically restore Indigenous control over cultural representation. Both approaches offer an understanding of resistance to colonialism, though their intellectual emphases will shape the way cultural identity, history and literary opposition are perceived.

1.1 Motivation

Although both critical approaches challenge colonial domination, combining them without recognising their theoretical differences may weaken the importance of Indigenous sovereignty and cultural self-determination. Thus, an important question for consideration is the meaning of authority in defining colonialism and its cultural implications in the two approaches. The article asks if there is meaningful dialogue when Indigenous resistance is shared, or if it is just putting Indigenous thought in a postcolonial model. This is significant when withholding critique of a community fails on a political point to account for community responsibilities.

1.2 Scope and Research Question

This article asks: How can postcolonial and Indigenous literary criticism jointly challenge colonial narratives while protecting Indigenous cultural identity and interpretive authority? This article examines the shared objectives, theoretical differences, and complementary contributions of both approaches while prioritising Indigenous perspectives in the interpretation of colonial narratives and cultural identity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Counter-narratives and Storytelling

Charon and Lehartel (2023) examined how three contemporary Oceanian novels challenge colonial discourse through Indigenous storytelling and metatextual strategies. They compared and contrasted the close reading of *L'île des rêves écrasés*, *The Yield* and *After Story* as they studied metatextuality and the interaction between Indigenous characters and Western texts. They discovered that narratives of self-reflection opposed the process of racialisation and validated the language and knowledge of ancestors. Evidence isn't in statistical form. This study explores resistance approaches without exploring the relationship between the

two important traditions. The novels would not only serve to expose the colonial image, but also how image is contested through the novel. Such a formal opposition behavior can be used as a foundation to contrast approaches.

2.2 Reclaiming Indigenous Epistemologies

Swaraj and Mishra (2023) examined two stories of Janice Pariat's book: *Boats on Land* by animist realism. Their study aimed to challenge colonial interpretations that portrayed Khasi spiritual practices as irrational by examining Indigenous knowledge through animist realism. The relational conceptions of more-than-human and human life have been gleaned through a process of close reading of water spirits and shamanic ritual. It has been possible to discover the relational thinking about more-than-humans and humans through careful reading of the spirits of water and shamanic ritual. This non-quantitative result complements further on-going theoretical discussions with Indigenous knowledge; however, its two-story body allows for broader theoretical tensions to be left open. To equate these spiritual relationships with symbolism runs the risk of not understanding their significance as knowledge. This assists to differentiate difficult colonial imagery from the recognition of Indigenous ways of knowing.

