

**Exploring a South African Indian Woman Poet  
and her Poetry from an Indigenous Perspective:  
Interviews with Francine Simon and  
Readings of Selected Poems from *Thungachi*.**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this dissertation “Exploring a South African Indian Woman Poet and her Poetry from an Indigenous Perspective: Interviews with Francine Simon and Readings of Selected Poems from *Thungachi*” is my own unaided work and that all sources used are indicated and acknowledged as references. This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts by Research at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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## Abstract

This dissertation executes a critical reading of Francine Simon's poetry in relation to contemporary perspectives of indigenous knowledge (IK), and against the political background and socio-cultural context of the poet's lived experiences. Simon is an emerging South African Indian (SAI) woman poet in the contemporary poetry scene, and has recently published a debut poetry collection titled *Thungachi*. I unpack instances of IK from selected poems in *Thungachi*, through use of an *indigenous language of critique*. Linda Tuhiwai Smith conceptualises *indigenous language of critique* as a form of theory that indigenous research scholars should engage with, by combining questions of indigeneity with attributes of decolonisation (24). Framed by decolonial theory, this study serves the interests of decolonising research praxis, and thereby the nature of the knowledge produced. I have executed in-depth interviews with the poet to determine how she came to acquire IK and how such knowledge is conveyed and dealt with in her poetry. The interviews are presented as an experiential montage, countering the "objective" nature of academic research that distances the knower from the known. The dissertation is thus composed of theoretical analysis and creative reflections, which together offer a textured exploration of the selected poems and an *experience* of the poetry. Using the interview data as a supplementary device, I conduct the poetry analysis with the following questions, which pertain to examining the data from an indigenous perspective: What indigenous worldviews are prevalent in Simon's poetry? To what culture/s may those worldviews be attributed? How is IK affected by diaspora, gender and cultural hybridity? This study finds that it is necessary to critique Simon's poetry from an indigenous perspective in order to uncover its cultural complexities, ontological insights and social commentary. Additionally, Simon's poetry demonstrates artistry, experimentation with language and form, and innovates a genre of decolonised feminist poetics that creates room for the heterogeneity of South African Indian women.

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## A Note on the Text

This dissertation makes use of a variety of research methods across theoretical and creative disciplines in the Humanities. The length of this dissertation is attributed to unconventional research writing techniques and formatting in chapter four. The dissertation refers to my interviews with Francine Simon as well as her doctoral thesis titled “Experimental Explorations of Selected Women’s Innovative Poetry Written in English, with a focus on ‘the Gurlisque’.” To distinguish between the two bodies of work, I use the abbreviated in-text reference “EWP” and relevant page numbers when referring to Simon’s thesis. References to the interviews are stated in each sentence and do not contain parenthetical in-text citations. References to Simon’s poems include the title of the poem and line numbers where necessary.

The following additional abbreviations have been employed for in-text references to author’s with more than one work, who are referenced recurrently:

- DSAIE*     *A Dictionary of South African Indian English* by Rajend Mesthrie.
- ELS*        *English in Language Shift: The History, Structure and Sociolinguistics of South African Indian English* by Rajend Mesthrie.
- III*         *Inside Indian Indenture* by Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed.
- MoF*        *Melancholia of Freedom: Social Life in an Indian Township in South Africa* by Thomas Blom Hansen.
- “WNFS”    “Where Names Fall Short: Names as Performance in Contemporary Urban South Africa” by Thomas Blom Hansen.

Other titles have been shortened for in-text references but are stated in full at least once. Abbreviations to the following terms have also been employed:

- SAI         South African Indian
- SAIE        South African Indian English
- IK          Indigenous knowledge
- IKS         Indigenous knowledge systems

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1. Research Topic, Background and Context

This dissertation executes a critical reading of Francine Simon's poetry in relation to contemporary perspectives of indigenous knowledge (IK), and within the political background and socio-cultural context of the poet's lived experiences. Simon is an emerging South African Indian (SAI) woman poet in the contemporary poetry scene and has recently published a debut poetry collection titled *Thungachi*. I unpack instances of IK from selected poems in *Thungachi* through use of an *indigenous language of critique*. Linda Tuhiwai Smith conceptualises *indigenous language of critique* as a form of theory that indigenous research scholars should engage with, by combining questions of indigeneity with attributes of decolonisation (24). Framed by decolonial theory, this study serves the interests of decolonising research praxis, and thereby the nature of the knowledge produced. I have conducted in-depth interviews with Simon to determine how she came to acquire IK and how such knowledge is conveyed and dealt with in her poetry. The interviews are presented as an experiential montage, countering the 'objective' nature of academic research that distances the knower from the known. The dissertation is thus composed of theoretical analysis and creative reflections, which together offer a textured exploration of the selected poems and an *experience* of the poetry. Using the interview data as a supplementary device, I conduct the poetry analysis with the following questions, which pertain to examining the data from an indigenous perspective: What indigenous worldviews are prevalent in Simon's poetry? To what culture/s may those worldviews be attributed? How is IK affected by diaspora and cultural hybridity?

The beginning of this chapter provides summative background information about the poet, working definitions of key concepts, and the rationale and research objectives of this study. Thereafter I include a brief overview of SAI history to assist with locating both the poet and myself within the timeline of South African political history. I also explain my ethical dilemma as an insider/outsider in relation to researching poetry that represents my own identity as a SAI woman. The latter part of this chapter



considers theoretical arguments regarding the political power of poetry. It focuses on theorists who write from indigenous, feminist, post-structuralist, and post-colonial perspectives, in order to provide a conceptual map for reading Simon's poetry. This brief review serves to support the rationale that poetry, as IK, is a political genre and a promising source of decolonising praxis. I link these views to examples of contemporary South African poetry criticism that demonstrate applications of indigenous perspectives in reading poetry. These texts illustrate how decolonised research practices, combined with contemporary examples of South African poetry, provide insight into alternative and local ways of knowing that deflect from the Western episteme. A chapter summary that outlines the contents of this dissertation concludes this introduction.

I will elaborate on my choice of theoretical framework in the next chapter but must emphasise here, that my study is undertaken from the perspective of IK in poetry. Although this research deals with a woman poet who writes about women's issues from the vantage point of her particular cultural identity, I have chosen a theoretical approach that is cultural rather than feminist. I acknowledge that feminist theory is the expected analytical lens for research on a woman writer. However, my study centralises IK and associated theories in order to offer a novel approach to literary analysis and to enquire within an emerging and decolonising field of knowledge.

