

# **Indigenous People, Plants, and Poetry: Understanding Biocultural Justice as an Essential Component of Sustainable Development**

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**October 2022**



# INTRODUCTION

- **Biocultural justice is an understanding of environmental justice that addresses the interconnections between ecology, culture, and heritage.**
- **For Sanjay Kabir Bavikatte (2014), biocultural rights include access to natural resources, self-determination, cultural sovereignty, and land stewardship.**
- **The idea of biocultural justice connects with many of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals such as 10 "Reduced Inequalities" and 15 "Life on Land."**
- **Poetry by Indigenous authors engages extensively with ideas of biocultural justice and, by extension, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.**

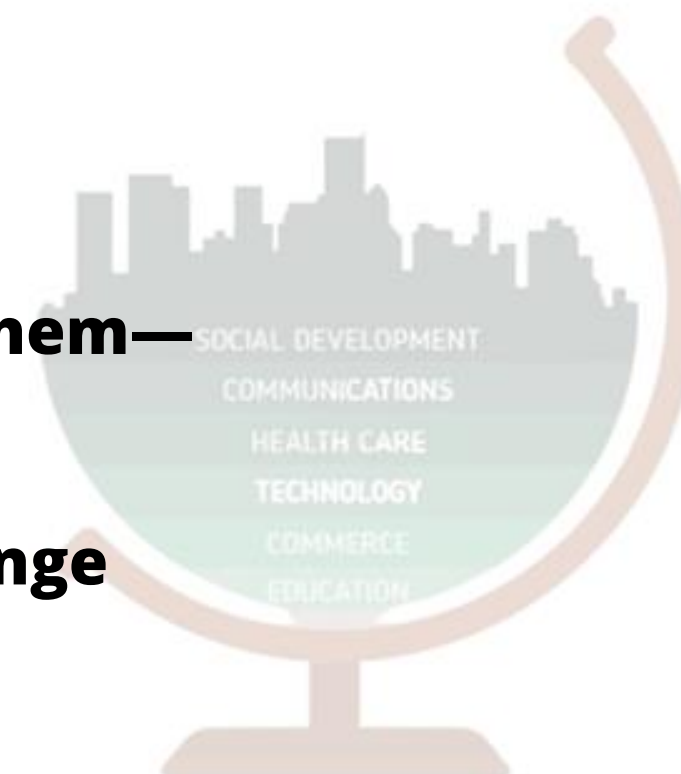


# INTRODUCTION

For poet Craig Santos Perez, *Indigenous ecopoetics* underscores “how the primary themes in native texts express the idea of interconnection and interrelatedness of humans, nature, and other species” (2015, para. 14)

## *Works of Indigenous Ecopoetics:*

- ***call attention*** to the significance of the land to First Nations genealogies, ontologies, and epistemologies
- ***critique*** colonialist constructions of non-human beings as objects to be appropriated, commodified or eradicated
- ***inflect*** a view of non-humans—and creative works produced *from* and *with* them—as agents of recuperation, resistance and reciprocity
- ***link*** creators, audiences, land, materials and technologies in dynamic exchange





# INTRODUCTION



## Indigenous Phytopoetics

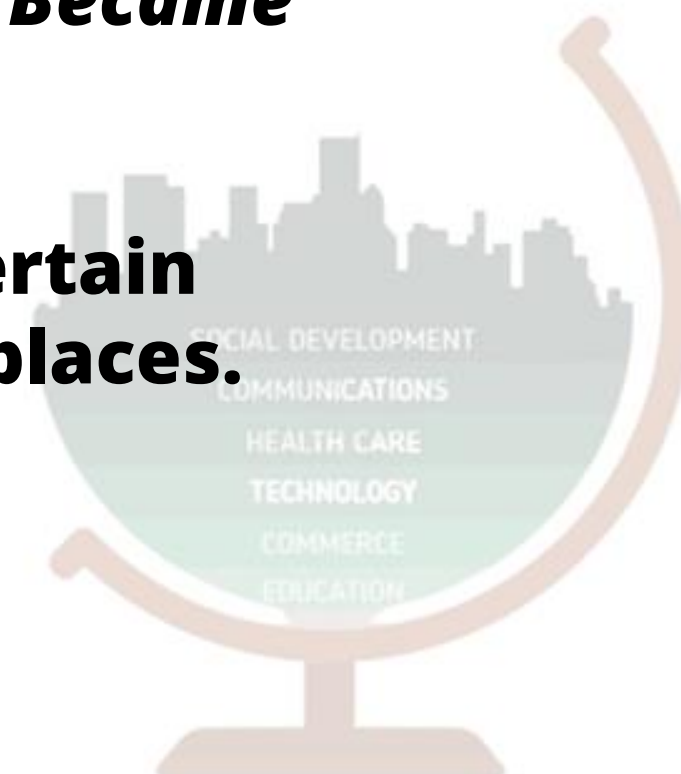
- ***narrativize*** human relationships to plants
- ***critique*** issues impacting people's access to plants
- ***inspire*** modes of human-botanical sovereignty