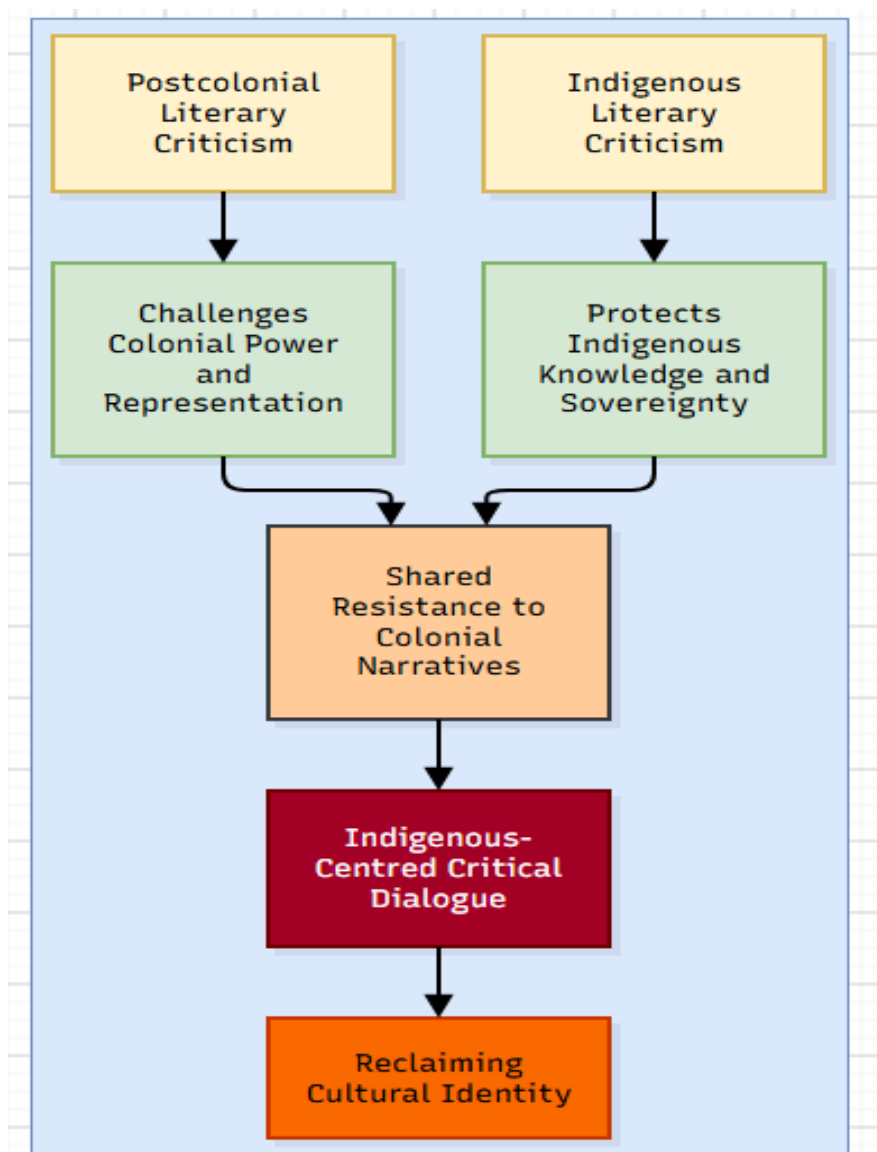


Figure 1: Relationship Between Postcolonial and Indigenous Literary Criticism in Challenging Colonial Narratives and Reclaiming Cultural Identity

(Source: Self-created)

2.3 Representation and Cultural Identity

Eppley et al., (2024) explored the identity of a "rural Indigenous" in Canadian award-winning children's fiction using critical content analysis. There were 58 books written by an Indigenous writer and only four books were about the rural Indigenous setting, which was about 17.5% and 1.2% respectively of the total books selected, 332 in total. Those four books were investigated under the headings of land relationships,

Exploring The Relationship Between Postcolonial And Indigenous Literary Criticism In Challenging Colonial Narratives And Reclaiming Cultural Identity

cultural teachings and the impact of colonialism. These descriptive numbers do not imply causation. However, the study's focus on Canadian children's literature limits its wider applicability and leaves important questions about Indigenous literary authority across different cultural contexts insufficiently explored.

2.4 Land and Literary Form

Brown (2023) made postcolonial ecocritical comparisons of Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*. Close textual analysis revealed concepts that challenged Western notions of attribution between humans and nature: those of Country, of a non-linear notion of time, and of oral storytelling. These findings were not statistical, but rather interpretive and the question of how to interpret them is unresolved. Landscape is not scenery; it is a relationship. This aids in determining if key frameworks enable appreciation for Indigenous ideas instead of assimilation into western boxes of "the environment".

2.5 Research Gap

The studies locate the practices of resistance but largely fail to consider ways in which postcolonial critique can contribute to indigenist critique without being used to their detriment. This article addresses these gaps by developing a comparative framework that connects postcolonial analysis with Indigenous literary criticism while prioritising Indigenous interpretive authority. It also examines how cultural differences can be recognised without allowing external theoretical frameworks to determine their meanings. Both the theory and the commonly stated political aims and values must be discussed to address this.