### The Poet: Francine Simon

Simon is a twenty-nine-year-old contemporary poet. During our interviews, Simon provided information regarding her family's background and upbringing. She was born and raised in Durban by Catholic-converted parents of Tamil linguistic heritage. She grew up in the affluent, mostly white neighbourhood of Durban North and was educated at Model C schools, which distanced her from close relatives who had been living in the "Indian" area of Chatsworth since the promulgation of the Group Areas Act. Simon's father managed to remain in Isipingo, the town of his upbringing. In 1990 when Simon was born, the Group Areas Act was repealed, allowing her parents to move to Greyville, closer to their family-run clothing business. Years later her family relocated to Durban North, accompanied by Simon's younger sister and her maternal grandmother. During her childhood Simon was a staunch Catholic devotee

like the rest of her family, attending Church regularly and adhering to religious conventions. She studied English at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and on discovering an aptitude for poetry writing, took on a master's degree in creative writing. She produced a portfolio of poems, which marked the beginnings of *Thungachi*. In 2018, Simon graduated with a PhD from Stellenbosch University. Her thesis titled "Experimental Explorations of Selected Women's Innovative Poetry Written in English, with a focus on 'the Gurlisque' ", led to the publication of her debut poetry collection — *Thungachi* — by uHlanga Press in 2017. *Thungachi* means "little sister" in the Tamil language. Simon, having a Christian name, asked her parents for an Indian nickname according to SAI household traditions. As a result, her father gave her the name *Thungachi*, ironically because Simon is the older of his two daughters. Simon's thesis tracks her struggle to find women poets whose work consolidated the hybridity and fragmentation of South African Indians, in a way that resonated with her own identity. When she failed to find such poets, she sought guidance from experimental women poets who transgress genre and gender boundaries through innovative explorations of marginalised 'femaleness' ("EWP" 3). In addition to *Thungachi*, Simon's poems have been published in journals and literary magazines, such as *The Sol Plaatjie European Union Poetry Anthology*, *New Contrast*, *New Coin*, *Illuminations*, *The Atlantic Review*, *Ons Klyntji*, *Prufrock*, *ConVerse*, *AVBOB Poetry Project Anthology*, *Stanzas* and numerous online journals such as *Aerodrome* and *Type/Cast*. She was a featured poet at the Franschhoek Literary Festival and the Poetry in McGregor Festival in 2018. During her PhD candidature, Simon married Christoph Pan, a German-speaking Italian student of engineering. Simon is currently spending a year in Italy with her husband and his family, as she ventures into new writing projects.

### Important Working Definitions

Before I explicate the research objectives and rationale for this study, I must provide working definitions to strengthen the suggested associations between IK, decolonisation and South African Indians. Dei, Hall and Rosenberg identify the issue of defining IK and establishing appropriate parameters when researching IK (5). The term 'indigenous', historically associated with colonial classifications, was used to describe all non-Caucasian communities as a single homogenous group (Purcell 259).

Contemporary, anti-colonial scholarship — accounting for forced migration, diaspora and hybridised identities — focuses on indigeneity in relation to knowledge, rather than to the geographical residency of the knowledge holder. IK constitutes a range of enduring epistemologies, ontologies, cultural practices, beliefs and traditions belonging to heterogeneous groups of people (Shahjahan 214). IK determines and texturises a people's worldview, refers to the long-term accumulation of empirical and spiritual knowledge used to regulate life, is predominantly disseminated through orality or practice, encompasses non-dual thinking, and recognises living and non-living beings as important components in the natural order of the world (Dei, Hall and Rosenberg 6; Dei 5; Gone 3-4).

This study is founded on anti-colonial understandings of indigeneity, which will be detailed in the following chapter. Although this research is broadly located in anti-colonial discourse, it is conceptually framed by theories of decolonisation. Anti-colonialism is used as an umbrella term to describe various schools of thought that seek to oppose colonial power and “restore local control” (Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 15). Focused on subverting notions of immutable relations between coloniser and colonised, anti-colonial discourse may include or refer to scholars of post-colonial theory, post-structuralism and decolonial theory. Thus, decolonial theory is one instance of anti-colonial discourse with a distinct approach to deconstructing the relationship between coloniser and colonised. For Smith, decolonisation is not restricted to national, geographical independence but is “a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power” (98). As such, theories of decolonisation frequently entail a rigorous analysis of colonialism, modernity and Western epistemology. I will provide further account of decolonial theory in chapter two.

The terms ‘Western epistemology’ or ‘Western *knowledge*’ are often used by decolonial and indigenous research scholars to describe the authoritative, scientific methodologies used to validate, verify and engender all institutionalised knowledge (Purcell 259). Under the traditional, positivist tenets of Western knowledge construction, any knowledge that cannot be tested, measured or rendered ‘objectively true’ is considered inferior, irrational and consequently marginalised. Western epistemology is both predicated on and is the predicator of modernity. Its increasingly

scientific, methodical approach to life is commonly attributed to key European intellectuals, such as René Descartes and Isaac Newton. Descartes's concept of mind/body dualism renders a mechanical world that severs the internal, sensational and psychological from the objective, external world (Semali and Kincheloe 26). Newton's advances on physics rationalised cause and effect, promoting the ideology that predictions could be made on any phenomenon if its conditions were measured, tested and scrutinised (26). Subsequently, Western scientific modes of thinking reinforced colonial conquest, patriarchy and capitalism by seeing the Earth, its people, its resources and landscapes as objects, subjects and commodities to own. Dei, Hall and Rosenberg elaborate:

Positivist thinking and the traditions of 'rationality', 'objectification', 'reason', 'progress', and the certainty of knowledge are the hallmarks of Western scientific knowledge. Social phenomena are often presented in structural forms that downplay the human element and the dimension of emotion and intuition. (8)

It is clear that Western modes of inquiry and perception do not account for indigenous epistemologies. Thus, anti-colonial discourse seeks the resurgence of IK as counter-colonial, counter-culture discourse, seeing IK as relevant in contemporary political thinking and not confined to the pre-colonial past (Dei, Hall and Rosenberg 6).

