



# Colonial Impact on Cultural Disconnection: Literary Interpretations of Loss Of indigenous Cultures from Loss of Ancestral Lands

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Colonial Impact on Cultural Disconnection: Literary Interpretations of Loss Of indigenous Cultures  
from Loss of Ancestral Lands

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A Thesis in the Field of English  
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the loss of culture and heritage arising from the loss of ancestral lands as a result of racist environmental policies. The research is comprised of analysis of three literary works, *Tracks* by Louise Erdrich, *Bless Me Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya, and *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward. Although fiction accounts, these works represent authorial experiences and observations of how racism and colonialism have led to policies that have displaced indigenous nations and eroded their cultural identity as well as heritage.

The research will show how the characters in these novels struggle and adapt to the loss of land connections and offer possibilities for paths forward in indigenous communities. As each character struggles with identity, belonging, and questions of how to maintain and preserve heritage, common themes of cultural and spiritual dislocation are revealed.

The thesis argues for the function of physical land and nature elements as repositories for community identity, spirituality, and heritage. Moreover, the research will confirm the historical and continuing common struggle of the characters regardless of time, tribe, or location. These fiction accounts serve as a mirror and magnifying glass for indigenous and marginalized communities in real-life situations. Through studying and understanding the impact of ongoing land dispossession on indigenous cultures and marginalized communities, the thesis will contribute to the ongoing conversation study

will contribute to the ongoing conversation on possibilities for preservation of indigenous cultures and overcoming systemic challenges.

## Dedication

To Jason, Evan, and Zoe and the places that hold our memories

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## Chapter I.

### Introduction

*The land is sacred. The words are at the core of your being. The land is our mother, the river our blood. Take away our land and we die. That is, the Indian in us dies.*

—Mary Brave Bird, Lakota

The United States imports oil from Canada. Not the black gold liquid that often comes to mind — tar sands oil. After mining, tar sands oil needs to be heated and extracted to become crude oil. The heating, extracting, and transportation issues present environmental concerns regarding greenhouse gases and toxic waste. While we may all benefit from the oil, few want it to be mined or transported near our homes. One such project, the Dakota Pipeline, was purposely redrawn so that it would avoid Bismarck, North Dakota, and travel through Standing Rock Reservation. The citizens of Bismarck would no longer be exposed to potential devastation to their water supply. Standing Rock would take the hit instead. The Dakota Pipeline is but one blatant occurrence of environmental injustice. In their opening statement, the co-editors of the *Frontiers in Communication* research topic “Communication, Race, and Outdoor Spaces.” assert, “Historical and institutional racism and the dominance of whiteness in land management agencies has arguably led to asymmetric uses of public lands by privileged users, to the exploitation of lands indigenous communities hold sacred, and to the perception that only certain kinds of bodies belong in outdoor spaces” (Alemán et al. 1).

The conversation among the eight co-editors confirmed that the aftereffects of a colonial racially biased hierarchy and racist environmental policies have impinged upon the idea of public spaces offering open access to all. Public spaces such as national parks have become more accessible to some and less so to marginalized communities and the indigenous populations who once called these lands home. Moreover, the fallout from climate change arising from an extension of the coloniality in environmental policies has disproportionately harmed indigenous and Black communities. These communities have been dislocated from the physical space, the basic safe environment that should be an inalienable right (Finney 47; Hayashi 65). It may seem that the damage ends here; however, contemporary fiction from every continent tells a different story. There is a systematic erasure of indigenous cultures through the appropriation of their lands. And the disconnect to the identity defined by their lands creates a loss of identity for future generations.

Humans have a natural connection to the ground. We naturally take root as trees do. Even nomadic communities live and breathe as an extension of the earth. It is on the earth that we live and build families and communities. It is the earth that feeds us and provides shelter for us. Societal norms and cultural traditions are often formed as a result of geographic distinctions. And so when we lose our connection to the places of heritage, we lose our future. It is on lands that cultures have become established, heritage has been passed from generation to generation, and individuals find a place of belonging. When that land is lost or degraded, the breaking of physical borders leads to the displacement of the peoples that once inhabited those borders and a loss of the developed cultures.

This paper will analyze literature from Louise Erdrich of the Chippewa Indians, Jesmyn Ward of the American South, and Mexican American author Rudolfo Anaya to examine the commonality of transgenerational cultural trauma and loss of identity through land dispossession and racist environmental policies. These three pieces were chosen to represent the attempted erasure of indigenous cultures brought about by the destruction of ancestral lands as seen in the American Indian tribes of the Great Lakes region, the Chicano experience in New Mexico, and a contemporary Black American experience in New Orleans.

Additionally, the works were chosen for their representation of the magical realism genre. The three works chosen all provide these instances where the magical, embedded in reality, reveals aspects of post-colonial culture and its detrimental effects on BIPOC communities enacted through government land policies. The magical not only provides the narrative experience of the community but pathway where in the community can survive. Arva, in providing a definition for the effects of magical realism, asserts “[i]n magical realist texts, as in most postmodernist fiction, words create rather than reflect reality: the constructed reality, however, is never entirely new, bearing an uncanny resemblance to the one that we already know (Arva 79). Erdrich’s *Nanapush* and Flor represent the magical in the tragic loss of Ojibwe culture, Anaya’s *Ultima* offers a magical path forward for Antonio, and Ward’s *Esch* is the voice and heart of the Greek goddess Medea. The three novels demonstrate the word created reality that Arva refers to. Through the voice of these authors, spanning different locations throughout the United States, the magical is brought into the post-colonial world in order offer tangible

possibilities for the continuation of cultural heritage. Dash, albeit writing about Haiti, provides a similar perspective that:

...colonisation and slavery did not make things of men, but in their own way, the enslaved peoples might have in their own imagination so reordered their reality as to reach beyond the tangible and concrete to acquire a new re-creative sensibility which could aid in the harsh battle for survival. The only thing they could possess (and which could not be tampered with) was their imagination and this became the source of their struggle against the cruelty of their condition... This is an attitude to the conquered peoples which is unprecedented. It is the taking into account of the inner resources which the ancestors of the Third World could have developed to combat their tragic environment, therefore engaging in a conception of the past which would shatter the myths of "historylessness" or "non-achievement." (Dash 66)

The intended impact of the research is to use the shared experience of these writers to help imagine pathways to helping BIPOC communities mitigate the effects of cultural loss.

## Chapter II.

### Belonging: The Interconnectedness of Land and Culture in *Tracks*

Through a revelation of the rules of interaction that created a space for home and belonging in *Tracks*, Louise Erdrich reveals the significance of land in the formation and continuation of culture. As contrasted with the euro-centric objectification of nature, the tribal nations have sought out stewardship and partnerships with nature as an entity with its own agency. *Tracks* not only establishes the significance of belonging and place through an exposition of the balanced ecology between human communities and nature and the Ojibwe culture's magical storytelling and spiritual elements; through *Tracks* Erdrich reveals the disintegration of Ojibwe culture as their land was attacked and assimilated by European settlers. As the tribe became physically displaced from the land, they lost both ancestral anchors for culture and the ability to pass on heritage to future generations. Through her narrative, Erdrich establishes the interconnectivity of culture, heritage, and land ownership, highlighting how racist environmental and government policies systematically cut off the first nations from any sense of belonging.

Erdrich, a contemporary representative of the hybridity of culture — she identifies as Ojibwe as well as German —embodies the struggle to maintain Ojibwe culture after the government forced enforced a cultural assimilation on the tribe. This cultural hybridity took upon itself European perspectives which corrupted the land. Previous to this loss, the Ojibwe viewed their ancestral lands as much more than objective property, the lands formed the basis for Ojibwe identity and religious traditions and beliefs; the Earth was an individual agent and basis for relationship and faith. The Ojibwe, as with

many of the first nations, held to the earth as a not only a spiritual source, but the dominant spiritual source. As a result, “Ojibwe orientations to land tend to treat it as non-human but still very much alive and available for participation in meaning making” (Engman and Hermes 91). In this context, non-human does not equate to the non-living object status of western cultural understanding. In western cultural terms, it could be understood as extra-human or beyond human. The earth, and the land by extension, is spiritual. The Ojibwe sourced meaning and culture from the earth as a dominant force in their lives, and sought to relate to the earth on a spiritual level. Thus the land became more than wayfinding landmarks, but an anchor for spiritual understanding as well as cultural cairns.

It was not solely the Ojibwe perspective of land as a living agent, but additionally, “[s]tructured divisions between humans and non-humans are not present, thus enabling distinct and expanded forms of agency, perception, explanation, and ultimately meaning making” (Bang and Marin 541). Foundational to the First Nations cultures, there is no hierarchy that separates humans from the environment. In the place of that dichotomy, where humans are the superior and dominant force, there is the seeking of a unified relationship to harmonize those who dwell within the environment and the environs itself. The natural environment, in this case, the physically greater, and therefore spiritually more powerful. Because of this relationship that was established between the First Nations and the earth, Ojibwe culture instinctively relied upon landmarks, natural resources, and the cycles of nature within a specified region. Without the earth and the natural environment as a living guide and spiritual guardian, the cultures of the First Nations — and the people — would experience a failure to survive as a culture. As

European settlers systematically displaced the Ojibwe from their lands, they not only removed them from their ancestral lands, they effectively cut them off from a heritage passed down from generation to generation, their cultural foundations, and the source of sustenance.