3. Methodology

The overall purpose of this *qualitative interpretive review* is to deliberately uncover 14 peer-reviewed articles about colonial representation, storytelling and sovereignty from 2022 to 2026. Four studies are assessed for aims, methods, results and gaps, with the rest providing information for thematic synthesis. Colonial government and theoretical convergence, the difference in interpretations, and cultural reclamation are being examined. No primary data were collected. Indigenous knowledge provides concepts that are important but not always what is understood in the West (Tynan & Bishop, 2023).

The review is conceptual, not systematic, and does not claim comprehensive database coverage. Each study is placed in its cultural context and close readings of the text are differentiated from numerical evidence. It refrains from homology or showing its suggested model as having been tested in reality. This will allow you to discuss connections with the two models and at the same time respect the cultural differences and literary traditions of the two scales.

4. Challenging Colonial Narratives: A Shared Critical Purpose

4.1 Exposing Colonial Representation

The process of conquest is sometimes reframed in colonialistic stories and the process of dispossession as necessary. The 'impact and effect' of imperial power that flows through representation and/or economic systems is seen in Postcolonial criticism (Morton, 2024). The following question arises when reading the critique of the indigenous: Who has the authority to tell suppressed histories? However, the impacts of Indigenous resistance to the removal of land and heritage are not divorced from the material dispossession, as evidenced in poetry that raises awareness about the separation of process and removal of culture (McGiffin, 2024). Neither denying a stereotype nor substituting it with one where the Indigenous cultures or claims to territories are lost is enough. Resistance has to tackle the issue of discourse and continued dispossession.



Figure 2. Counter-Narratives and Decolonial Resistance

(Source: <https://www.frontiersin.org/files/Articles/1716755/xml-images/feduc-10-1716755-g001.webp>)

4.2 Restoring Suppressed Histories

Speech reclaimers focus on Indigenous views and reclamation is not just about heard voices filling the gaps in the colonial archive. It also contests rules, established by the Archive, regarding evidence, knowledge and continuity in history (Hembrom, 2022). Postcolonial analysis shows who is in control of how to write history, while Indigenist interpretation also asks "How to remember the past outside of the record? Oral history, ceremony, and knowledge of the place are not emphasized in colonial archives, and the latter is largely ignored. This hierarchy is challenged, not only in question of what history is, but also in question of how evidence is recognised.

5. The Relationship Between Postcolonial and Indigenous Literary Criticism

5.1 Convergence: Resistance to Eurocentrism

The fields of postcolonial and Indigenous literary theory have come together to bring to light the construct of colonial power in relation to history, identity and literary representation. Both question the idea of benchmarking other cultures based on experiences in Europe. Postcolonial means the criticism of the language and ideologies that typically characterize colonized peoples. Critique from Indigenous communities contests the representations as well, but with emphasis on Indigenous community history and knowledge. It is here where they overlap, as literary narratives reject imposed identities and recover the silenced voices (Charon & Lehartel, 2023). The narrative approach is able to challenge who might define cultural truth through storytelling, change in voice of the narrative, and use of Indigenous languages. However, their relationship is not only one of opposition to colonialism, but one of collaboration to de-concentrate power in the interpretation of literary texts.

5.2 Divergence: Cultural Negotiation and Sovereignty

Yet, despite these shared aims, the frameworks stand apart in its conception of what constitutes central issues in decolonisation. Those themes of cultural hybridity, migration, and reformed identities, in the face of imperial powers, are regularly studied in the context of postcolonial theory. While these concerns can shed light on the complexity of belonging, they do not exhaustively account for Indigenous rights that have their source in being connected to ancestral lands. In the eyes of the indigenous people, the land is an active factor of cultural identity, rather than an emotion from a past. Indigenous criticism is not only about land, it is also about responsibilities for the community and regions, and it is also about self-determination. Migrant stories of belonging, therefore, cannot be equated with Indigenous stories of dispossession (Islam, 2024). Moreover, the tendency to celebrate hybridity can lead to closures in theories of Indigenous culture and lives if it implies that Indigenous cultures have indigenous significance only in colonial interaction. Indigenous literary traditions also possess distinct intellectual histories, cultural knowledge, and creative practices that existed before colonial encounters and have continued to develop beyond colonial influence. By identifying these differences, the two frameworks will not be interchanged.

