

# University of Alberta

Visions of Sovereignty:  
Indigenous Narratives of Resistance in a Neoliberal Age

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines four Indigenous novels published in Canada and the United States between 1990 and 2000. Building upon Indigenous and non-Indigenous theories of literary nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization, this project focuses on narrative articulations of Indigenous cultural and political sovereignty that foreground and are cognizant of global political, economic, cultural, and environmental entanglements. One of the key intentions of this study is to underscore the importance of examining how modes of Indigenous being-in-common are articulated in fiction written within a context of neoliberalism. Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* is foundational in terms of its critique of the practices and ideologies of neoliberal globalization, its representation of Indigenous modes of being-in-relation and resistance, its association of Indigenous sovereignty with transnational, inter-tribal, and alliance-based movements. Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* offers an Indigenous critique of neoliberalism from an environmental standpoint, foregrounding the importance of Indigenous ecologies, knowledges, and relations in the face of neoliberal globalization. Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* articulates urban Indigenous community practices in resistance to urban neoliberal governmentality, ongoing colonial policies of erasure, and material and intellectual dispossession. Jeannette Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows* explores the context of Indigenous liberation struggles in the Americas, as well as global Indigenous activism at the international level. I argue that these novels represent a broad spectrum of Indigenous responses in 1990s North America to the economic, environmental,

cultural, and political consequences of neoliberal globalization for Indigenous practices of community, nationalism, and sovereignty. Ultimately, they imagine and problematize possibilities for resistance, for conceptualizing justice, and for understanding our complex interrelationships with others.

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## Introduction

During a conversation with Osage scholar Robert Warrior at a panel at Stanford University in 1996, Muscogee Creek poet Joy Harjo asserted that the central questions animating the work of Indigenous artists and scholars at the turn of the twenty-first century remain those that have been asked since the arrival of Europeans in the Americas: “Who are we? Who are our children? And what are we all becoming together?” (qtd. in Weaver, *That the People* 164). These queries speak to a hunger for explorations of identity, relationships, continuance, change, and community that narrate, critique, and celebrate the contemporary lived experiences of the First Peoples of the Americas. It is Harjo’s last question that drives this project, which investigates how Indigenous literary works have conceptualized collective becoming in an age of neoliberal globalization, and how they have imagined (expansively or restrictively) the “we” that engages in that becoming. Building upon growing research into the liberatory potential of international solidarities and relationships, my dissertation analyzes the ways that First Nations texts delineate issues of cultural, aesthetic, political, and intellectual sovereignty in a context where the destructive consequences of neoliberal capital penetrate into the various life-worlds of Indigenous peoples.

Thus far, relatively little scholarly attention has been given to the ways in which Indigenous writers and texts at the turn of the twenty-first century have engaged with the social, cultural, political, and economic challenges of globalized free-market forces. This project is meant as a tentative step in that direction. It is

not my intention to claim that this mode of analysis is to be privileged above any other. It is instead, to borrow a phrase from literary critic Craig Womack (Muscogee Creek), “merely a point on [a] critical spectrum” (*Red 2*), one that I believe retains a commitment to the dignity, sovereignty, agency, and continuity of Indigenous communities. One of the key intentions of this study is to underscore the importance of examining how practices of Indigenous being in common are articulated in fiction written within a context of neoliberal globalization. Whereas literary nationalists foreground the indispensable work of recovering Indigenous intellectual traditions and articulating tribally specific modes of literary analysis, this project intentionally focuses on narrative articulations of cultural and political sovereignty that foreground and are cognizant of global political, economic, cultural, and environmental entanglements.

In this project I explore four Indigenous novels published during the last decade of the twentieth century: *Almanac of the Dead* by Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), *Solar Storms* by Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), *Indian Killer* by Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d’Alene), and *Whispering in Shadows* by Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan). These texts were conceived during the 1980s and 1990s, a period that saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Oka crisis, the Gulf War, the quincentennial of Columbus’s arrival and the Zapatista uprising, the work of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples towards the adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the rise of the alter-globalization movement, and the ascendance of neoliberalism

as an hegemonic form of governmentality. I argue that these novels represent a broad spectrum of Indigenous responses in 1990s North America to the consequences of neoliberal globalization in terms of Indigenous nationalism and sovereignty. Although this particular historical moment has passed, contemporary social movements like Occupy Wall Street and Idle No More indicate that these texts are prescient in their depictions of Indigenous responses to neoliberalism.

As a non-Indigenous educator currently working in Treaty Three territory in Northwestern Ontario, I acknowledge that I approach Indigenous texts from a position of privilege accrued as a result of specific historical and social forces of race, colonialism, capitalism, and education. My involvement in Indigenous and Adult Education has increased my awareness of the ways that discourses of nationalism and sovereignty continue to operate in rural municipalities and First Nations in a Canadian context where extractive industries such as mining and forestry have been, and continue to be, fast growing sectors of an economy that draws interest from international investors and companies. I have found that approaching these issues through fiction enables students to imagine modes of collectivity that complicate prevailing neoliberal valorizations of individualism and self-sufficiency. My engagement with these texts is rooted in a desire to discover the kinds of work they can do for readers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to enable them to imagine new ways of belonging, and to articulate those forms of belonging towards socially just ends including challenging oppression, building social solidarity, and empowering Indigenous communities to exercise self-determination and sovereignty over their own futures. The novels

examined in this project imagine a spectrum of social justice practices, involving acts such as distributing food to the homeless, working with and through international agencies, and challenging corporate exploitation. For the authors in this study, an essential aspect of social justice involves asserting cultural and political sovereignty and privileging sustainable relations with the land.