In opening each chapter with a nature-oriented demarcation, Erdrich establishes Ojibwe connections to land and nature while exposing the dichotomy created by the rise of the human-centric ethics of the Europeans and the destruction of the nature-centered culture of the Ojibwe.

We started dying before the snow, and like the snow, we continued to fall. It was surprising there were so many of us left to die. For those who survived the spotted sickness from the south, our long fight west to Nadouissiuox land where we signed the treaty, and then a wind from the east, bringing exile in a storm of government papers, what descended from the north in 1912 seemed impossible.

By then, we thought disaster must surely have spent its force, that disease must have claimed all of the Anishinabe that the earth could hold and bury.

But the earth is limitless and so is luck and so were our people once. (Erdrich 2)

Snow, the first reference to nature, serves as a cyclical marker of seasons, times, and geographical location. Snow does not fall in the summer — and it ordinarily only falls in defined areas. The juxtaposition of the death of the Anishinaabe tribal nation and the snow provides not only the season (before the snow) but a reference to the northern lands that regularly succumb to snowfall. This juxtaposition not only situates the time and place, it reveals the unity suggested by Bang and Marin — the lack of division between humans and the land they live in. The Ojibwe, or Anishinaabe, expressed the same life as the snow. As the snow falls, the tribe fell. As the snow is transformed into ice and water, the people were mutated and separated from nature and their true identity.

The comparison of the tribal people to snow confirms not only the unification of the tribe with nature, but also the resulting reliance of the tribe on the physical location. The falling and melting of the individuals during a particularly tragic season, a paradoxical collusion of the colonial government in its “storm of papers” and the land they relied upon. Through this assertion—that it was the “government storm” that did the most damage—Erdrich lays the groundwork for a contrast between the unity life taking forces of the government with the nature and the life-giving forces of the earth. The earth, by far the largest and more powerful, is mentioned foremost after the contrast of the word "but." This contrast to the previous scenes of death and extinction places the earth in a divine position—one that not only receives the first mention, but is followed by “luck” and “people.” This progression demonstrates the rightful connection the Ojibwe must have in their struggle to survive. The earth is followed by luck— the mark of the magical, and only after this does Erdrich mention people. The three, the earth, the foundations of Ojibwe culture and spiritual practices, the luck— the magical, and the people — the wielders of both the scientific and the magical, themselves a blend of the spiritual and the scientific, are bound together by the perceived limitlessness of their nature. To say that the three are limitless immediately confuses the idea of empirical distinction and categorization and draws the reader into a magical relationship, a murky mixture that Erdrich uses as a foundation for her assertion of Ojibwe relationship with their land. The collaboration between the earth, luck, and people, accentuates the inherent ecological relationship between the Ojibwe and the physical environment. The contrast between the miracle of having survived the government and the diseases brought upon by the settlers and the earth functioning as the resistance to the empirical scientific data provided by

man, combined with the mystical elements of luck all bound together in one location, sets the table for a battle between the forces of the foreigners and the power of the earth to provide for the Ojibwe.

Due to the disruption of the relationship between the land and the indigenous peoples brought about by the colonial settlers, a mediator is required to bridge and reconcile the relationship. The first mediator in *Tracks*, Nanapush, brought in the previous account of the snow, the fallen people, and the government. Through a magical realist lens, Nanapush serves as the mediator and bridge to reassert the significance of the land in fostering and establishing heritage for a new generation. Nanapush's first role is as the go between the two cultures — the soon to be lost indigenous culture — and the domineering culture of the new settlers and government. It is through a natural ability for trickery and the power of his voice that Nanapush forges himself into a living bridge: "I gathered speed. I talked both language in streams that ran alongside each other, over every rock, around every obstacle. The sound of my own voice convinced me I was alive" (7). Even though it is his voice serving as the vehicle for his life, Nanapush compares his bilingualism to parallel streams. It is in this juxtaposition that Nanapush introduces himself as a centerpiece for carrying forward the significance of the intersection of the land and culture to a new generation. It is in a near death experience that Nanapush's voice brings him back to life, and it is the voice of two different languages juxtaposed with the two formations of nature — streams that Erdrich uses to pave a way for indigenous nations to preserve their culture while surviving the forced dominion of the European settlers.

In Erdrich's assertion, the running and voicing of the parallel streams bring Nanapush back to life. While these streams may suggest a form of cultural hybridity within Nanapush, the intermingling of two disparate languages bursting from one person, the allusion to parallelism reveals the true situation: It is not a hybridity, but rather a co-existence. The two streams of language, though arising out of an individual. The language is not mixed together, it is parallel. Nanapush contains both the old and the new, both the indigenous and the European. It is through holding the two conflicting cultures in "parallel" that Nanapush establishes himself as the bridge between two cultures. And it is through the distinction that Nanapush is able to pass on the uncorrupted heritage of the First Nations. Because Erdrich specifies streams — natural landmarks that indigenous nations used as guidance, this provides a visual reference to understand the relationship between objects in nature and indigenous cultures. The physical streams provided physical directions, the streams of language — two co-existing — provide a new prospect of life. Progressing beyond the fluidity of co-existing languages that Nanapush bridges, Erdrich furthers builds on Nanapush as both a trickster who accumulates cultural traits of the "white man" only to use it against the colonialists and a model for cultural survival through the holding on to cultural landmarks:

"I have the use of a white man's name," I told the Captain who delivered the ration payout for our first treaty, "but I won't sign your paper with that name either" ...Land is the only thing that lasts life to life. I am a holdout...I could have written my name, and much more too, in script. I had a Jesuit education in the hall so Saint John before I ran back to the woods and forgot all my prayers. (32-33)

Because of "the absence of writing in most pre-Columbian societies of America" (Silver and Miller 5), European colonist further underestimated the first nations and created a false hierarchy of intellectual ability. Language is one anchor of the ability to

pass on culture and it is through the assumed colonial superiority that Nanapush holds on to his indigenous cultural roots while declaratively holding on to the “use of a white man’s name.” In the initial ambiguity of whether Nanapush has stolen the identity or rather has been assigned one for him to wield as his own followed by the unnamed “Captain,” Erdrich exposes the absurdity of forcing new identifiers upon the tribal nations. Not only does Nanapush have no need of this name, Erdrich affords him full manipulation of the written process through providing him access through the “use of” it and the refusal to use it. Through Nanapush’s recognition of the temporality of the name and the paper compared to the permanence of land coupled with the refutable education of the Jesuits and the return to the woods and the spiritual, Erdrich asserts the other anchor of cultural heritage — the landmarks that the indigenous communities were built around. Nanapush, masters the written and new language of the colonialist, but holds on to the oral spiritual language of the land, rather than fusing the two cultures, Nanapush holds the two in parallel. It is through these parallel lines that Nanapush maintains the Ojibwe culture. Rather than accepting the planned corruption of the Ojibwe at the hands of the new settlers from Europe, Nanapush preserves the original Ojibwe heritage. And because of the land-based nature of that heritage and the orality of the communication, he is able to pass it on to the next generation.

### Chapter III.

#### The Language of Land: The Living River in *Bless Me Ultima*

The Ojibwe were only one of many First Nations that drew upon the land for cultural foundations. In the case of the Pueblo Indians, European settlers began the process of eradicating the Pueblo culture through settling in and urbanizing indigenous farmlands and replacing the language of indigenous cultures with English. Furthermore, Spanish settlers hybridized and diluted indigenous religions. The significance of the land heritage in New Mexico culture predates the annexation of Mexican lands by the United States. As with other indigenous cultures, the land and landscape were integral to the culture of the original settlers of New Mexico — the Pueblo Indians. According to Brown, “land came to be central in what defined “Puebloness.” In contemporary Pueblo life, ties to land and landscape are central to Pueblo identity. Origin myths locate history within landscape: they tie history directly to particular features of land so that visits to shrines constitute a reenactment of history (Brown 490). Although New Mexico represents a mixture of cultures, as ancestral ties to the land were integral to the Pueblo Indians, they are equally as integral to the Mexican American cultures that grew in that geographical location. Anaya’s children’s book *How Chile Came to New Mexico*, Anaya establishes the connection between the contemporary Mexican inhabitants and the Pueblo Indians: “Long ago before this land became known as New Mexico, it was the land of the pueblo Indians” (Anaya 5). This children’s reference establishes not only the ancestry of the land, it also introduces the diversity of culture in New Mexico. After Spanish settlers arrived in New Mexico and introduced Catholicism, the Spanish settlers and the Pueblo Indians created a hybridity of culture and religious beliefs that incorporated elements of

Catholic faith while retaining the foundational aspects of the lands they lived in. The features of ancestral lands still dictated the way of life and dominated beliefs and traditions.