5.3 Interpretive Authority

The primary conflict is over who should be the interpreter(s) of Indigenous writing. One could criticize

Exploring The Relationship Between Postcolonial And Indigenous Literary Criticism In Challenging Colonial Narratives And Reclaiming Cultural Identity

colonial stereotypes, but then again present a eurocentrism view of Indigenous stories by rating or assessing them through the lens of the more dominant Western realism and individualism or linear history. For instance, the presence of the ancestors or connections to land do not necessarily represent symbolic elements; rather, they may represent the culturally embodied reality. Therefore, indigenous criticism urges the critics to care for the significance and responsibilities lived in specific traditions (Buffoli, 2025; Maisuangdibou & Chandran, 2026).

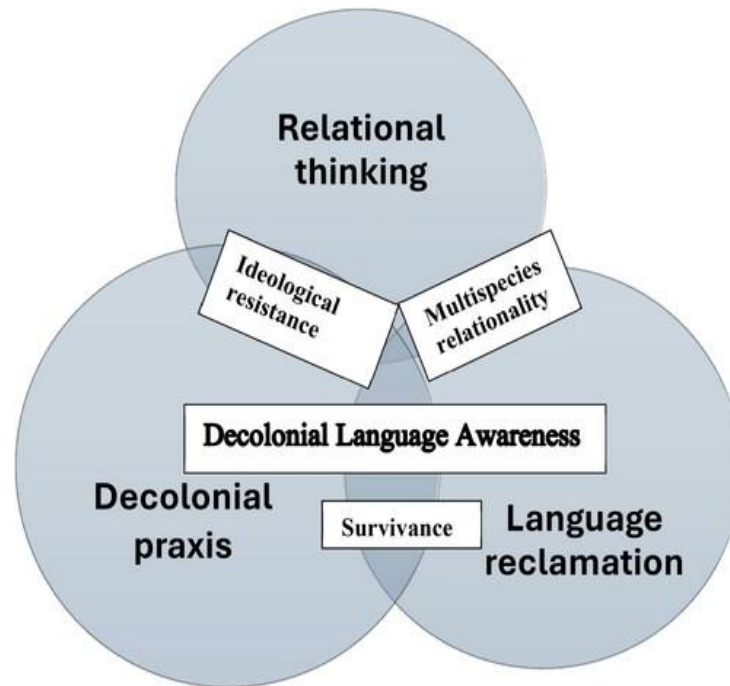


Figure 3. Decolonial Language Awareness and Indigenous Knowledge

(Source: https://www.tandfonline.com/cms/asset/976ccbf6-1ebe-4354-23bb73c948e217d/rmla_a_2580330_f0003_c.jpg)

While the concepts of “institutional” and “ideological” domination remain relevant in postcolonial analysis, it should not be used to preemptively decide who or what is legitimate to define and read into the Indigenous meaning. Relationships are productive when Indigenous knowledge can challenge postcolonial thoughts, and there is discussion. This maintains their common critical purpose but without compromising Indigenous interpretive sovereignty.

6. Reclaiming Cultural Identity Through Indigenous Literature

6.1 Oral Traditions, Language, and Memory

Oral histories and written accounts can help carry forward cultural memory about displacement and over multiple generations. Living together does not constitute a situation where Indigenous traditions have disappeared, rather, this is an example of cultural adaptation and continuity (Hembrom, 2022). Storytelling also offers avenues to deal with the colonial trauma and never limit identity to suffering (Mussi, 2023). Place names and kinship relations as well as cultural concepts are not translatable because they are part of indigenous languages. They have been featured in literature, and they counter claims that one descriptive vocabulary is sufficient to describe all cultures.