It is also necessary for me to clarify my use of the descriptors: 'female' and 'woman'. First, I must note that, in many instances, Simon describes herself and her influences as 'female poets.' She asks the following question in her thesis:

Searching for examples of local innovative female poetry, and unable to find an obvious local figure of female inspiration and guidance, where does a young South African 'Indian' female poet turn when she is writing between the uneasy claims of a gendered identity and linguistic-conceptual experimentalism? (3)

Although I respect Simon's views and will approach an analysis of her poetry that adheres to her own ways of theorising her identity and poetic process, I am cognisant of feminist scholars who derogate the term 'female.' Lockett suggests that in feminist scholarship, the term 'female' is used to connote biological identity, while 'the feminine' refers to "values that are marginal and often oppositional" and is used to indicate the redefinition of women's roles in society (7). Similarly, Nfah-Abbenyi emphasises that in most examples of feminist scholarship, sex is differentiated from

gender, where gender is understood as “the nonphysiological aspects of sex, a group of attributes and/or behaviours, shaped by society and culture” (259). Thus, this dissertation will use the terms ‘feminine’ and ‘woman/women’ when dealing with issues of gender and the social expectations of a person’s behaviour in their community. However, I use the term ‘female’ in instances where gendered identities are not subsumed, for example when referring to mythological or non-human figures, to certain indigenous practices and to the physical female body. I also use the term ‘femaleness’ in line with Simon’s use of the concept as a poetic device. In her thesis, Simon expresses her concern with ‘femaleness’ being the singular, predominant and defining element of a women’s identity, especially within the context of SAI culture. Consequently, she redefines and explores ‘femaleness’ as “multiple inflections rather than struggling with the inability to fit into a coherent, single position” (22). Thus, Simon’s understanding of ‘femaleness’ offers a deconstructive interpretation of gender, whereby femaleness is the locus from which to approach gender issues.

#### Rationale and Research Objectives

This study responds to a range of gaps in literature on IK. Its overarching rationale is based on notions that IK can have liberating and decolonising values if it is intellectualised and integrated into the mainstream system (Ntsoane 100). The re-acquisition, promotion and protection of IK has a place in South African governmental policies (Botha 8). Indigenising education is the predominant concern for African IK activists and theorists who advocate modified pedagogical approaches and curriculum content, which will be relevant to the lived experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds of black students. The task is to “create new ways of knowing” and “different strategies for sharing knowledge” (Ntsoane 97). When researching IK in South Africa, the available outputs hold strongly to essentialist views – focusing predominantly on indigenous African ethnic groups and pre-colonial beliefs and practices. A 2009 survey, conducted by Moos, Struwig and Roberts for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), reveals that coloured and Indian respondents were less supportive of IKS initiatives in the country than black respondents. The report on the survey states, “People in tribal and informal urban areas are more inclined to support IKS” (“Local is Lekker”). There is no present evidence of inquiry into SAI culture from the perspective of IK. South African Indians have lived in the

country for over 150 years, experiencing a long, troublesome history of systematic oppression and cultural repression and should be represented in national decolonising outputs. Thus, this study aims to produce IK research in relation to SAI culture. My purpose here is not to categorise SAI culture as an expression of IK, but simply to recognise the dynamics of IK that are embedded in SAI lived experiences, and ways of seeing the world that deviate from — and co-exist with — Western epistemologies.

Secondly, I am cognisant of the lack of IK research into humanities' disciplines. Botha deduces that from the perspective of national discourse, indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) initiatives have strong economic orientations, neglecting to realise opportunities for liberation (10-11). My research began as a response to the National Research Foundation's (NRF) call for research on IKS, particularly its request for "novel and creative thinking that will shift the boundaries of IKS knowledge production and that address national priorities in South Africa" (3). The South African Poetry Project (ZAPP) has responded to this call by producing research on contemporary IK poetry. Newfield emphasises that ZAPP interrogates essentialist views of IK by regarding indigeneity as heterogeneous, mutable and fluid. ZAPP aims to "reconceptualise poetry in terms of indigenous oral traditions, currently reconstituted and hybridised through global intersections of culture" (1). Later I will provide a brief survey of poetry criticism in South Africa that endorses indigenous critique in relation to literary analysis. I will indicate that poetry is a highly political genre that can afford deep cultural insight if coupled with IK studies.

Thirdly, the introspection of Simon's poetry for this research is partially a personal choice. I identify deeply with her poetry and have never been exposed to such personally relatable poetry in either my school or tertiary education. This study therefore addresses gaps in my own life and educational experience. Additionally, there is lack of profound academic investigation on SAI women poets. Devarakshanam Govinden produced a doctoral thesis titled " 'Sister Outsiders' – The Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected Writings by South African Indian Women" (2000) which gives some focus to SAI women's poetry. In 2008, the thesis was published as a book. Aside from Govinden's work, there is no extensive academic research that centralises SAI women's poetry.

Finally, my study contends that mainstream versions of SAI history do not suffice. Kumar and Tiwari postulate that personal narratives, literature, songs and testimonies should be considered as viable sources in the historiography of indenture (22). Largely predicated on limited archival material and colonialist renditions of indenture, the rich oral histories that exist in the community are frequently overlooked. This research aims to give credence to SAI oral traditions for its vital role in cultural continuity and its encapsulation of indigenous ways of knowing.

### South African Indians: Brief Historical Background

“Slavery had been abolished. But labourers were still required to sweat in the fields” (Sam 129). These words by Agnes Sam in *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* powerfully depict the beginnings of the SAI subject. Growing up, I was told that our people were brought to South Africa as slaves to plant sugar cane for the Queen. According to my family, I am a fifth generation SAI. My great-great-grandparents arrived on board the *Truro* and *Belvedere*. My maternal predecessors came from Pondicherry: a French colony in India during the emergence of indenture. The story was always told as if those ships came together. Only during formal education did I learn the term ‘indenture’. Sam offers a narrative rendition of indenture, similar to my family’s stories, telling of how poverty-stricken Indians were coerced into parting with their families, seduced by offers of minimal wages, greener pastures and a passage back to India after gaining sufficient finances, all with the belief that slave trade principles were entirely relinquished (Sam 129-131). While a considerable percentage of indentured labourers were descendants of low-caste, poor communities who sought a better quality of life, they do not account for all the migrants who travelled to South Africa (Ebrahim-Vally 122). Some were recruited by British sub-agents who “would lurk in temples, at weddings, community meetings” feeding Indians with promises of brighter futures (127). The *Truro* arrived at Port Natal on 16 November 1860, followed by the *Belvedere* on 26 November. Together the ships contained nearly seven hundred indentured migrants from various parts of the Indian sub-continent. Desai and Vahed describe this moment: “Hierarchies ‘imagined’ into being over a long period; divisions based on age-old customs; castes, religions, dialects, centuries in the making, unravelling. Space, time and place compressed” (III 1).