Rudolf Anaya, a native of rural New Mexico, experienced first-hand what it means to be shaped by ancestral lands and rooted in the indigenous culture. His personal experience of forced hybridity provides a unique window into the cultural loss that resulted from Spanish colonizers who expanded the Spanish empire through building missions. Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima*, as with Erdrich's *Tracks*, establishes the centrality of the land in New Mexican culture and provides the mediator of broken relationships with the land, amongst other dichotomies, through the character of Ultima. Anaya begins with an introduction to the liminal space that Ultima represented and ruled over. In the opening passage,

Ultima came to stay with us the summer I was almost seven. When she came the beauty of the llano unfolded before my eyes, and the gurgling waters of the river sang to the hum of the turning earth. The magical time of my childhood stood still, and the pulse of the living earth pressed its mystery into my living blood. She took my hand, and the silent, magic powers she possessed made beauty from the raw, sun-baked llano, the green river valley, and the blue bowl which was the white sun's home... My bare feet felt the throbbing earth... Time stood still and it shared with me all that had been, and all that was to come... (1)

Anaya immediately shifts from the seasonal introduction of summer to the location that is brought in through the person of Ultima. Ultima serves as the doorway to the llano despite the distance from the llano and the proximity to the town. With the coming of Ultima, the llano becomes an anchor not only for the Maréz family, but for the heritage that Antonio, in this retrospective narrative, will establish. Her arrival in the summer orients the reader in a season of sunshine, growth, and the absence of school structures. Summertime brings not only heat and time to spent outdoors, but harvest — a time for

enjoying the fruit of labors. And it is in this season that Anaya connects the main character, Antonio with the earth. The river — which Anaya later reveals as a major character, receives its rhythm from the earth, the earth becomes the ultimate life-giving power. Beyond the river, Ultima introduces Antonio to his connection to the earth. The earth, and its “living pulse” (1) becomes Antonio’s heartbeat and the driver for the internal and living river of blood. Not only is the earth Antonio’s pulse, externally, “[his] feet felt the throbbing earth...” Antonio was integral within and the connection without. Ultima stands at the center of this world — “the sun-baked llano, the green river valley, and the blue bowl...” Not only do the earth, the rivers, the sky revolve around Ultima, for Antonio, she is the keeper of time — time stops at her arrival, perhaps at her command — she stands in the liminal space between what was and what will come. The story begins as a pause in the first step forward in time — the beginning of Antonio’s school years. In that in-between, Ultima helps Antonio understand the significance of the land as he travels from youth to adulthood and formulates his history.

Having established the significance of the earth, Anaya addresses reconciliation in relationship to the earth. Before the arrival of Ultima, the reader is introduced to Antonio’s conflicting worlds. He is caught between the llano that represents the old ways, the old religion, and the wide-open plains in the world of his father, and the new ways, the catholic faith introduced by the Spaniards, and the town that his mother belongs to. Even in the house, Antonio is first situated at the “top of the stairs [with a] vantage point into the heart of the home, my mother’s kitchen” (1). Antonio occupies this space between the upstairs and the down — he can see into the kitchen and experience the kitchen, but he is not part of that kitchen. From his perch, Antonio is an observer of the

new world. However, his first interaction with Ultima forever changes the order. Despite Anaya initially describing Ultima as bringing the earth into Antonio in order to establish its significance, after settling Antonio in the liminal space — a space Ultima oversees, in Antonio’s description of his first interaction with Ultima, Anaya changes the order and sets Antonio up to become central to human relationship with the earth. As Ultima

took my hand and I felt the power of a whirlwind sweep around me. Her eyes swept the surrounding hills and through them I saw for the first time the wild beauty of our hills and the magic of the green river.... The four directions of the llano met in me, and the white sun shone in my soul. The granules of sand at my feet and the sun and sky above me seemed to dissolve into one strange complete being. (10)

This initial contact with Ultima did more than revive Antonio and replace his pulse with the pulse of the earth, it replaces Antonio’s perspective with Ultima’s. Antonio is lifted into the supernatural and magical. Ultima is initially compared with the “whirlwind sweep[ing] around” Antonio as her eyes “swept the surrounding hills.” Antonio who starts at the center of this whirlwind that he called Ultima becomes unified with her as she takes in the surroundings with her eyes. Her perspective becomes his as do her powers. The commonplace hills and river are revitalized for Antonio as he enters into a new stage of life and takes on new responsibilities in carrying on culture. The renaissance goes beyond a new understanding of the significance of place and landmarks, like Ultima, Antonio becomes the central keeper of the earth as both the llano and the sun settle in him and the earth and the sky “dissolve into one...” Not only is the earth significant in Antonio’s heritage and future, Antonio is significant as the vessel of carrying the relationship.

Through the Antonio’s interaction with the land that the family lives in, as with Erdrich’s Nanapush and his interaction with land ownership, Anaya provides a parallel

for the two conflicting cultures. The river that surrounds the community is polluted with the blood of Lupito, shot for having lost his mind in the war — yet the river remains and overcomes this pollution to continue providing life. The Maréz household on the edge of the community with a view of the Ilano — another representation of standing in the liminal space between two cultures. In spite of colonial (in this case conquistador) circumstances, the ability to hold on to the ancestral land of his father's house provides Antonio the ability to digest the new language, and rather than provide a fusion of two languages and two cultures, carry forward the Pueblo culture while holding at bay the new.

## Chapter IV.

### Home: Places of Survival in *Salvage the Bones*

African Americans have always held a complex and tension filled relationship with the land. Historically, it was not the land they owned, but rather, the land that owned them. Even as the enslaved transitioned into landowners, they went from being owned by their white masters to being indebted to the same white masters. In 1896 Booker T.

Washington laments that

The first year that our people got their freedom they had nothing on which to live while they raised their first cotton crop. They had to go to their masters and get money...in that way they got in debt and in that way started in the south what is known as the crop-lien or mortgage system. (Washington 282)

The crop-lien system ensured that African Americans, despite having become landowners, were confined to hunger and poverty and endlessly indebted to the white masters. Black landowners may have owned land, but they were still enslaved and could not forge voluntary ties to the land. While Native American and Chicano First Nations found themselves dispossessed of ancestral lands that forged their cultures; African American culture was dispossessed of culture as a result of being first dispossessed of land. The inability to freely provide themselves through their lands and create debt free homes resulted in debased living standards as African Americans were accused of lower moral standards. Smith attributes this observation to Dubois: “the disruption of the black home accounts for many of the moral defects of which the black community was accused” (Smith 160).

Culture and heritage arise from memories created and deposited around physical spaces. The intergenerational transfer of wealth is one of the chief means by which a community achieves a sense of continuity with the past and future (Smith 157). Without ancestral lands, common landmarks became the vehicle for communication and the passing on of heritage. Frogmore Plantation, Wye Plantation, The Underground Railroad, Selma, Birmingham — these places are preserved and protected because they are the retainers of culture. As black farmers freed themselves of the poverty of rural farm work, they found themselves in urban areas. These enclaves, though impoverished, provided a home to hand down to the next generation. However, governmental environmental policies served to put these homes at risk and bear the brunt of climate change consequences.

Climate change and global warming have brought about fundamental changes to the way that humans interact with the nature. Research shows that the destruction and loss of property resulting from climate change has disproportionately affected impoverished neighborhoods. This is especially true for those in the lower ninth ward of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. According to Thomas et al., “Hurricane Katrina only became a disaster because the neglected infrastructure failed, poverty and segregation were common in New Orleans, and many people lacked the resources to prepare for, avoid, and recover from the storm.” Jesmyn Ward, as with Erdrich and Anaya, is a native of the location she writes about. Furthermore, Ward experienced Hurricane Katrina and was an eye witness to its aftermath. In *Salvage the Bones*, Ward triangulates the significance of the physical property, the individual reactions of the black community, and erasure of cultural heritage. She brings renewed perspectives of African

American culture and its relationship to the land, a new definition for passing down generational lands, and a new understanding of the concept of home.

Ward's main character, Esch, is not the trickster that Nanapush was, but like Nanapush, Esch Batiste stands in the liminal space between generations. Esch begins her narrative by establishing the continuity of a cultural heritage she received from her grandparents in the form of 15 acres of land. Esch's family lives in a space ironically called "The Pit," which definitively makes it an absence of soil or land. Esch and her brothers, accustomed to having to scavenge and survive in the pit have learned to make the best of it. "When there's good rain in the summer, the pit fills to the brim and we swim in it (Ward 15). This ad hoc pool draws a clear distinction between the neighborhood of the Batiste family and communities that are privy to pools that were created for the purpose of swimming. Even before the hurricane, enough rain gathers for a summer swim. In Ward's narrative, she draws the connections from a previous generation to the next through the land owned by the family and establishes the significance of their physical home to future generations:

My mama's mother, Mother Lizbeth, and her daddy, Papa Joseph, originally owned all this land around fifteen acres in all. It was Papa Joseph nicknamed it all the Pit, Papa Joseph who let the white men he work with dig for clay that they used to lay the foundation for houses, let them excavate the side of a hill in a clearing near the back of the property where he used to plant corn for feed. (14)

Her grandparents, the original owners of the land surrounding their home. The pit, became the pit as the "white men" took from the firmament and soil of the Batiste family in order to create foundations for their own. Starting from the first generation of land owners, the dominant population undertook an erosion of the land that the black people

lived on. While the Batiste family owned the land, it was plundered and the soil was removed from beneath them. This goes beyond the removal of land ownership rights, this is a destruction of the land itself, and even before Hurricane Katrina hits, the land has already lost much of its essence and become a watery pit. It is in the absence, or rather abscess, that Esch comes of age, becomes pregnant, and becomes a necessary link from the culture that once was to a post Katrina world where all is lost.

