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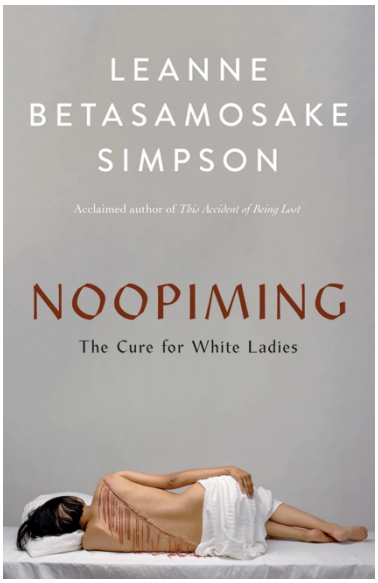
A Settler Celebrating Noopiming: Engaging with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's Brilliant Storytelling

Review by Shruti Raji-Kalyanaraman

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies*. Toronto: Anansi, 2020.



A grey cover with the author's name in white capitalized sans serif letters and the book title in a blood red font, in the center, capitalized with rounded, crooked edges, below which is the subtitle in black. At the bottom, lies a thin feminine body with dark hair on their side, on what looks like a hard bed plank, covered with a white bedsheet at the torso. The person has their back towards the reader. Their upper back has a cut running diagonally from the right shoulder all the way to lower back on the left, from which drips blood.

Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies was released in 2020 by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a renowned Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist. Noopiming (Anishinaabemowin for "in the bush") transcends the genres of poetry and prose, including a song collaboration with Gizhiiwe Music on "solidification," a poem by Simpson included in the first part of the book (Gizhiiwe Music 2020). This book is a collection of stories, conversations, and poetry that highlight the existence of Anishinaabe life, such as through everyday experiences of shopping for groceries, conversations with each other, looking out for each other, and healing, coping, and surviving in colonized Canada. The book is divided into ten sections, following a selection of main characters (human and non-human) as they navigate their dispossession and removal from their land and how they persist, negotiating their life in the unnatural western, colonial habitat. All characters are referred to with they/them pronouns and they are: Mashkawaji; the narrator (9); Akiwenzii, the old man (23); Ninaatig, the maple tree (93); Mindimooyenh, the old woman (39); Sabethe giant (41); Adik, the caribou (99); Asin, the human (64); and Lucy, the human (65). In storytelling, each of these characters inform the narrator's own truth and reflection as they influence different parts of the narrator's body, mind. The narrator's will is Akiwenzii, their conscience is Mindimooyenh, their marrow is-Sabe, their eyes and ears are Asin, their brain is Lucy, their lungs are Ninaatig and the narrator's nervous system is Adik (Simpson 2020, 23–29). As I read through experiences of each character, I found Simpson's use of "they/them" pronouns throughout encouraging. Centering Indigenous knowledges through storytelling created a gender inclusive imagination of the main characters.

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Every element of Simpson's storytelling presents a decolonial lens of visual, auditory, and written language. As a settler, the glaring histories of dispossession and the erasure of Indigenous languages, knowledges, and cultures are made visible in each section of the book (Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2017). Conversations, incidents, and everyday living are infused with a sense of healing of the self and one's relations. The individual voices of the book's characters are amplified collectively without compromising the individual through a mosaic of prose, poetry, and dialogues. Blatant truths of conditions of dispossession are presented by each character through a wry sense of humour, without trivializing centuries of colonial violence and attempted genocide of Indigenous communities and their relations. For example, as Mindimoyenh (the old woman) surmises, "We live in an ecosystem of hurt," while the rest of the page is blank (Simpson 2020, 62). This presentation with one quote and a huge blank space is powerful, as the reader is drawn to reflect on Indigenous genocide and state-led violence against Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities. Later in the book, the narrator weaves a conversation between Ninaatig (maple tree) and Akiwenzii (the old man), who are oldest of friends (Simpson 2020, 90). Author explains how Ninaatig keeps their belongings in a shopping cart for travel, much like a suitcase with wheels, a suggestion made by Sabe (93). A scene plays out where Akiwenzii reads from Ninaatig's belongings, a text titled, *"The hidden life of Trees: What they feel, How they communicate- Discoveries from a secret world"* (93). Akiwenzii, in humour, reads the title to Ninaatig by replacing the word "Trees" with the colonized term "Indians"—a word never used before this land came to be colonized and renamed as "Canada" (Marks 2014). This humour made me uncomfortable and accountable at the same time, highlighting my settler privilege as an East Indian immigrant.

The section on Mandaminaakoog, Anishinaabemowin for ear of corn, was another difficult read for me (Simpson 2021, 229–235; weshki 2016). I could vividly visualize state-sanctioned violence, control, and border patrolling through requirement of the "status card" from Indigenous communities (Simpson 2020, 232). Reading about Mindimooyenh's identity as a residential school survivor was triggering for me, especially as a mother who has faced child loss, yet in a glaring way, reminded me of my settler privilege, such that I get to keep my child that lives in the present. Mindimooyenh's experiences in the book are a stark reminder of thousands of children who have faced rape, abuse, and are still buried in the genocidal spaces of Indian Residential Schools (Blackstock and Palmater 2021).

As a settler, a racialized mother to a three-year-old, and someone whose first language is Tamil, I was very encouraged to see Simpson's use of Ojibwe words with no glossary of terms or footnotes provided in any part of the book. With this unapologetic rejection of English language supremacy, Simpson not only scores with racialized communities like mine, but also invites settlers like me to learn and know about Anishinaabe culture and peoples, their stories, and lived experiences. I would recommend other readers to follow the WordPress blog by Dani Sallyan, Thunderbird Woman Reads (Sallyan 2020), or their YouTube channel (Thunderbird Woman Reads 2020), for an initial guide to Anishinaabemowin language and resources.

I cannot speak for others, but for racialized settlers like me, *Noopiming: A Cure for White Ladies* is a gift, an invitation to learn about healing, coping, and going beyond rights to understanding the obligations of this land through these seven characters and the narrator.

"There are still stars. There are still stars" (Simpson 2020, 35).

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