Despite the myth of the *kala pani* (dark waters) which forbade Indians to cross the ocean, likening it to debasing the soul; to the loss of a pristine Hinduism; and to banishment with no return, Indians migrated to South Africa (56). The condensation of differing identities aboard the ship led to a significant collapse of the caste system, a social hierarchy based on archetypal Indian occupations (Hiralal 161). Subsequently, caste stratifications were internalised and appropriated in new ways (Ebrahim-Vally 120). Once disembarked, the passengers (most of whom were lower caste and illiterate) had their names recorded in the Indian Immigrant's Register, a dubious process that marked the interpellation of the labourers as subjects of modernity (Desai and Vahed *III* 63). Then, the myth of the *kala pani* became a truth. Indians were increasingly ill treated under the indenture system; they were forced to work fourteen hours a day, starved, physically abused and deprived of healthcare after being placed in squalid, hostile living conditions (127). Women were constantly assaulted and raped (209) and countless labourers were killed, worked to death or committed suicide (127).

The transplantation to South Africa, and working under Christian authorities who saw Hindus as pagans, caused the labourers to modify their cultural rituals (Naidoo vi). Desai and Vahed write, "These were not simply inherited and transplanted from India, but often refashioned in a fluid and complex situation" (*III* 240). Although Christianity spread throughout South India, with 1.4 percent of indentured labourers already converted before leaving Calcutta (262), conversions persisted and increased in South Africa (279). The majority of the converts were lower caste and saw conversion as a tool for politico-cultural resistance (262). Complaints of cruel treatment were systematically silenced for years until some indentured labourers managed to return to India by paying for a passage back (77). This led to new contractual agreements in 1874 between the Indian and British governments, stipulating better treatment and the allowing Indian traders to migrate to South Africa for self-entrepreneurship. These migrants were known as 'passenger Indians' or 'free Indians', most being Gujarati or Muslim, and of higher caste than the indentured labourers (Ebrahim-Vally 83). The passenger Indians arrived at port cities, including East London and Cape Town, and began the Indian diaspora throughout South Africa (126). Despite vast linguistic, caste, religious and regional differences, the designator



‘Indian’ was used to describe all who migrated from the subcontinent (84). It was only in 1961, over one hundred years after the arrival of the first generation Indians in South Africa, that their descendants received South African citizenship (Ebrahim-Vally 84).

Citizenship meant the transition from indenture to oppression under apartheid. The continual homogenisation accorded by both systems elided the complexities of the Indian population (Moodley 125). Indians began to distinguish themselves in cultural terms defined by regional cuisine, linguistic heritage and traditional garments (126). The introduction of apartheid’s Group Areas Act in 1950 complicated matters further. The act sought to separate South African residential areas into clusters based on racial hierarchy. One of the areas was Chatsworth, an Indian township about 15km south of Durban. Hansen deduces that Chatsworth was devised as a buffer between white and black residential areas in Durban. Poorer Indians were strategically positioned on the outskirts, bordering Umlazi, while middle-class Indians were located on the boundaries of working-class white neighbourhoods (“WNFS” 209). Desai and Vahed note, “Chatsworth was born at the height of apartheid’s madness when the government sought to ghettoize persons of ‘Indian’ origin into what it intended to be a frozen racial landscape” (“Writing Chatsworth” 1). Chatsworth was constituted by ten units (although the units were numbered from one to eleven for unknown reasons) and three private townships: Umhlatusana, Kharwastan and Silverglen, where Indians could purchase land on auction. The layout of Chatsworth and the strategic distribution of Indians was determined by class divisions marked by a variety of sub-economic houses: flat-like homes made from cheap material; free-standing economic houses for purchase; and free-standing houses built by Indians themselves (Vahed 26-29). Housing approximately 350 000 residents, Chatsworth became the largest Indian suburb in the country (Desai and Vahed “Writing Chatsworth” 2). Hansen postulates that the shift from apartheid to democracy instituted multi-layered feelings of loss amongst Chatsworth residents who had grown accustomed to communal intimacy, enforced by cultural enclosure and newfound economic stability (*MoF* 15-16). Referring to Freudian psychoanalysis, Hansen identifies the people of post-apartheid Chatsworth as self-reproaching and self-reviling, symptomatic of the perpetual state of ‘melancholia’ where “the loss of this deeply problematic past, its pleasures, and its

forms of life cannot be acknowledged. The past is tense, and the experience of freedom becomes melancholic” (16).

Given the post-apartheid imperative of geopolitically locating the country’s residents as ‘South African’, today Indians are officially known as ‘South African Indians’, yet widely referred to as ‘Indians’, influenced by indenture and apartheid racial classifiers. The term is still reductive and fails to account for the differences amongst a heterogeneous population of 1.3 million people (“WNFS” 202). Hansen aptly describes the incessant flux of SAI identity attributed to numerous systems of oppression and shifts in contemporary politics:

Indians in South Africa remain, in other words, “in suspension” – in a provisional and indeterminate space: with a history of forced removals, non-recognition, of economic success against many odds; of being at the mercy of powerful forces beyond their own control. . . . (“WNFS” 203)

These complexities, fragmentations and displacements are part of the reason Simon struggled to find an *affidamento* poet figure to follow (“EWP” 14). She questions her place in South Africa as an emerging poet, “What (*how?*) was I (to be) called?” (18). The indefinite answers to these questions are the reasons why Simon emphasises varying dimensions of femaleness, one of which is attributed to her ‘Indianness’ (13-14). Simon sees her identity as a rhizomatic structure — each root a confluence of cultural identifiers and femaleness (38). As a South African, Indian, woman, Catholic, Tamil, Simon acknowledges herself as provisional and frames her poetry within themes of ‘non-place’: a technique used to “provisionally situate and yet repeatedly also re-locate” (32). Simon’s poetry, while feminist and experimental, deeply captures the experiences of dispossession and loss that define the large majority of South African Indians. Given the divisions and compression of contrasting Indian cultures in South Africa, Simon’s poetry will particularly resonate with those of Tamil linguistic heritage, residents of Chatsworth and Christian converts who hold on tightly to Hindu traditions despite their religious affiliations. Yet the subdued indigenous knowledge/s infiltrating her poetry speak to a wider SAI consciousness: to those who long to know their origins, to the educated elite who are more and more distanced from their cultural ‘roots’, to those who cannot articulate their differences, and to those who are burdened by repressed and untold histories.