The Batiste family has inherited the fifteen acres of land, and this ancestral land not only forms the cornerstone for their memories, Mother Lizbeth's house becomes a provider of life for the family. Through the Batiste family deconstructing the house piece by piece and carrying over the pieces to build and fortify their home, Ward asserts:

The house is a drying animal skeleton, everything inside that was evidence of living salvaged over the years. Papa Joseph helped Daddy build our house before he died, but once he and Mother Lizbeth were gone, we took couch by chair by picture by dish until there was nothing left. Mama tried to keep the house up, but needing a bed for me and Skeet to sleep in, or needing a pot when hers turned black, was more important than keeping the house a shrine, crocheted blankets across sofas as Mother Lizbeth left them. That's what Daddy said. So now we pick at the house like mostly eaten leftovers . . . (58)

The house that the Batiste family currently lives in was built with the help of the elder Papa Joseph. It was the hands of the past generation that helped to provide a physical base for the next to go forward. As the first generation passed on, they not only passed on skills and know how to build the house, their house, little by little, became what the next generation would physically build on. In their times of need, it was the house of Mother Lizbeth and Papa Joseph that continued to meet those needs and enable them to carry on. Rather than preserve the memory of the previous generations, the habits and customs of "crocheted blankets across sofas," the items have been carried over into new habits, new

customs — the demands of a new generation trying to survive. Where land formed identity for the Native American tribes, the culture of Black America was also formed by the land — the destruction of it, and the necessity of having to use every bit of the ancestral home to provide safety and security in order to pave a future for their children. It is in these bits and pieces, the magical version of generational wealth, embedded in the Esch, and the child that Esch carries, that the Batiste family as a representative of Black culture in the Louisiana is able to continue.

## Chapter V.

### Losses of Food and Shelter: Where the Buffalo Roam

The cruelty driving the crop-lien system guaranteed failure for Black farmers. Rather than passing on generational wealth, they passed on debt. This systemic oppression was not limited to the new freedmen trying to provide for families and communities, nor was it limited to the African American community. American Indians were also systemically deprived of the necessary resources for life. In conjunction with the forced relocation and dispossession of lands through the Homestead Act, indigenous tribes were deprived of buffalo which they once relied on as a food source. While some attributed the death of buffalo herds to disease or natural causes, historical documentation supports the claims of systemic genocide enacted by the government. In parallel to the civil war, Butler reveals that “[i]n 1867, one member of the US Army is said to have given orders to his troops to “kill every buffalo you can. Every buffalo dead is an Indian gone” (Butler 97). Previous to the arrival of the Europeans, buffalo herds were plentiful. indigenous tribes, especially those in the Northern Plains survived off of buffalo meat and hides. Their livelihoods and economy centered around buffalo to such an extent that “Northern Great Plains Native groups who relied on the bison adopted a distinct annual migration cycle that mirrored that of the buffalo” (Hodge 7). Buffalo were one of the few species that thrived in all seasons and were able to provide food year-round for the hunters. Having confirmed the reliance of indigenous tribes on buffalo herds as a meat

staple, The U.S. Cavalry sought to eradicate the source of food in order to eradicate the tribal nations:

Sherman himself publicly proposed the employment of the army to slaughter the buffalo in order to subdue the plains tribes. On 26 June 1869, the prestigious Army Navy Journal reported that "General Sherman remarked, in conversation the other day, that the quickest way to compel the Indians to settle down to civilized life was to send ten regiments of soldiers to the plains, with orders to shoot buffaloes until they became too scarce to support the redskins. (Smits 317)

General Sherman was not only a master strategist in the civil war, he was a master strategist in the war against the indigenous tribes. Although Sherman fought against the Confederate Army and presumably against the tenets of enslavement, he simultaneously fought for the extinction of the indigenous tribes, and not only did he actively seek this extinction, along with him came the men who followed him. John Schofield, a union general and later Andrew Jackson's Secretary of War, proclaims in autobiography "[w]ith my cavalry and carbined artillery encamped in front, I wanted no other occupation in life than to ward off the savage and kill off his food until there should no longer be an Indian frontier in our beautiful country" (Schofield 428). Not every soldier has access to book publishing or even journal keeping — these are but a few representatives that demonstrate the general state of mind behind why the buffalo needed to be slaughtered — it was a forced starvation of Indian tribes.

Sherman's policy was an effective albeit cruel one. Erdrich's *Tracks* retells these experiences of forced starvation — and then offers the magical and spiritual resolutions that the tribes turned to in order to maintain their lives as well as pass on their culture. *Tracks* begins with the end. The narrative voice of Nanapush provides a glimpse of a tribe that has succumbed to the wiles of the enemy — a tribe that has come to its end with no way out. This purposeful commentary from Erdrich paves the way for the insertion of

the magical realm. Erdrich emphasizes the consequences of colonialism as the winter sets in:

“My girl, I saw the passing of the times you will never know. I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years’ growth. I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would give away our woods and lake. I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I saved the last Pillager.” (Erdrich 2)

The last of the food supply has been exhausted. Along with the disappearance of the herds, the hides, furs, pelts that once offered protection from the natural elements also dwindled. There was nothing left for the tribes to sustain themselves. The juxtaposition of the death of the culture that the girl will never know with the light at the end of the tunnel; the salvation of the one who would carry on that culture despite the colonial circumstances frames the battle for resources.

The battle for survival to be carried on by the last Pillager was not limited to the tangible, but also fought in the liminal spiritual spaces. Along with the Europeans came forced religious overhauls. The settlers brought with them the ultimate authority, the directives of God. The Indians meanwhile began to acquiesce to the new religion. Erdrich’s contrasts the hero — Nanapush the trickster who is able to retain his Ojibwe spiritual roots to the character of Pauline who not only acquiesces to the Catholic religion offered by the settlers, but becomes a victim of her internal conflict. This contrast is not only between Nanapush and Pauline, but also spiritually between the catholic priest representing the government and the Nanapush as the last of the Ojibwe spiritual men. As food supplies dwindled, and starvation has overtaken the family, through his Ojibwe faith, Nanapush is able to guide Eli to a Moose:

I had caught some beardgrass, a clump of gray fur, a small carcass picked clean overnight by an owl, and a rabbit that was no good, full of worm....I began to sing slowly, calling on my helpers, until the words came from my mouth but were not mine, until the rattle started, the song sang itself, and

there in the deep bright drifts, I saw the tracks of Eli's snowshoes clearly... The moose appeared. I held it in my vision just as it was... The scrub it stood within was difficult and dense all around, ready to deflect Eli's bullet. But my song directed it to fly true. (101-2)

Nanapush's ability to see beyond the tangible and provide direction for Eli sets a sharp contrast to the provisions allowed by the government. The government provisions did not require a hunt, but did require them to sign over their lands in order to partake. Nanapush realistically and wistfully how they finally came upon consistent food — by relying on the government. He ultimately concedes "... in the end it was not Fleur's dreams, my skill, Eli's desperate searches, or Margaret's preserves that saved us. It was the government commodities sent from Hoopdance in six wagons" (171). The ease of the process compared to Eli's hunting in the cold, the drumming and singing, or the frozen fishlines, is deceptive. The difficulty in the hunt in Nanapush's ability to guide Eli and in Eli's ability to track the moose is the process of ensuring continuity. Not only does this process ensure physical continuity in the very act of lifting them out of starvation, but spiritual continuity in the younger receiving the ability to receive spiritual direction. It might have been easier to receive the food the government easily "sent from Hoopdance"; however, that method lead to loss of lands, which would in turn lead to a total loss of culture.

## Chapter VI.

### The Poisoned Well: Anaya's Magical Response to Corrupted Sources

When the first Francisco Vasquez de Coronado and the Spaniards arrived in New Mexico, they were met by the Pueblo Indians residing in vast untouched plain: the llanos. Coronado and his men eventually retreated back to Mexico having left three catholic priests stationed in New Mexico. The Spaniards may have been the first, but they were most certainly not the last, waves of new settlers followed close on their heels. The indigenous Pueblo Indians were mainly subsistence farmers and small game hunters. Although they did rebel, and they did hold their villages, they colonial settlers managed to corrupt and decimate indigenous cultures in much more subtle and insidious ways. This was not only a loss of cultural foods through the loss of lands to grow those foods, it was a loss through hybridity and dilution — a poisoning of cultural roots.

The European settlers, mainly Spaniards and Catholic missions, began to corrupt the economy and agrarian society of New Mexico by introducing sheep and cattle herds along with new crops and diseases. They were soon followed by early American ranchers. The original Spaniards, or Hispanos, “took it for granted that the land was theirs,” Gilbert notes, and that “no other people had been interested in the country” until Hispano pioneers had made it safe for colonization” (Gilbert 73). The herding economy introduced by the settlers created conflicts and a hybrid culture of the caballero, the original model for cultures, had arisen around the cattle herds that had been introduced. Not only did these herds require feed and grazing lands that were originally provided agricultural plots, MacCameron asserts that

Spanish settlement, evidence indicates that portions of these grassland were, over time, dramatically overgrazed. While many fewer in a number than sheep, cattle also effected changes in the land in several principal ways. Whereas sheep were often grazed on distant pastures and required intensive labor, cattle were turned loose, unattended, on commons close by agricultural plots for safety from hostile Indians. (MacCameron 21)

Along with the overgrazing and loss of agricultural lands, the ranches required labor that were most often provided by New Mexicans. The open llanos turned into a “system of grids, based upon the rectangular survey...with far more severe environmental consequences” (27). And a new hybrid role — that of the vaquero or caballero, the model for the modern cowboy had been created.