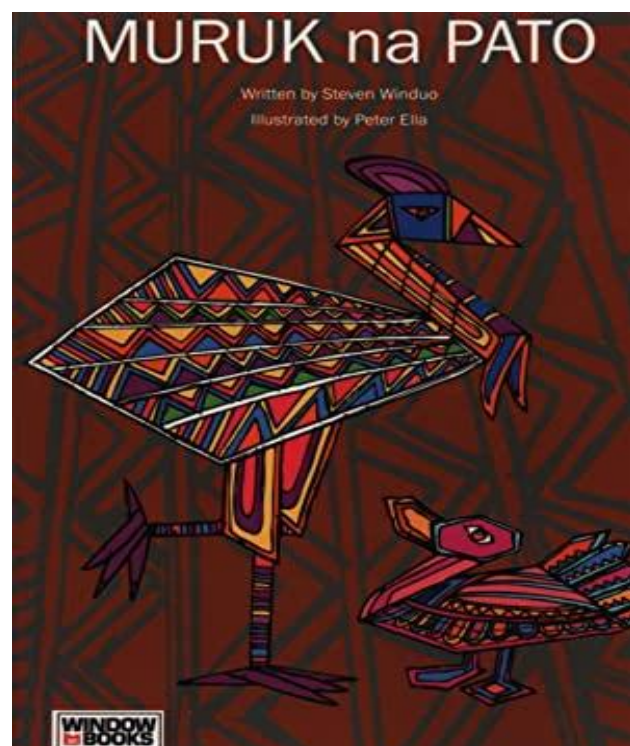
# MATERIAL AND METHODS

- **The main method employed in this study is textual analysis, or close textual reading of literary works.**
- **Key texts include Perez's *Habitat Threshold* from 2020, Bill Neidjie's *Story About Feeling* from 1989, Steven Winduo's *Hembemba* from 2000, James Steven's *Combing the Snakes From His Hair* from 2002, and Joy Harjo's *How We Became Human* from 2004.**
- **The texts were read from an ecocritical perspective in order to ascertain references to cultural traditions involving plants within particular places.**





# RESULTS





# RESULTS

## SEEDS AND ROOTS



Blood of roots so ancient  
Roots becoming of seeds  
Early passionate moments  
Textured clay masks  
Sacred forest's mysteries  
Valley of thousand tribes  
Ponds where animals visit

Savannah sadness of my tears  
Anuki martyrs tell of present heroes.