## The Researcher as an Insider/Outsider

There is much I share in common with Simon if viewed through the lens of identity designators: race, gender, age and nationality. We were born and raised in the city of Durban; our elders were victims of the Group Areas Act; we have relatives in Chatsworth and an ancestry tracing back to South Indian, Tamil-speaking indigenous peoples who entered South Africa through the indenture system. We share the fact that neither of us knows much about those ancestors. Even so, we had variegated upbringings: my family's religious affiliation is with Hinduism; I was raised in Umhlatuzana (one of the private, middle-class districts that forms part of the greater Chatsworth); I attended Indian-majority public schools where classmates and teachers had distinctively SAI accents and used the dialect known as South African Indian English (SAIE). I have had great exposure to Chatsworth and Hindu culture as a community member: that is, as an insider. Yet my subsequent tertiary education at an elitist institution outside Durban, and increased exposure to national, political currents, had significant impact on my view of religion, my use of language, and on my familial social circles. Smith points out that research methodologies are often devised on the assumption that the researcher is an outsider who knows nothing about the community he or she is observing (137). Drawing from reconceptualised and flexible methodologies of feminist theory (137), Smith posits and problematises the use of insider methodology for indigenous research. She suggests that the insider/outsider dynamic of researchers dealing with their own communities is two-fold. At one level the researcher is a partial insider in the particular group and shares important, eternal relationships with the community members; and, at another level, is a partial outsider by acting in the interests, or for purposes of, Western institutional research (5). Smith affirms:

Simultaneously, they work within their research projects or institutions as insiders within a particular paradigm or research model, and as outsiders because they are often marginalized and perceived to be representative of either a minority or a rival interest group. (5)

I have established my working definition of 'indigenous' in order to clarify that the community I am 'insider' to, is not removed from Western institutional practices, education or the fabric of modernity. I must also clarify that this is not an anthropological study, although it utilises certain ethnographic methods, which will

be explained in chapter three. The study focuses on Simon's poetry and contains interviews with her. I have not committed any ethnographic observations of people in Chatsworth for purposes of this research. However, through sparing use of autoethnographical inserts, I reflect on memories that mildly implicate family figures and members of my social circle. Emphasis is put on the fact that these reflections are filtered through my subjective perspective. Additionally, due to the fact that Simon's poetry bears striking resemblance to my own past and present lived and 'living' experiences, I cannot claim to deliver a purely objective conceptual analysis of her poetry and interview responses, nor do I intend to. Thus, throughout developing a research methodology, executing interviews with Simon, and in reflecting on and presenting those interviews, I was cognisant of my insider/outsider status and aimed to think through all research processes reflexively while maintaining ethical accountability to the research participant and to the wider community implicated in the research (Smith 147).

## **1.2. Literature Review**

### The Political Implications of Poetry

Audrey Lorde's essay "Poetry is not a Luxury" engages the political value of poetry from a black, feminist perspective, whilst highlighting its capacity as an agent of change. Lorde confronts white, patriarchal, capitalistic dominance as a conduit for oppressive and subalternising gestures. For Lorde, "institutional dehumanization" is justified by modernity's predilection for logical thought over feeling and experience (39). Feeling becomes the repressed skeletal structure of self-determination (36-39) and can only be exhumed through poetic activity, which gives "name to the nameless so it can be thought" (37). Lorde clarifies her definition of poetry:

I speak here of poetry as a revelatory distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that too often, the white fathers distorted the word *poetry* to mean – in order to cover a desperate wish for imagination without insight. (37)

Lorde's definition of poetry differs from the poetry of education institutions, mainstream profitable literature, or entities functioning as incumbents of imperialism.

She implies that poetry's capacity to transform distilled experience into language allows it to transcend the scientific and objective use of language as a transparent medium. As such, she indicates that liberation for victims of colonialism — particularly women — cannot occur through the use of pure logic or new ideas but through “old and forgotten ones” (38). Lorde's standpoint signals toward what Dei, Hall and Rosenberg call the ‘crisis of knowledge’: the commodification of knowledge induced by colonial and globalising forces (3). The flux of knowledge across geopolitical borders problematically configures the displacement and suppression of Third World (or what is now known as the ‘Global South’) philosophies and traditions, confounding all world knowledges with that of the ruling episteme's (4). Lorde's conjecture that forgotten, pre-existing ideas are the solution to reshaping black women's futures, resembles theories of indigenising, where “through the process of learning the old, new knowledge is discovered” (Dei, Hall and Rosenberg 6). Thus, Lorde postulates poetry as a site of resistance, accorded by its propensity to resurface silenced and marginalised ways of being. Kristevan semiology offers a comparable view in “Revolution in Poetic Language”, albeit from a psychoanalytical and semiotic perspective:

In ‘artistic’ practices the semiotic – the precondition of the symbolic – is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic, and this revelation allows us to presume something about its functioning. (103)

It is necessary to unpack Kristeva's two varieties of signification. The *semiotic* refers to the pre-linguistic process of signification. This process is marked by repetition and rhythmic baby talk during an infant's acquisition of language. Borrowing from Freud's theorisation of the pre-Oedipal complex, Kristeva associates baby talk with the phase of maternal dependency (95-98). Conversely, the *symbolic* refers to the acquisition of developed language, associated with subject differentiation and subservience to social codes constituted by signs and syntax (Lewis 31). For Kristeva, both processes are interdependent and constitute the intelligible speaking subject (Kristeva 93). The dynamic of language as both *semiotic* and *symbolic* is not apparent until a breach is affected between the two processes of signification (109-10). The breach may be incited through uses of poetic language that resemble the musicality of *pre-language*, which appropriates the primal states of fragile narcissism and maternal dependency (115). This theory posits that poetic language is self-referential; that it raises the signifier (language) above the signified (meaning) and in doing so, breaks

the continuity of an ideologically determined subject. As a result, poetic language turns language against itself, exposing it as abstract by initiating a resurgence of primal operations, and thus, the feminine. While this model accounts for poetry's ability to dismantle patriarchal ideology provisionally, its paradoxical reliance on white, male psychoanalysis and semiotic deconstruction produces what Spivak self-reflexively calls "the inbuilt colonialism of First World feminism" ("French Feminism in an International Frame" 153). Furthermore, Kristeva's theory of a *revolutionary* poetic language restricts poetry's significance to linguistic mastery. Borrowing Eagleton's words, from the post-structural perspective "poetry is writing that flaunts its material being, rather than modestly effacing it before the Holy-of-Holies of meaning" (41). It is a view that presumes all poetry functions this way, moreover, what is considered *good* poetry (41). While Kristeva's theory could be extended to forms of indigenous oral poetry, its emphasis on poetry as discourse is useful and applicable to a wider range of contexts.