Antonio’s father in Anaya’s *Bless Me Ultima* is one such caballero. By the 1940s, the caballeros had become the new torchbearers for indigenous culture. The representation for the freedom of the llanos, ancestral lands, and indigenous cultures that were removed from the towns built around Catholic missions and European settlements. Caught between the magical llano culture of his father Gabriel Maréz of Las Pasturas and his mother, María Luna of the town of Guadalupe. As Antonio struggles with the conflicting identities of the llanos and the town, he recalls the free culture of the llanos and the death of the culture at the hands of the new settlers that brought in both the cattle that they herded and the iron horse that would end their lives and take their lands.

Always the talk turned to life on the llano. The first pioneers there were shepherders. Then they imported herds of cattle from Mexico and became vaqueros. They became horsemen, caballeros, men whose daily life was wrapped up in the ritual of horsemanship. They were the first cowboys in a wild and desolate land which they took from the Indians. Then the railroads came. The barbed wire came... Then the people were uprooted. They looked around one day and they found themselves closed in. the freedom of the land and sky they had known was gone. Those people could not lie without freedom, so they packed up and moved west. They became migrants. (Anaya 119)

Ironically, the hybrid culture created by the Spaniard import of horses created a new freedom through transportation and speed, the freedom to conquer the “wild, desolate land” (119). A post-colonial lens may provide the most global understanding of Anaya’s observation of colonial impact on the indigenous culture of New Mexico. Sheep were imported by the Spaniards and an agrarian society became “the first pioneers [of] shepherders” (119). Having become accustomed to shepherding, the Spaniards “imported herds of cattle from Mexico and [they] became vaqueros” (119). As the indigenous villages of New Mexico sprung again to accept this new role, they mastered the task and grew accustomed to a previously unknown sense of freedom. But this freedom was not to last long as the new settlers once again introduced a new disruption that would prevent the carrying forward of established indigenous culture — they replaced the horse with the iron horse — the railroad. Lands that had gone from farmlands to cattle-grazing lands became cut by not rivers, but tracks. Antonio takes this all in as the culture and heritage of his father’s people is infused into him through the stories and tales of better times. Thus the European settlers once and again made the passing on of cultural values impossible for the indigenous peoples. In the skills they honed at the request of settlers are unneeded, the open lands are gone, and “they [become] migrants” (119).

Anaya’s contrast of the two conflicting cultures at war within Antonio begins with the removal of land that Antonio’s family clings to — the land provided a source for food and physical spaces for landmarks and cultural deposits, and that land was no longer. In addition to displacement, the Europeans brought with them the skills of distilling alcohol that would not only create externally chaotic situations, it moreover changed the nature of the drinkers. Although the alcoholic beverages were not foreign to the original

inhabitants of the llano — the Pueblo Indians, the alcohol consisted of fermented beverages derived from their crops and local vegetation rather than distilled (Abbot 5).

Anaya argues that the social fabric as well as individual identity were corrupted through the introduction of alcohol. After Gabriel is drawn into the hybrid life,

[h]e saw less of his old compadres. He went to work on the highway and on Saturdays after they collected their pay he drank with his crew at the Longhorn, but he was never close to the men of the town. Some weekends the llaneros would come into town ...[t]hen my father's eyes lit up as they drank and talked of the old days and told the old stories. But when the western sun touched the clouds with orange and gold the vaqueros got in their trucks and headed home, and my father was left to drink alone in the long night. (Anaya 3)

Anaya's composes his argument on the effects of alcohol through a juxtaposition of the highway life and the llano life, the drinking with friends during the day, and the arrival of night, and ultimately the departure of companions for the world of "home" and the lone Gabriel, left to his drink and to the night. While the other vaqueros went home together, Gabriel, "if he drank too much he came home a bitter man, then he was at war with everyone" (26). The intended effect goes beyond the introduction of alcoholism, it is the isolation of the individual from their community and subsequently creating a new culture of solitude — to separate the individual not only from compadres but to go further, to separate the individual from the most basic unit of belonging — the family. Matriarchs are at the center of Pueblo culture. Support in other areas of life extend out from the core. Gabriel Maréz moves away from the llano to be closer to his wife's family. And it is the magical *Ultimá* that comes to stay with the family to restore the family's cultural ties. The effects of the saloon and the drinks offered were not only to cut Gabriel off from his matriarchal core, but to put him at enmity with his family and culture. His brief encounters with his previous connections with the old only serve to accentuate the

aloneness and furthermore, to provide a replication and replacement for the old ways and the drink of the indigenous culture.

Through the magical character of Ultima, Anaya offers a contrast and a solution for the effects of the new drink offered. Anaya's answer to the corruption brought in by the colonialists. Rather than separation and isolation, Ultima's magic through natural and ancestral cures bring a restoration of community and wholeness. After Antonio's participation in a spiritual healing exhausts him, the solution is in the bowl of blue atole. "I ate but I could not hold the food down at first. I gagged and Ultima held a cloth before me into which I vomited a poisonous green bile. My nose and eyes burned when I threw up but I felt better" (94). This cleansing can only be interpreted in the realm of magical realism. There is the reality of emotional exhaustion yet the solution is not one that the western mind can comprehend. Additionally, the contrast of colors — the blue atole and the poisonous green bile suggest a direct one to one battle. The calming and warm blue drink dragging out the green venom.

"Will I be all right?" I asked as she cleaned away the mess. "Yes," she smiled. She threw the dirty rags in a gunny sack at the far end of the room. "Try again," she said. I did and this time I did not vomit. The atole and the bread were good. I ate and felt renewed. (95)

In this second application of the atole, Antonio is able to eat bread as well and concludes with feeling renewed in stark contrast to the isolation and attitudes of war that his father suffered after drinking.

## Chapter VII.

### Deserts in the City: Food Access and Government Policy

Fast forward to the year 2005. While Hurricane Katrina may have created temporary food shortages for many of its victims, for the residents of the lower ninth ward it merely exposed, confirmed, and exacerbated existing shortages. As with the governmental attempts of eradication of indigenous nations by killing off the buffalo as food source, and both land and spiritual losses in New Mexico, the lower ninth ward suffered from policies of disenfranchisement that resulted in the loss of ancestral lands; however, this slow dissolution of culture begins by eroding the individual life through preventing access to healthy foods.

The term “food deserts” first came to use in Scotland in 1990 as a descriptor for areas that lacked both affordable and healthy food. The term became more commonly used to drive government policy in addressing food and health access as a preventative measure. The food deserts, however, were created by real estate and redlining policies that steered grocery stores away from low-income areas. The irony of Paula Deen, Tory McPhail, and Emeril Lagasse is that these foods are not available to those living in food deserts such as the Lower Ninth Ward. This irony is addressed Writing In The Kitchen: “In truth, for many southerners, food security has been and continues to be a serious issue” (Davis and Powell 8). The heart of the question is not the availability of food; the question centers on the definition of food. What qualifies as food? How much food is enough food? Ward’s *Salvage the Bones* reveals these issues in real time in the days before and after hurricane Katrina hit. Katrina was not the root of the food disparity:

“census tract-based neighborhoods in New Orleans that were predominately African-American had less access to supermarkets and greater access to small food stores and general merchandise stores than other neighborhoods” (Bodor 65). Potential health concerns were already in place because of this lack of access to fresh food when Katrina hit. The hurricane further exacerbated the situation, those without access to healthy food had even less of it.

These policies were but an extension of the racist policies that compounded the impact of Katrina on the impoverished lower ninth ward. According to McDougall, “there is significant evidence that Army Corps of Engineers projects, especially the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (or MRGO) project, helped produce the levee breaks and flooding in the City (especially in the Ninth Ward)” (McDougall 538). This systematic building up wealthier areas while destroying homes in poorer black neighborhoods. In Ward’s poetic narrative through the voice of Esch, who is fourteen, pregnant, and taking note of the world around her — a world where, even before one of the deadliest hurricanes recorded, “everything else is starving, fighting, struggling” (Ward 89).

The narrative opens with the teenage heroine Esch simultaneously recognizing the need to prepare for the oncoming hurricane and the scarcity of food as she tries to remember “...how many jugs of water we need to fill, how many cans of sardines and potted meat we should stock, how many tubs of water we need” (4). While this may seem like a normal hurricane preparedness checklist, these items are not the items that the family purchases for emergencies, these are items that are saved from their everyday stock. In lieu of fresh water or water bottles, Esch and her siblings are left to retrieve old water jugs from under the house and “the water that burst out of the spigot was hot as

boiling water. One of the jugs was caked with mud on the inside” (5). Ward’s descriptions help establish the lack of anything fresh in the Lower Ninth. The Batiste family, having been warned of the coming hurricane through the radio, understands the significance of food and water supply, yet what is available to them has already been tainted. The water coming out of the spigot is unclean as is the jugs that will hold it. Whether in Flint, Michigan or in the Lower Ninth of New Orleans, the predominantly black families living in these areas were deprived of any agency that wealthier neighborhoods enjoyed. Water that is piped in is polluted water — food that they have regular access to is canned food. Fresh food and the likes of fruit juice are items they have heard of, “fruit punch being "the closest thing to real fruit juice [they’ve] ever had in the house” (49).