6.2 Land and Ancestral Relationships

In colonial narratives land is frequently viewed as property or an economic asset. Indigenous literatures place emphasis on the relationality of land, the spirit of land, and the Indigenous peoples who are connected to land within its history. Khasi poetry challenges development practices that threaten ancestral territories and traditional relationships with land (Chakraborty, 2024). Similarly, Indigenous Australian ecological narratives question Western distinctions between human life, nature, and Country by emphasising their interconnectedness (Brown, 2023). By minimizing the land to environmental imagery, you forget the political and spiritual significance too. Indigenous-centered readings, on the other hand, inquire into how the place defines responsibilities, belonging, and authority in regard to cultural histories.



Figure 4. Dimensions of Indigenous Cultural Identity

(Source:https://www.tandfonline.com/cms/asset/98974170-3da5-44e6-ad15-af9bcd36e73b/tqse_a_2233939_f0003_c.jpg)

6.3 Cultural Self-Representation

Representation must be controlled for reclamation. Rather than portraying Indigenous characters as passive witnesses to a disappeared past, literary narratives can express continuing cultural relationships and responsibilities towards future generations (Donovan, 2024). Identity, in other words, is a process which is constantly probing, not merely the reactions to colonial transgression. The author of a particular story may be reallocated through indigenous preferences of language, narrative, and address to the audience. Indigenous literature should not be solely for the education of outsiders. It might speak to Indigenous readers, capture conversation within it, and imagine Futures. A knowledge of these purposes prevents reclamation from turning into a quest to be judged as safe and acceptable and approved by others.

7. Towards an Indigenous-Centred Critical Dialogue

7.1 Complementary Roles

A productive reading is shaped by an engagement with postcolonial critiques of imperial ideology and Indigenous critical engagements with the local, land, and sovereignty. It is the first aspect that helps to explain the oppressive structures, and the second aspect that helps to determine which cultural meaning has been hidden by the structures. The functions must not be overwritten. In actuality, a critic can look at the text's cultural terms and formal decisions in making the point, as well as review if their reading upholds community specific meaning. This sequence is a suggested analysis only, no it has not been validated in an empirical way.

Any discourse which is worthy of its purpose has to give itself to those principles. Structural criticism can shed light on the unfolding of colonial power, but not on community-specific meanings, while cultural interpretation can affirm tradition but fail to even mention material domination. They are not in isolation the answer to the problem.

7.2 Conditions and Limitations

Comparative work cannot be homogenizing or discarding interpretations by Western standards. Decisions and choices should be guided by community-based knowledge and relational accountability (Tynan & Bishop, 2023). The model proposed here is one "way to read" and not a consensus among Indigenous writers of how to read. If someone is a critic, they need to recognise their own views and limitations in evidence. They are also responsible for covering for other flaws such as apparent discrepancies in the experience and claims of each community of Indigenous writers.

8. Challenges and Limitations

No generalisation can be made because of geographical and methodological variation. This is a scholarly review written in English, and does not include community-based interviews and might demonstrate publishing-system biases. It is important to recognise that this is a conceptual review and as such should not be interpreted as reflective of how the framework would be assessed by Indigenous communities. Academic

Exploring The Relationship Between Postcolonial And Indigenous Literary Criticism In Challenging Colonial Narratives And Reclaiming Cultural Identity

sources might not recognise knowledge that can be found outside university institutions. These constraints limit the generalisability of the framework in this instance and stress the need for more community-based research.

9. Future Directions

Further research could focus on Indigenous-language texts, peoples' stories, and publishing disparities. None of the reading approaches, whether Indigenous-centred or traditional, are likely to produce a uniform interpretation of text and it would be interesting to see if they were not different, how the two methods would compare when using collaborative approaches. Comparative research can be done to examine the same texts using both methods to highlight the differences in readings and account for the differences. Consideration could be given to collaboration with the community to review any such difference and determine if this would benefit the interpretive accountability.