Similar to post-structural theorists, Ngugi wa Thiong'o sees poetry as a metalanguage: an inventive and creative interplay of speech that makes everyday language flourish (87). His concern in *Decolonising the Mind* is peculiar to the revival of indigenous languages and cultures, which, according to him, are indivisible categories (13-16). Ngugi perceives language's ontological resonance as a power it holds to help people form organic relations to one another and to nature. Thus, he objects to the use of English over African vernaculars in African literary forms. In his view, literature's potential to repair and liberate can be maximised if presented in the relevant indigenous language (87). Intertwining semiotics with cultural analysis, Ngugi's rendition of poetic language emboldens the signifier without eclipsing the signified. Instead it revitalises the signified to the point of cultural restoration. It is useful to apply Eagleton's words here, when he remarks on the feeling of loss arising from new knowledge in *How to Read a Poem*:

Yet that something had also been lost is surely beyond question; and part of the point of poetry was to seek to restore it. In a world of instant legibility, we had lost the experience of language itself. And to lose our sense of language is to lose touch with a great deal more than language.  
(21)

While Eagleton rebukes the widely denotative and monotonous use of language in everyday speech, his words reverberate with themes of orality and the concern for the

non-institutional use of African vernaculars. Indeed his comments hold true for South African Indians, most of whom have lost the intimate cultural knowledge that goes along with Indian vernaculars. Although Eagleton's criticism appears limited to Western poetry, he elucidates the importance of considering poetry as discourse and as a language whose meaning "*is the whole process of signification itself*" (21). He describes discourse as "language grasped as a concrete social occurrence inseparable from its context. It is language seen as a transaction between human subjects, rather than viewed formally or abstractly" (90). Evidently, each of the theorists mentioned above share the common perspective of poetry as discourse. This perspective is subsequently used as a foundation for theories regarding the political competency of poetry. Kincheloe takes issue with the unquestionable use of language as representation in formalist research. He suggests the necessity of breaking out of the narrative structures that govern our perceptions of the world, bearing in mind that "students of inquiry are rarely exposed to meta-analytical orientations that facilitate the exposure of the effects of such narrative constructions" ("Redefining Rigour and Complexity in Research" 43). By acknowledging the discursive frameworks from which poetry emerges, and which are made transparent through the form and content of the poem, one is able to identify and reflect on the white, patriarchal and capitalistic narratives that rule the world. For being able to achieve this, poetry's aptitude for political empowerment is indisputable.

Ramazani explores the characteristics of poetry that set it apart from prose-dominated literary genres. Moreover, he acknowledges frequent associations between poetry and localised cultural experience and how this translates in a global context. In describing the transnational value of poetry, Ramazani states:

Because poetic compression demands that discrepant idioms and soundscapes, tropes and subgenres, be forced together with intensity, poetry—pressured and fractured by this convergence—allows us to examine at close hand how global modernity's cross-cultural vectors sometimes fuse, sometimes jangle, sometimes vertiginously counterpoint one another. (4)

For Ramazani, poetry's political value lies in its capacity to reflect adequately on the creolisation of local worldviews, raising the genre to the level of the transnational. His standpoint engages an analysis of modernity's confluence with Third World nations. This perspective can be likened to that of Latin American decolonial theorists, such as

Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Maria Lugones and Walter D. Mignolo. These theorists examine colonialism as the premise for modernity and its consequent ontological dichotomisation. Colonialism infiltrates socio-historical spheres such as the economy, militant and political authority, gender and sexuality, and knowledge and subjectivity, resulting in the colonality/modernity of the world (Mignolo 15-21; Lugones “Toward a Decolonial Feminism” 742). In “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality”, Maldonado-Torres examines how modernity is mobilised by colonial powers to incite metaphysical tribulations for colonised subjects, naturalising their subjugation and dehumanisation (11-15). These theorists recommend that in order to pursue decolonisation, one must first dismantle and scrutinise the past operations of colonialism, and the perpetual occurrence of the *coloniality of being* (10).

Ramazani’s rendition of transnational poetry as a microcosm of global tensions and fusions suggests poetry’s profound exposure of modernity/coloniality. The seemingly “one-way homogenization and westernization of the world” is challenged by poetry’s astute outlining of the cultural imbalances within the globalised world (6). Poetry then becomes a measure for decolonial resistance, articulating the inner workings of modernity/coloniality — concurrently disobeying and deviating from its paradigm. Poetry, compressed and pliable, stretches over various themes, cultures and landscapes, “its figural and allusive traversals of space, its rhythmic and sonic coordinations of distances” (14) evoking the spatial dominion of the empire, while summoning the “global ungathering of decolonization” (145). Since Ramazani’s articulation of transnational poetry encompasses both postcolonial and indigenous poetry, we must distinguish the indigenous prerogative “where the tendency has been to re-appraise metropolitan ‘touchstones’ through the telescope of alternative modernities” (Chapman 11) from post-colonial criticism, which seeks to examine liminal and hybrid spaces where coloniser and colonised interact (Chapman 10). Both positions are present in transnational poetry and refute the binary opposition between coloniser and colonised. However, where indigenous analysis perceives this binary cosmologically (Smith 25-28), post-colonial criticism sees it through the lens of the linguistic and psychoanalytical turns (Chapman 9-10). Thus, Ramazani’s meditations are crucial in evaluating contemporary South African poetry from an indigenous perspective.



## Indigenous Perspectives on Contemporary South African Poetry

Before exploring examples of literary analysis that focus on the indigenising features of contemporary South African poetry, I must first clarify what I mean by an *indigenous perspective*. I borrow my definition of the term from Michael Minor, who published a thesis titled *Decolonizing Through Poetry in the Indigenous Prairie Context* (2016). Minor rigorously argues for indigenised poetry as a specific form of decolonial activism (142). For Minor, indigenising is about repositioning society from the perspective of indigenous peoples and how indigenous principles ground and frame their lived experiences (154). Consequently, indigenous poetry can be defined as expressions of indigenous worldviews *by* indigenous peoples. The next chapter will address the issue of indigeneity, suggesting an anti-essentialist and heterogeneous definition of the term that accommodates the phenomenon of diaspora. For now, I use Minor's understanding of indigenous poetry, as I believe it is suitable and applicable to the contemporary South African context. In addition to centring indigenous worldviews, Minor posits that indigenous poetry subverts Eurocentric visions of genre by reconfiguring poetry as a multimodal genre that caters for a range of cultural expressions, art forms and every-day practices (184). Minor elaborates:

Indigenous poetry works as a decolonial force because it challenges generic boundaries, constructs writing in new ways that reject the politics of recognition, and uses this writing as both documentation of and script for performance. (184)

This view of poetic genre as artistic and historical expressions of intermingling forms, proposes that a rethinking of genre itself is part of what constitutes an indigenous worldview. The subversion of Western genre is a concern also taken up by Taban Lo Liyong. In his article "Indigenous African Literary Forms May Determine the Future Course of World Literature" (2018), Liyong posits that decolonising can be effected by the production of literary works which illuminate the spirit of a people and their unique cultural architecture. He denounces Western literature and its imperialist implications for placing African literary forms under erasure. Moreover, he claims that instruments of modernity have strategically prevented our spontaneous will to create. Liyong states:

That stopped the development of our literary genres and forms. And, by doing so, blocked our springs of thought, of inventiveness, our capacity to bring to the world stage well-developed works of art which display how

our minds and spirits work, and which we consider important for humanity's existence. (18)

For Liyong, the solution is to equip future African artists with IK by exposing them to African IK holders — “the ‘unmortared’ experts” — in order to obtain valuable traditional insight, and thereafter innovate contemporary versions of indigenous poetry and literature (27). Liyong's argument signals towards the potential for cross-pollination of genre, while emphasising the importance of anchoring literary creation within African indigenous worldviews. Now that I have clarified the type of poetry this study invests in, I will explore how these views have been applied to poetry criticism in South African contexts.

Newfield and D'Abdon, in their article “Reconceptualising Poetry as a Multimodal Genre” (2015), acknowledge the crisis in poetry in South African formal education — where the scope of poetry is restricted to elitist, Western, written word poetry (514). Positing that poetry must be reconceptualised to account for local traditions and practices, the article makes reference to Newfield and Maungedzo's report, “Mobilising and Modalising Poetry in a Soweto Classroom” (2006). The report details a pedagogic intervention that took place in a Soweto classroom where learners displayed little interest in English poetry (72). Acknowledging that meaning-making involved both the collection and transformation of various cultural resources (74), the researchers urged students to engage with poetry through diverse modes of expression — such as stories, letters, visual artwork and oral performance (76). Students produced their own poems resulting in the published anthology *Thebuwa, Poems from Ndofaya*. Newfield and Bozalek describe the collection as follows in “A Thebuwa Hauntology, from Silence to Speech” (2018):

The poems enliven possibilities of indigeneity through the rupturing of canonical conceptions of poetry . . . They produce insights into the complexity of South African worlds, opening up a myriad of connections to place, time, everyday life and culture that reconfigure both literacy and themselves . . . Students drew — consciously or subconsciously — on indigenous traditions of oral poetry, ignored in official syllabi. . . (45)

Here we see an example of Liyong's meditations put into action. By crossing Western genre boundaries, and fusing their lived experiences with intellectual activity, the students were encouraged to think and act instinctively. Newfield and D'Abdon attribute this result to a convergence of Western literary forms and organic cultural

poetic practices (514). This version of poetry challenges divisions between written and oral modes, allowing holistic understandings of contemporary indigenous South African poetry (519). The above study demonstrates that opening poetry up to indigenous influence propels self-actualisation, agency and marks a political moment. *Thebuwa, Poems from Ndofoya* is an instance of decolonial aesthetic creation brought into existence by marginalised subjectivities, who have reclaimed their power to “shape, and reshape subjectivity, space, and time” (Maldonado-Torres “Ten Theses” 27) and thus emerge as agents of social change (28).

Gunner has published extensive research on African indigenous oral poetry. In “Africa and Orality” (2000) Gunner debunks the colonial myth of a primitive, homogenous Africa by examining a range of African poetry genres where “poetry was, in a way, the heartbeat of royalty” (2). Gunner wants us to see that orality is not a monolithic genre devoid of organising principles — nor is it a nostalgic pastime, employed by African politicians to appropriate positions of royalty by evoking ideas and feelings of the past (3). The latter point is already indicative of oral poetry’s unwavering political disposition and adaptability to contemporary politics. In South Africa, praise poems are cultural memory banks “that act as a mirrors and as a form of working archive” (4). For most indigenous sub-Saharan societies, praise poetry has multifaceted functions beyond the scope of artistic mastery. As a mirror and as an archive, praise poetry in its myriad of subgenres allows societies to reflect on their social ideologies while maintaining cultural continuity, in which the past is attainable. Liyong advocates that African literary genres should be shared with the world for their unique ability to capture both the visceral and cognitive dynamics of life, and a community’s truth and ways of being (26).

Furniss and Gunner’s anthology *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature* (1995), examines African oral literary forms both as representations of social life and agents of change in contemporary African politics (1). The collection provides a number of reports on anthropological studies in selected oral communities throughout Africa, finding that oral art was mobilised as a tool for self-regulation and to structure power hierarchies within societies. It draws attention to oral societies’ resistance to documentation, suggesting the refusal of oral forms to being marginalised within communication networks in African societies (7). The scope of my study does not

permit me to venture further into oral genres and forms but I would like to emphasise the manner in which oral poetry functions both as an expression of culture and as commentary on societal conditions: a defining characteristic of revolutionary poetry. I will later demonstrate how Simon's poetry, albeit written, attempts to contain orality's ephemeral and animated resonance and is prompted reflexively to contemplate the discourse of orality itself. Africa's oral histories and histories of orality demonstrate indigeneity's reluctance to be confined to divisive genres that do not account for interconnection of cultural and social codes (Minor 185-86).

I will now explore the interest in ecocritical evaluations of poetry in South Africa. Boswell's article "Re-memory and an African Ecofeminist Poetic of Healing in Malika Ndlovu's Poetry" (2011) executes poetry analysis from the theoretical framework of ecofeminism. Boswell explains:

Inherent in these African ecofeminist approaches is also a critique of Western epistemologies – what counts as formal knowledge – and a restoration of indigenous modes of knowing and understanding the earth and nature. (34)

Acknowledging that indigenous women hold deep connections to nature, Boswell propounds that modernity's structures worked to sever women from the natural world (34). African ecofeminist poetry thus endeavours to rebuild women's alliance with the environment through the regeneration of indigenous epistemologies (34). Healing the Earth becomes analogous with human psychological and emotional healing, and consequent liberation (34). Indigenous ontologies underlie this approach, giving "a sense that the people, animals and entities are not separate from the places that they occupy" (Kavanagh 32). Boswell focuses on the restorative ethic of nature, viewing environmental elements as historical sites from which human memory can be reconstructed (37-39). In relinquishing the binaries that divide humans from the natural world, re-memory and recuperation of the "fractured sense of self" becomes possible (35). This critique exemplifies that landscape is, to some extent, exempt from the "collective amnesia" (37) suffered by colonised subjects through colonial processes of cultural erasure, and is therefore an important source of knowledge and liberation. Where memory fails us, the Earth bears evidence of pre-colonial ways of being and the subsequent shattering of these ontologies initiated by colonialism. If nature contains traces of IK to accelerate self-determination and re-humanisation, then

re-linking the self with nature is equivalent to summoning the repressed, the instinctual, the indigenous ways of being.