Ward’s establishes hope through managing the realities of the Lower Ninth — scarcity of food, dog-fighting, and teenage pregnancies, and presenting a heroine that is as flawed as she is magical. Esch is magical in her connection to the mythical Medea and in her identification with China. In Esch’s survival-of-the-fittest world, she is the hope for continuation through her ability to see the magical in her connection with China the fighting dog, and through her offering herself up as food, albeit sexually, to the boys around. The two literal expectancies, that of China and that of Esch, provide a future oriented perspective. Nevertheless, these expectancies are threatened by the grim impact of environmental racism. The total lack of comfort resulting from both climate change and government policies puts both pregnancies and both lineages at risk. It is through her mother that Esch first identifies with China. In teaching Esch how to collect eggs from the backyard hens, her mother instructed, “[l]ook but don't look, she said. They'll find

you. You gotta wander and they'll come. She'd leaned over like Randall, her strong hand soft on the back of my neck, steadying me like a dog” (198). The idea of Esch as China should not be mistaken for a pejorative understanding of a dog, but rather for in the survival attributes — the ability to hunt, fight, and live. Esch is not only steadied as she is ready to fight, but later in the narrative, as Esch faces off with Manny, she is “on him like China” (203). This complete identification with China provides Esch with the spirit and the skills that she needs to survive, and to ensure survival for her family. It is through instinct that she overcomes her loss of agency. The survival instinct that Esch invokes in fighting Manny is the same that gave her mother reason to steady her as she searched for eggs. Through the spirit of China, Esch is able to reject destructive governmental policy, overcome the lack of all provision, and hunt for the survival of the Batiste family.

Deserts heighten the need for what the desert lacks. In the food desert, food is first and foremost on the mind of those living in the desert. Ward’s narrative juxtaposes the momentary pleasures of sexual escapades — the means of impregnation and continuation of a physical legacy — with descriptive images of the food they dream of filling their empty stomachs with. Esch, at fourteen, is already sexually active with multiple partners. And already, she sees her body as food, not just the staples, but food that would be unattainable in her neighborhood, food that is rich and luxurious. She sees her body as an object of desire, and her breasts as “small as the peaks of cream on lemon meringue pie with hard knots at the middle” (23). And in spite of her many sexual partners, her focus, nevertheless, is on Manny — the one. And it is when having sex with Manny that Esch identifies herself as food, that is, as that which could provide not only satisfaction, but nutrition for others. It is in her understanding of the need in the community that she offers

herself to so that they may “[peel] away my clothes like orange rind; [they] wanted the other me. The pulpy ripe heart” (16). This can be seen as an act of typical teenage act of lust, however, Esch is not the typical teenage girl. The specific detail of offering her heart as an object that others can consume places Esch in the role of the supplier. Manny, amongst others, knows on a liminal level that Esch can keep him alive. Esch’s comparison elevates Manny’s sexual need to the need of the famished hungering for food to live on. In Ward’s argument Esch as the heroine who offers salvation, Esch is both the survivor and the provider.

As “food deserts are part of a broader pattern of racial segregation in America’s urban communities” (Anderson et al. 20). It is mostly those who reside in places like the Lower Ninth Ward that are victimized. Without magical connections and comprehensions, the existing policies will eradicate ancestral homes and bring an end to the indigenous cultures and peoples.

## Chapter VIII.

### Depleting the Earth: Changing Atmospheres from Ground Up

Long before Paul Bunyan was credited for the creation of Minnesota being the “land of 10,000 lakes,” the Ojibwe nation was not only surviving but thriving in the same area. This land of 10,000 lakes was also the land of trees. The forests of the North America’s Great Lakes region, the same region that housed the Ojibwe, came to be valued by the U.S. Government for the lumber that it could produce. In 1916, President Wilson signed into creation the National Park Service. Freemuth, in his article, “Absolutely American and Absolutely Democratic: National Parks and Policy Change,” writes, “The NPS [National Park Service] is not an expert-centered agency but rather a more responsive one concerned with questions of representation of various stakeholders in policy and decision-making” (Freemuth 65). This explanation of the National Park Service reveals the root issue of — the NPS was the fruit of a poisoned tree. Freemuth’s clarification of the NPS’s *raison d’être* as somewhat of a collaborative forum among stakeholders rather than (assumed environmental) experts tells the story of a history of bias. Stake holders, by definition hold certain positions and/or investments — their main focus is to protect the stakes that they have sunk into their claims. On the other hand, experts, opine and apply a body of knowledge. Had the creation of the NPS been centered upon bringing together a body of experts to facilitate the creation of National Parks in the United States, the narrative might have been different. Unfortunately, this was not the case. The very idea of the “stake holders in policy and decision making” creates a bias in the same way that previous to the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, policies and elections were biased

due to the exclusion of women. The idea of a forum of stakeholders is not only limited by those who are welcome to the table, but also by who is doing the welcoming.

In fact, in 1872, when President Grant signed Yellowstone National Park Protection Act, not only were the native tribes of the area not welcome and not only were they not recognized, they were hunted and the reason why an armed infantry encampment was stationed at Yellowstone in the first place. In other words, the arrival of what we would now call “Americans,” the descendants of the European colonials, arrived at Yellowstone as part of an effort to eradicate what they referred to as savages and primitives. Well before their arrival at Camp Sheridan, “Native Americans [had been] hunting and gathering for at least 11,000 years” and at least “twenty-six modern day tribes trace ancestral connections to Yellowstone Park” (Gourley 27). In other words, The indigenous communities that had been kept out of Yellowstone had been caring for and surviving off of the environment for roughly 11,000 years. As with the myth of Paul Bunyan, colonists were hijacking the credit for protecting an area of noted beauty and paradoxically, exposing their complicity in the destruction of the environment.

In 1902, Congress passed the Morris Act creating a space that would somehow serve both the interests of loggers and those who would preserve the forestland of Minnesota. The Morris Act, a predecessor of the National Parks Act, would serve as a template for the exclusion of the indigenous nations. According to Chapman, “these hostile interests were able to reach an agreement which has endured for over fifty years to the complete satisfaction of each group and the maximum benefit to the locality, the state and the nation” (Chapman 3). The hostile interests represented at the table in the Morris Act discussions were the ecologists or, in today’s terms, tree-huggers, and the lumber

companies. As with the creation of Yellowstone, the Morris Act, in creating the Minnesota National Forest, effectually removed all governance of ancestral lands from the indigenous communities living on the land. It additionally allowed for the excessive logging.

The policies that allowed for the Paul Bunyan's of the new world to log their way through the native homelands also created environmental dangers for the Ojibwe. Erdrich's *Tracks* addresses not only the logging and the effects of governmental logging policies on the climate, but through the heroine Fleur, Erdrich provides a resolution. *Tracks* presents the fight over the land to be logged not as a battle between the Ojibwe and the government, but rather an battle between natural forces. As the narrative opens, Nanapush describes "a wind from the east, bringing exile in a storm of government papers" (Erdrich 1). The arrival of the government papers through this wind initiates the battle between this wind and the natural and perhaps spiritual wind of the Ojibwe represented in Fleur. Erdrich not only describes Fleur as the wind but having the effect of a "cool wind" (120). In our current day, as we recognize over deforestation as one of the causes of global warming, cool winds become increasingly needed and yet increasingly difficult to find. It is Fleur's wind that defeats the wind of government papers. The battle initiated by the government comes to a climax through Fleur's control of the wind. The narrative begins with the wind of government papers, and the first suggestion of the negative environmental consequences of logging also begins with the wind. Nanapush tells Fleur's daughter that

It began as a far-off murmur, a disturbance in the wind. We noticed an usual number of birds and other animals that nested or burrowed in trees. Thrashers and grouse settled in the wild grass around Fleur's cabin.

Kokoko silently appeared in the broad daylight and walked the roof at dusk, uttering one note. (206)

The disturbance, could be read as the government, or perhaps the government papers, but the fall-out of the disturbance makes it clear is that this this a literal disturbance of the wind. In 2022, a study out of Basel, Switzerland, determined that “When trees are cut, they expel the CO2 that they have absorbed during their life, which immediately generates changes in the climate” and that “the excessive exploitation of natural resources could lead to the destruction of nature and, therefore, human life” (Leon et al. 9). *Tracks* tells testifies of this effect as the canopy of the forest home along with the natural cooling effects from carbon reduction brought about by an abundance of trees in the forest have been disturbed. Even before Nanapush and Fleur see or hear the felling of the trees, the eco-system the forest creates for the many animals and creatures has been disturbed as they flee the forest and find shelter around Fleur’s cabin. And not only have the habitat of these animals been disrupted; the innate character has been altered — birds that once sang through the night now “appear in broad daylight... uttering one note” (209). Fleur has become more than the wind; she is the protector of the forest home.

The natural conclusion is to fault the lumber companies and not the government, however, Erdrich draws a direct conclusion between the lumber companies and the government policies and instruments that were created in order to support and uphold the lumber companies. It is the voice of the government agent that informs Nanapush that “The Turcot Company has, very kindly I must say, consented to start the lumbering operation on the far side of the lake. This will give the residents time to gather their possessions. Even time to build elsewhere” (208). The government assigned to the indigenous community the same worth and treatment that it did to the animals residing in

the forest, where the only advantage of being human was advanced warning to vacate their ancestral homes. While The Turcot Company is surely responsible for these atrocities — Erdrich directly relates [t]he lumber men often used drags or sledges, and these too had cut the earth... “to the death road of the trees and all that lived in their shadows” (209). However, it was the government, through acts such as the Morris Act, that has allotted the land for logging. It is government policy that the Agent represents and communicates directly and indirectly. When the Agent snidely refers to Nanapush as “grandpa” (208), he represents himself as well as the insincerity of the government in destroying the habitat of an entity much older than itself. It may know to use the terminology of respect, but has a laid out a scheme to eradicate the other.