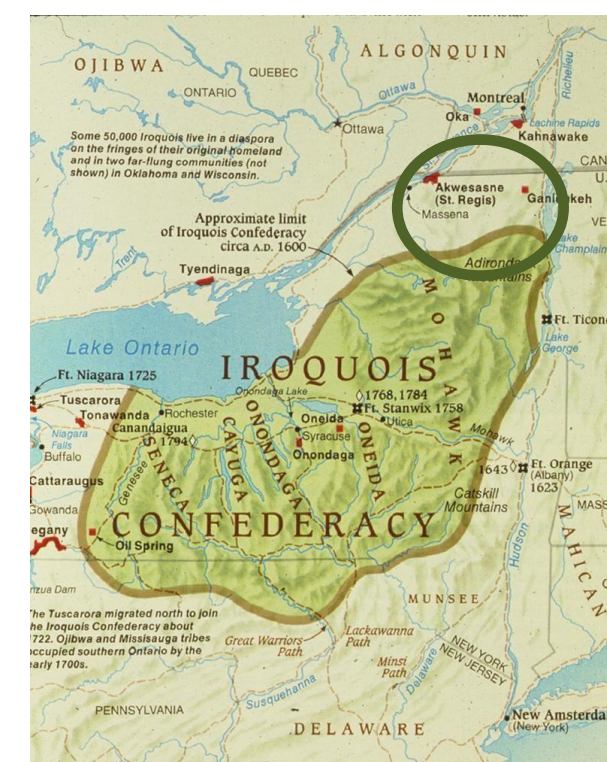
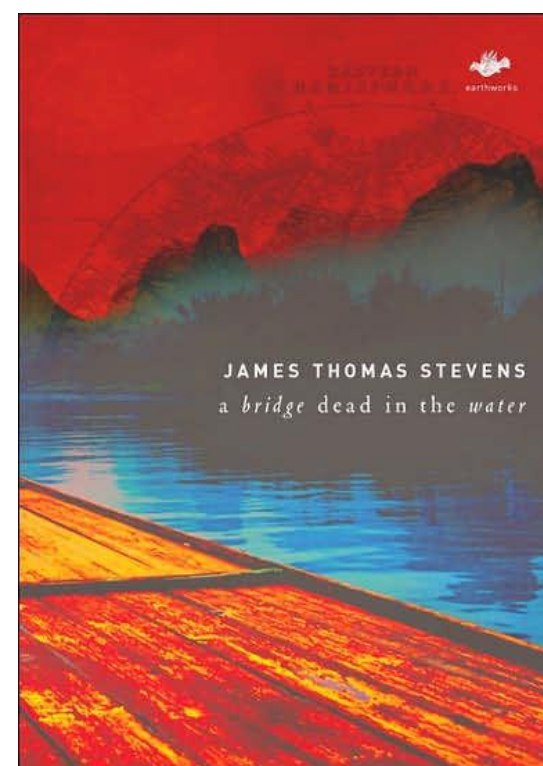
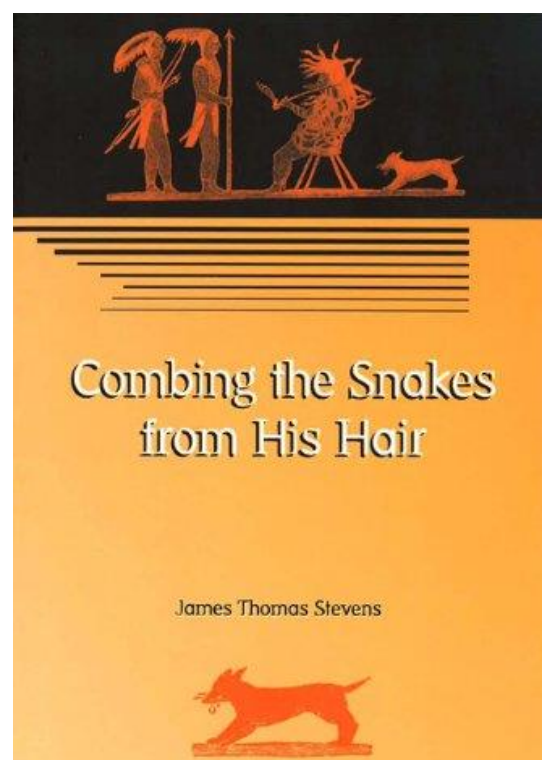
Somewhere in this world the dead poets  
Are feasting over the birth of Lomo'ha  
Maybe under the timeless sword of Mao  
Beneath the shambles of Berlin Wall  
Maybe in the inner cities of America.

If a poet must have a name let  
History reveal it while the poet is alive  
Give us the poet whose eyes are a rainbow  
Neither washed in tears nor shaken by bullets  
A poet must avoid the terror of bombs  
The pilgrims must sing through the night.  
A nation must rise after it has fallen  
Like a poet of visions without a word  
And who must rise to its greatness.





# RESULTS





# RESULTS



## *El Melon*

My mistake to take you  
from our great lake climes to  
the desert southwest.

*Cucurbita foetidissima* –

the Buffalo Gourd.

Its long train of triangulated leaf,  
gourds greened and striped,  
yellow in late summer sun.

& following the Doctrine of Signatures,  
I locate its root  
more than fifteen inches  
circumferent.

Divergent, divided into three,  
two large as legs,  
call to mind your narrow &  
southern Italian waist.

The doctrine, that each  
healing plant mimics, the shape or colour  
of the body part it heals.

Apply it  
to its correspondent.

But I note  
in the cracked gourds singing  
from the side of the road,  
spidery sinews  
filling their blacked and yawning maws.

There is a string in your throat  
that you are learning to bow.

I press the gourd against your mouth.





# IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

- **Works of Indigenous phytopoetics highlight the material, spiritual, and transgenerational interdependencies between people and plants.**
- **In the writing of Winduo and Stevens, plants are agents of Indigenous cultural sovereignty with the capacity to nourish, heal, and inspire.**
- **Their poetry links to SDG Goals 3 “Good Health and Well-Being,” 10 “Reduced Inequalities,” 11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities,” 13 “Climate Action,” and 15 “Life on Land.”**
- **Poetry reveals aspects of Indigenous biocultural heritage, forwarding ideas of biocultural justice and connecting to Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN.**





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- **I acknowledge Southern Cross University and the University of Notre Dame, Australia.**
- **Thank you for your kind attention to this presentation.**
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