Similar viewpoints are found in Mthatiwa's doctoral thesis, "Human-Animal Relationships and Ecocriticism: A Study of the Representation of Animals in Poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa" (2011). Mthatiwa postulates that ecocritical examples of African poetry reshape the relations between human and animals, often refuting the Western ontological views of animals as mechanistic, beast-like creatures whose purpose is only valued in relation to human capitalistic enterprises. He justifies the need for a transpersonal ecology that erases boundaries between human and non-human beings: boundaries that have thus far engendered the continual exploitation of animals as resources for human consumption (296). Literal use of animals in mainstream literature is infrequent in comparison to allegorical representations (60). Mthatiwa deduces that African and Hindu ontologies recognise the interconnectedness between all living organisms and as such, poems derived from these traditions are inclined to representing animals as spiritual yet literal beings (229). Again, we can give credence to contemporary African poetry for encapsulating indigenous ontologies that counter and destabilise Eurocentric visions of the world, in efforts to reconstruct harmonious and decolonised ways of being.

The above arguments have demonstrated a need for reading poetry in the socio-political and cultural contexts from which it emerges. Gqola emphasises this point in " 'Pushing Out from the Centre': (Black) Feminist Imagination, Redefined Politics and Emergent Trends in South African Poetry" (2009). Gqola explains her diverse selection and comparative examination of black South African women's poetry:

. . . their work illustrates something about the place of the cultural in contemporary South Africa, and the specific ways in which a Black feminist imagination is responsible for a widening of the literary landscape. (215)

These words are of particular importance to the study at hand. Gqola's suggestion of an expanded literary landscape serves figuratively to map marginalised imaginaries that are at once racialised, cultural and feminine. Relating to Lorde's and Kristeva's conjectures, Gqola renders women's bodies and cognition as prime sites of resistance. Reading the poetry of Gabeba Baderoon, Myesha Jenkins, Lebogang Mashile and

Makhosazana Xaba, Gqola highlights the necessity of recognising the conscious centralisation of women in relation to local experiences and cultural influences. She identifies the decolonial stance taken in black feminist poetry and the subsequent need for a new forms of criticism (233). In “Whirling Worlds? Women’s Poetry, Feminist Imagination and Contemporary South African Publics” (2011), Gqola explicates:

Attention to such multimodality is a questioning, exploratory stance, rather than obsessive framing, as we attempt to make sense of the kinds of creative explosions that women’s poetic energy continues to give rise to.  
(6)

This new form of poetry criticism should account for the geopolitics of knowledge and historical consciousness embedded in the literary landscapes of black feminist poetry; should identify multimodal processes of meaning-making that exceed the confinements of Western literary conventions and criticism; should integrate semiosis with the multiple modes of meaning-making and with lived experience; and should forage for indigenous ways of knowing and assess how these are inflected in contemporary South African poetry. More importantly, a new form of poetry criticism should elucidate how the found ontologies differ from, subvert and destabilise Western epistemology, all with the intention of transforming it. The above examples of contemporary South African poetry criticism exhort the application of indigenous perspectives in order to deflect from and transcend conventional Western approaches. Additionally, they illustrate poetry’s restorative and decolonising capabilities through viewing poetry as a multi-generic discursive expression of local cultural tapestries.

The present chapter sets the foundation for this dissertation by providing the background and context of SAI history, of the poet and of the researcher. The rationale for this study is attributed to gaps in research with regards to IK, SAI history and SAI women poets. Additionally, there is a lack of IK research within the creative arts. In reviewing the political power of poetry and indigenised critiques of contemporary South African poetry, I argue that poetry should be researched more carefully in relation to IK and decolonising praxis. As such, my dissertation wishes to execute an analysis of selected poems from Francine Simon’s debut collection, *Thungachi*, from an indigenous perspective. In doing so, I have conducted in-depth interviews with Simon to investigate her poetry writing process, how she came to acquire IK and how she interprets such knowledge in her poetry. The dissertation uses

decolonial theory as conceptual scaffolding to provide an *indigenous language of critique* of Simon's poetry. Extending the theoretical framework to research design, I experiment with interdisciplinary and creative articulations of literary analysis, as described in the chapter summary below.

### 1.3. Summary of Chapters

Chapter two, "Theoretical Framing", describes Smith's conceptualisation of *indigenous language of critique* by exploring its two major components: IK and decolonisation. I review theories of indigeneity, IK and decolonisation, indicating how the dissertation is framed, overall, by decolonial theory. Feminist perspectives of decolonisation are used in amalgamating IK and decolonial theory to produce an *indigenous language of critique* for this research. Chapter three, "Methodology", details the 'decolonising methodology' devised as an extension of the theoretical framework. Kincheloe's notion of research *bricolage* is used to describe the interdisciplinary research methods patched together for the compilation of the dissertation. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews with the poet, observation, and searching the archive. The differing methodological approaches in chapters four and five are defined individually. Chapter four, "Interviews with Francine Simon: A Reflexive Montage", delivers a creative and experimental presentation of the interview transcripts. A variety of texts are used: Simon's poetry, interview excerpts, archival material, media extracts, and autoethnographic reflections. This chapter promotes a diffractive reading of data, influenced by Jackson and Mazzei's article "Plugging One Text Into Another: Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research" (2013). As a result, texts juxtapose and complement each other in a non-linear montage that unsettles the supposed seamless chronology of history. Chapter five, "Reading Selected Poems from *Thungachi*: Analysis and Findings", executes a close reading of five selected poems from *Thungachi*, namely: "Naming Places", "Tamil Familiars", "Rati", "Nanni-Ma" and "Betel-Nut". I explore instances of IK and ontologies that underlie the poems. Chapter six briefly concludes this dissertation by discussing how the research topic was addressed. It illustrates how a range of perspectives, writing styles and methods, culminate in a research *bricolage*.