The Turcot Company, as a representative for the government, destroyed the environs for all living creatures native to the lands around Lake Matchimanito. Erdrich’s Fleur as a lone hold-out in the tribe takes her stand. As the wind and the storm,

With one thunderstroke the trees surrounding Fleur’s cabin cracked off and fell away from us in a circle, pinning beneath their branches the roaring men, the horses. The limbs snapped steel saws and rammed through wagon boxes. Twigs formed webs of wood, canopies laced over groans and struggles. Then the wind settled, curled back into clouds moved on, and we were left standing together ... (223)

Her ploy to use the trees to kill those killing the trees effectively brings the work to a temporary standstill. It is her hands that accomplish the sawing of the trees, and ironically she uses tools stolen from the lumber company, but it is ultimately her wind that provides the hidden power to stop, albeit temporarily, what the government wind has brought in. And ultimately, as the trees fall upon the lumberjacks, the wind returns from whence as it came. Fleur is the wind, but the wind is also bigger than Fleur. She embodies the wind, but the wind comes from the spiritual.

Ultimately Fleur's battle for spiritual domination cannot triumph in the tangible world that fights with physical weapons. The government and invisible policy holds the power over the visible lands and the invisible atmosphere, "no matter how many vanished, more came in their stead, and all of them had crosscut saws, sharp axes..." (217). In spite of Fleur's best efforts, even in the magical realm where she can wield the power of the spiritual, the insurmountable numbers provoked by greed are too numerous for the indigenous tribes. In the end, "[t]he Turcot company, [is the] leveler of a whole forest" (219). And the indigenous communities become "[a] tribe of pressed trees. A tribe of chicken scratch that can be scattered by a wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match" (225). Ironically, through Nanapush, Erdrich extends the metaphor — the same trees that were cut down became paper treaties and policies that held all the power and enabled the destruction of more trees and native environments. Those acts of deforestation, in addition to changing the climate and the nature of the animals living in the forest, have now changed the nature of the indigenous peoples as they are diminished to "pressed trees" and "chicken scratch" (225).

In *Tracks* Erdrich connects the dots for us. It was the government all along. The government implemented policy that created global warming and climate change crises. But it was the American Indians, the first residents on the continent — predating others by roughly 11,000 years — that were also the first to experience the negative consequences of government environmental policy.

## Chapter IX.

### There's Something in the Air: The Devil in the Dust Storm

What the government removed cut down in terms of the numbers of trees became directly correlated with a change in the local climate, both physically and spiritually for the Ojibwe in *Tracks*. In Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima*, the government spotlight does not shine on the trees, nevertheless, the policies that affected the Pueblo Indians and locals of New Mexico were policies that arose from the same governmental desire to fundamentally eradicate native cultures and replace them with narratives from the dominant white cultures. New Mexico holds a unique place in history in that it was chosen for the site of the Los Alamos National Laboratory. According to the website for the laboratory, it is:

Located about 35 miles northwest of Santa Fe, LANL is a multi-program, federally funded research and development center...LANL's priority roles are serving as a nuclear weapons design agency and a nuclear weapons production agency; addressing nuclear threats; and performing national security science, technology, and engineering. (LANL)

While this description offers a concise location and purpose, as with the Morris Act and National Park Services Act, it does not address the indigenous peoples who had been living on the land "35 miles northwest of Santa Fe" (LANL), nor does it in the brief statement address why the land was chosen. These may be irrelevant details, but it is more likely they are irrelevant because the original peoples of the llano that LANL dispossessed were irrelevant. What differentiates the policies that choices that governed the LANL from the racist policies that dispossessed the Ojibwe tribes in the Great Lakes Region was the vehicle for displacement. The Los Alamos Labs is considered a destination research facility; it is the pinnacle of human intellect and technology. And it

was at the Los Alamos Labs that the Manhattan Project completed “the world’s first nuclear explosion [on] July 16, 1945 at a site located 210 miles south of Los Alamos, New Mexico, on the plains of the Alamogordo Bombing Range, known as the Jornada del Muerto. The code name for the test was “Trinity.” And according to a US Navy pilot flying near Albuquerque, “when he radioed Albuquerque Air Traffic Control, he was simply told, ‘Don’t fly south’” (“Trinity: World’s First Nuclear Test”). At the time of detonation, there were

Approximately 63 ranches and three camps within 48 km (30 miles) of ground zero...The closest occupied residence at the time of the blast was approximately 19 km (12 miles) north of ground zero. Incorporated towns with populations over 1,000 closest to the site were just over 48 km (30 mi) from ground zero. (Widner and Flack 481)

The certain effects of the radioactive fallout for those around the test site and the contamination of both the atmosphere and the groundwater are not the focus of this study. Rather, it is the treatment of the indigenous peoples living in the affected zone. Not only had ancestral lands had been confiscated for government use, but furthermore, they were given no warning, not even a “don’t fly south.” Their lands and lives were of no consequence to the researchers. Perhaps this is not fall strictly under a racist government policy that heaped negative effects of climate change on indigenous communities and cultures; however, it does provide a picture of how racist government policy change the local climate if only temporarily and poisoned the air for disproportionately indigenous peoples.

Anaya’s small town of Guadalupe is witness to the Trinity test, but Anaya goes further and reveals the real battle. As with the battle of wind in Erdrich *Tracks*, Anaya’s understanding of the battle reveals an unseen world — the battle of knowledge and the source of knowledge. The townspeople of Guadalupe live in constant fear of the bomb.

Having received no warning or other information about the experiments taking place in their backyards are overcome by the fear of the unknown, and in obedience to human tendencies, try to find explanations for inexplicable experiences. Antonio's neighbors in town raise the issue of a changing climate and provide the best possible explanation within their limited experiential understanding:

The spring dust storms of the llano continued and I heard many grown-ups blame the harsh winter and the sandstorms of the spring on the new bomb that had been made to end the war. "The atomic bomb" they whispered, "a ball of white heat beyond the imagination, beyond hell..." (Anaya 183)

Although in Antonio's purview the dust storms were a continuance, there is a recognition of a particularly harsh winter and the dust storms, in the vocabulary of the surrounding adults, become sandstorms. Some notable change has taken place, something that is out of the ordinary. These are the occurrences that the human mind stretches to encompass and attribute reason to, and the only reason they could determine, was the Trinity test of the atomic bomb. These were not casual statements, but in Anaya's masterful personification of fear, they were "whispered," as if the open declaration would bring the bomb upon them, or perhaps even worse, the consequences of the bomb — whatever it is that lays "beyond hell." The government had not only found a way to subdue the enemy and end the war, it had found a way to further subjugate the indigenous communities of the area. Those who were not even worthy of human consideration were further subjugated by the threat that they readily perceived.

Ultimately, Anaya presents a path forward by presenting the real battle — the battle of knowledge. Anaya presents two divergent types and paths of knowledge — one based on western schooling and education and one based on traditional means, Ultima the curandera, and the resources of the earth. One path, that of the European settlers come

to the New Mexico llano, would try to understand and control the unknown, while the other, would find faith and acceptance in the unknown. As the fear overcame the townspeople, it was not a fear of the bomb or the consequences of the bomb — their fear was that “...they compete with God, they disturb the seasons, they seek to know more than God Himself. In the end, that knowledge they seek will destroy us all” (183).

What the townspeople understood, in spite of their hybrid and diluted culture, was that the bomb was akin to the second tower of Babel — a people exerting their will to conquer the heavens and compete with God. And what they also were also assured of was the confidence that this would not end well. The Los Alamos Labs, despite its collection of the top scientists and brain trusts, would culminate with a knowledge that would result in a destruction of the world. This intellect was at odds with the indigenous understanding of knowledge and its applications. The world that Ultima introduces to Antonio “a new world opening up and taking shape ... [as they] walked in the hills of the llano, gathering the wild herbs and roots for medicine” (36), is a world that draws understanding and healing from the earth in place of mining for uranium and plutonium that would ultimately lead to the destruction of all things. Ultima’s knowledge is focused on respect for all living things as “even the plants had a spirit” and understanding which plant could be “endowed with so much magic [that it could] cure burns, sores, colic in babies, bleeding dysentery, and even rheumatism” (37). The sole purpose of Ultima’s traditional knowledge was holistic healing that did not seek to know the how or why or the intellectual details of the transaction. Eventually through imparting this type of knowledge to Antonio, he is able to overcome his own fear of the unknown. Antonio “...followed. [He] knew that if she did not answer [his] question that part of life was not

yet ready to reveal itself to [him]. But [he] was no longer afraid of the *presence* of the river” (39). The traditional path of knowledge that Ultima imparts to Antonio allows him to understand his one act — to follow — an act of faith. Additionally, Antonio’s actions result in an ability to be at rest with and embrace the unknown, understanding that even the unknown has an agency — a spirit — that requires respect.

Oppenheimer, the director of the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos National Laboratory named the first nuclear detonation test Trinity after John Donne’s Holy Sonnet XIV. While there is no intention to discuss or analyze Donne’s sonnet as a part of this research, it is important to note that after the volta, the sonnet declares: “Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain, / But am betrothed unto your enemy” (lines 9-10). It can be reasoned that Oppenheimer was well aware of the true nature of the product of their knowledge. Despite all desire, prayers, and willingness to love God, they are nevertheless, united with the enemy. In a stark contrast, Anaya’s Ultima and her magic bring a what the government could not — peace on earth.