10. Conclusion

Both traditions counter the colonial narrations, albeit with different conceptions of cultural authority. Indigenous criticism focuses on living knowledge, land and sovereignty, imperial criticism focuses on imperial representation. When interpretation of Indigeneity or self-determination rules comparison, their relationship works. Recovering cultural identity does require a degree of control of its current significance, which of course is separate from rectifying past colonial issues. This article is thus against theoretical separation as well as easy synthesis. The contribution of its own place is a 'conditional dialogue' where structural critique makes sense but interpretation is placed under the authority of Indigenous interpretation.

References

1. Brown, J.M., 2023. "The Interconnectedness and Spiritual Equality of All Things": Recovering Indigenous Ecological Imagination in Postcolonial Australian Fiction. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 64(3), pp.477-490. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00111619.2022.2053044>
2. Buffoli, C., 2025. Decolonial readings: Challenging Eurocentric frames of interpretation in contemporary criticism of Indigenous literatures. The case of Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 61(5), pp.620-633. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17449855.2025.2492153>
3. Chakraborty, S., 2024. Traditional land, postcolonial development, and indigenous ecocriticism in Esther Syiem's poems. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 60(3), pp.285-300. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17449855.2024.2337734>
4. Charon, M. and Lehartel, T., 2023. Decolonial Metatextualities: Strategies of Resistance in Three Contemporary Novels of Oceania. *etropics: electronic journal of studies in the tropics*, 22(1), pp.197-214. <https://hal.science/hal-04153202/>
5. Donovan, K.T., 2024. These ones will learn it too': transforming relationships with Chelsea Vowel's 'kitaskinaw'. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 14(4), pp.518-536. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/2201473X.2024.2378239>
6. Eppley, K., Wood, J. and Stagg-Peterson, S., 2024. Resistance Literature: Representations of Land and Indigeneity in Indigenous-Author, Canadian Award-Winning Rural Young Adult and Middle-Grade Fiction. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 67(4), pp.206-216. <https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jaal.1318>
7. Hembrom, R., 2022. Cohabiting a textualized world: Elbow room and Adivasi resurgence. *Modern Asian Studies*, 56(5), pp.1464-1488. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-asian-studies/article/cohabiting-a-textualized-world-elbow-room-and-adivasi-resurgence/4A3F146EBC9C4F6A2A0561A9AF473961>
8. Islam, N., 2024. "Odd but recognizable": Indigenous Epistemologies and Indo-Creole Belonging in Cyril Dabydeen's *Dark Swirl*. *ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 55(2), pp.31-58. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/925428/summary>
9. Maisuangdibou, M. and Chandran, R.A., 2026. Towards a Tribal Literary Criticism in India: Engaging Northeast Tribal Voices in English Literature. *3L, Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 32(1), pp.333-348. <https://search.proquest.com/openview/0f61e98ae9fc32c2a42087ccd6f97170/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=4413477>
10. McGiffin, E., 2024. Raced and Erased: Settler Colonialism and Environmental Violence in the Poetry of Jordan Abel. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 31(1), pp.4-25. <https://academic.oup.com/isle/article-abstract/31/1/4/6602046>

11. Morton, S., 2024. Decolonizing allegory and anti-imperialist critique in the longue durée of extractivism. *Literature, Critique, and Empire Today*, 59(1), pp.73-84.
12. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/30333962241236094>
13. Mussi, F., 2023. Land and storytelling: Indigenous pathways towards healing, spiritual regeneration, and resurgence. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 58(3), pp.660-676. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00219894211031716>
14. Swaraj, S., & Mishra, B. (2023). Decolonial re-existence through animist realism: Water spirits and shamanic mantras in Janice Pariat's *Boats on Land*. *eTropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics*, 22(1), 130–154. <https://doi.org/10.25120/etropic.22.1.2023.3974>
15. Tynan, L., & Bishop, M. (2023). Decolonizing the literature review: A relational approach. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 29(3–4), 498–508. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221101594>