## Chapter X.

### Looking for a Drink: Muddy Waters

Whether it is a hurricane, Covid-19, or any other existential threat, members of any community rely upon its governing bodies to support and protect them in the midst of crises. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in the case of Erdrich's *Tracks* and Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima*, decisions are limited not by those who have a vested interest in the outcome, but rather those who have been welcome to the table. Historically, this has meant that members of the BIPOC community, perhaps the greatest stake-holders, were purposefully excluded in the governing process.

Ward's *Salvage the Bones* offers one more case study for racially biased governmental policy systemically eradicating the indigenous local culture. Ward exposes the governmental policies surrounding the Katrina crises. Through the onslaught of the flooding caused by Katrina, Ward not only reveals the initial lack of fresh water for those living in the Lower Ninth Ward, using water as a symbol for the destructive power of the government, Ward's narrative provides a chilling account of the government's treatment of BIPOC communities.

The Roman aqueduct is the first known vehicle that lead to the control of water rights. An inscription from the first century BCE shows one "Quintus Folvius, son of Quintus, grandson of Marcus claim[ing] a right to this water in the court of P(ublius) Atilius, son of Lucius, the urban praetor" (Bannon 79). With this interdict, the world enters the age of government control of water. It is not until the year 2010 however, that the UN declares water a basic human right as it "acknowledged the importance of equitable access to safe water and sanitation as an integral component of the realization

of all human rights” (Arden 785). In the Lower Ninth Ward, Ward’s opens with a laboring dog China and the Batiste family struggling to find jugs to save water. While saving water may be a common detail in emergency situation, the Batiste family, and those in the Lower Ninth Ward are not saving bottled water, they are bottling water to save. Additionally, in Esch’s account of filling the jugs, “[she] turned the knob and the water that burst out of the spigot was hot as boiling water” (Ward 10), Ward brings to life the inequity of the faucet. Those in the Lower Ninth Ward have no control over what comes piped through. The faucet does not offer the choice of temperature, and it would be a stretch to say that the water at boiling point temperatures from a spigot would constitute safe waters. Furthermore, when “Big Henry ... [drinks] from the faucet, [wets] his head, and [shakes] it like a wet dog...” (13), Ward reminds of us the Third World living circumstances of the Lower Ninth Ward. The same water being used for drinking, bathing, and the dehumanizing of Big Henry into animalistic characteristics provide graphic detail for what the government policies have produced. Other than Esch’s commentary on the temperature of the water, it seems that the citizens of the community have become accustomed to the temperature. The assumption that the water temperature reflects the heat of the summer, nevertheless, it should also be safe to assume that the water comes from government-controlled sources. In this case, the community cannot rely on the government to provide access to water. Since the government has abdicated this responsibility, it would be safe to assume that it has neglected other safeguards and responsibilities as well.

What can be categorized as oversight of the government is in actuality the result of not oversight, but racial bias. Ward’s fictional account of the Batiste family struggling

under the weight of flood waters provides a reflection of the lived experiences of the BIPOC community. As the news of the hurricane approaches, the Batiste family gets ready to hunker down. Esch's remark on the difference in the response between larger animals and smaller ones, "I thought all animals ran away...And maybe the bigger animals do. But now I think that other animals, like squirrels and the rabbits, don't do that at all. Maybe the small don't run" (215). This self-assessment and alignment with the squirrels and the rabbits, the inconsequential and forgotten who understand their total lack of significance in the overall ecosystem is but a reflection of where the black community has landed after centuries of racist abuse. Even in their own eyes they are not only insignificant, but understand that they have no place to go. It is from this stance that they interact with a gargantuan entity known as the government.

The Batiste family does not have any formal relationship with the government. They have a small plot that they have managed to keep; they've managed to construct a life through relying on bits and pieces they were able to scavenge off the ancestral home of the previous generation, and they understand the government is not stepping in to help them. Their one interaction is the phone call.

...It's a phone call from the state government that goes out to everyone in the area who will be hit by a storm. ...A man's voice speaks; he sounds like a computer, like he has an iron throat...*Mandatory evacuation. Hurricane making landfall tomorrow. If you choose to stay in your home and have not evacuated by this time, we are not responsible. You have been warned. And these could be the consequences of your actions.* There is a list. (217)

The disembodied voice with the iron throat. The role of the government, as far as the Batiste family is concerned, is not to step in to help, but to let them know that they are orphans as far as the government is concerned- it is the negation of any responsibility from the entity

that should exist to support and protect its citizenry. The voice on the other end of the phone, the modern equivalent of human bridges, is a machine, and it does not care.

As Katrina overtakes the town of Bois Sauvage, the fictional stand-in for the Lower Ninth Ward, Ward's description of the force of the water depicts the experience of centuries of government policy inundating and drowning out the black community. It is the water that displaces the family and dislocates them from their home, "The house," Randall says, and his voice is steady, calm, but I can hardly contain the panic I feel when the house tilts, slowly as an unmoored boat. "It's the water," Skeetah says, "It's the water" (229). The water, or rather the government, has broken up the home. The government in all its interactions with BIPOC communities has slowly with an unstoppable force lifted them from the spaces they possessed and nurtured for ages past, and sets them to afloat to water. And it is this realization that enlightens Skeetah. All this time, it was the government killing them off slowly. Esch's own epiphany comes as the water surrounds her, "The water swallows, and I scream...*Who will deliver me?* And the hurricane says *ssssssshhhhhhhh*. It shushes me through the water, with a voice muffled and deep" (235). As Esch cries out, the power of the hurricane is extended through the water mechanism; through the lack of governmental oversight, through the racist policies that have been at work for centuries, through robbing the community of their lands, the voices of vital stakeholders were silenced. It was not the water, but the government. It is the government.

## Chapter XI.

### Conclusions and Redemptive Narratives

In every generation, indigenous cultures have faced differing challenges nevertheless, the forms of oppression consistently fall along the same lines. Whether it is the loss of ancestral lands for the Ojibwe, indigenous peoples of New Mexico, or Black communities in the south, the concerted effort to stamp out these cultures through destruction of physical spaces is reflected in literary representations of real-life circumstances. While these three authors, Erdrich, Anaya, and Ward, all offer perspectives of the different ways in which dominant European cultures have tried to replace indigenous cultures, the story is the same.

Each indigenous community faced the same challenge of governmental policies in the name of progress purposely removing indigenous peoples from their lands. In our current context, the consolidation of these different cultures into the term BIPOC provides some leverage in terms of an identifiable group that can expose and stand against policies. However, by grouping disparate cultures under one umbrella, the unique identity of each is lost to the whole. These fiction accounts that represent the individual cultures, and are written from individuals native to those cultures, are necessary to uphold the specifics of each community group. As much as survival of BIPOC groups as a whole is a goal, the ultimate goal is to help individuals find identity that has been passed down and can be carried on. It is through these individual experiences that a lens of magical realism can be applied and it is through the banding together of individual experiences that communities can grow, flourish, and create traditions. Additionally, it is through

revealing these grass-roots individual experiences and that a possibility of recognition and positions of defense can arise.

A discussion of the systemic eradication of the indigenous cultures requires the inclusion of basic human rights definitions. According to the United Nations, basic human rights include economic, social, and cultural rights. Among the basic economic, social, cultural rights, are the following:

- Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality. (United Nations, Art. 22)
- Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. (United Nations, Art. 23)
- Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. (United Nations, Art. 27)

The narratives discussed in this thesis have revealed that indigenous peoples are being deprived of these basic human rights. As is often the case, this deprivation arises when colonialists viewed all land as theirs and other cultures as inferior. Under the auspices of “God is on our side,” they sought to eradicate other religions and belief systems — more often than not, God also needed to make use of guns and other weapons and implements of industry in order to push whole communities off the land. This denial of human rights seemed to be more a practice that reflected personal greed rather than anything involving a Christian God as it resulted in a total deprivation of economies and cultures. European settlers, while establishing a new nation, sought to ensure basic human rights for themselves and to deny those very same rights for those whose land they were overtaking. Economic deprivation is one of the most basic of all human rights

abuses — to remove opportunity to support oneself and family, additionally, the deprivation of the ability to pass on culture to the next generation is not only a deprivation of a basic human right, the inability to communicate culture effectively eradicates culture. These human rights abuses are yet another symptom of the innate greed in capitalist societies that has spilled over from the individual abuses to affecting whole people groups.

A saying attributed to the Hopi Indians embodies the issue at the source of these abuses: “Those who tell the stories rule the world” (Matuga). The abuses to indigenous communities have resulted in the silencing of BIPOC voices. Ultimately, the only voice left is the voice of the western colonialist — the only narrative offered is the narrative of the dominant culture. Nevertheless, while the history of indigenous communities continues to be truncated by the impact of colonization and racist government policies, the human spirit continues to prove itself increasingly more resilient. The three authors discussed in this thesis provide a ray of hope and a model for redemptive practices as they simultaneously expose historical trauma and offer a solution through magical realism.

These narratives offer a window into the possibilities of maintaining the original cultures while assimilating to the culture of the colonizer. In this way, the repatriation of land rights and cultural revitalization becomes more than a possibility. These collaborations allow for new policies that potentially could be used to develop new policies and strategies. Through these collaborations indigenous communities can support self-governance as well as economic pathways to survival as a people group. Solutions will require the continued commitment of the literary community to expose the injustices

in non-fiction real life narratives. This form of truth-telling provides hope for future generations of indigenous communities and offers realistic pathways for continuation and healing.

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