I have chosen novels as the primary objects of this study because this narrative form has a long history of being bound up in processes of constructing national and communal identity. This focus on novels is a limitation to the extent that the work of prominent Indigenous playwrights and poets, such as Tomson Highway (Cree), Drew Hayden Taylor (Ojibwe), and LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), to name but a few, occupies a marginal place in this project. The lack of sustained engagement with the Indigenous poems, plays, films, speeches, and other aesthetic forms means that non-narrative considerations of neoliberalism and being-in-common are left unexamined. The novels I have chosen to focus on demonstrate the varied and multiple ways in which indigenous literary writers are grappling with the demands of working in a globalized era. These texts provide a varied overview of Indigenous literary responses to neoliberalism in the late 20th century. Literary history is filled with works that have elicited or accompanied cultural change. Harriet Beecher Stowe's popular 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, is often held to have fuelled the abolitionist movement in the United States. In his 1998 book *Worrying the Nation: Imagining a National Literature in English Canada*, Jonathan Kertzer claims "the nation owes its very 'life' to literature, and to all the arts of cultural persuasion, because they articulate a

national life by telling its story and by supplying its motivating principle—justice.” He argues that “the nation as social imaginary always relies on both a narrative of justice and the justice of narrative” (12). Although the novel is bound to legacies of nationalism, not all novels are celebrations of the nation; nor do they subscribe to identical ideas about how nations are constituted. By privileging marginalized histories, worldviews, and modes of being in common, texts can problematize accepted narratives about belonging, colonialism, nationalism, and justice. Novels speak to and open imagined possibilities for resistance, for conceptualizing justice, and for understanding our complex interrelationships with others.

The notions of being-in-common and being-in-relation play a central role in this dissertation. My use of these terms draws upon Silko’s account of human nature and Indigenous community:

Our human nature, our human spirit, wants no boundaries, and we are better beings, and we are less destructive and happier. We can be our best selves as a species, as beings with all the other living beings on this earth, we behave best and get along best, without those divisions. (“Listening” 170–71)

Here, Silko emphasizes the notion of *being with* others, of *being with* all living beings, as the central condition of healthy human communities. Making a similar argument about the ontological status of the notion of “being with” in his 1996 treatise *Being Singular Plural*, French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy argues “it is not the case that the ‘with’ is an addition to some prior Being; instead, the ‘with’

is at the heart of Being” (30). In other words, Silko’s understanding of human nature posits an originary “witness” as a foundational condition of human existence. In an earlier essay entitled “Of Being-in-Common,” Nancy claims, “We shall say then that being is not common in the sense of a common property, but that it is in common. Being is in common” (1). For my purposes, being-in-common is a more generic term than being-in-relation, as it can refer to organized or unorganized groups of people, accidental or purposeful gatherings. On the other hand, I draw upon Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice’s term, “*community-in-relationship*” (*Our Fire* 211), to inform my use of being-in-relation, which designates both a process of engaging with various others and a process of othering. Relations, after all, can be banal, benign, caring, oppositional, or oppressive, according to how they are shaped by constructions of gender, class, culture, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, or race. We are always already positioned in relation to multiple communities and peoples in different ways. Whereas being-in-common leaves open the possibility of an absence of relationship, being-in-relation foregrounds community, and thus emphasizes purposeful modes of togetherness.

Throughout my study I use the terms neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization to designate a hegemonic mode of thought which came into ascendance in the 1980s, with the election of Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain, Ronald Reagan in the United States, and Brian Mulroney in Canada. Neoliberalism is a philosophy that privileges free trade, deregulation, efficient markets, and profit. Other concerns, such as cultural institutions, the common

good, the environment, social relations, are subordinated to this economic rationality. For example, in her introduction to the 2007 edited collection *Resistance: An Indigenous Response to Neoliberalism*, Māori scholar Maria Bargh asserts that neoliberalism can be defined as “those practices and policies which seek to extend the market mechanism into areas of the community previously organised and governed in other ways” (1). By framing policies of deregulation and privatization as favourable to the values of choice and individual freedom, state actors are able to implement policies that weaken social programs, environmental protections, and increase poverty. I use the term neoliberal globalization to refer specifically to the global spread of neoliberal ideas, institutions, and legislative regimes. For my purposes, globalization refers to the flows of people, culture, goods, ideas, information, technologies, and capital across national borders. Globalization is not a new phenomenon—people have been travelling and crossing borders for centuries. However, globalization in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can be distinguished in terms of degree and intensity of these flows. While globalization can refer to the circulation of artifacts in a wide variety of domains, neoliberal globalization designates the circulation of market-based principles and policies of states and corporations. Neoliberal globalization, therefore, is a particular mode of globalization that emphasizes economic efficiency, free trade, and deregulation as its overriding principles. For this reason, I prefer use term “alter-globalization” as opposed to “anti-globalization” to characterize movements that articulate alternative visions of globalization rooted in justice and respect for the

environment, human dignity, and cultural diversity. Alter-globalization movements do not wish to arrest the global circulation of ideas, goods, and peoples. Instead, they emphasize the need to prioritize the globalization of justice, human rights, and respect for difference.

The Zapatista uprising in the mid-1990s exemplifies the complicated relationships Indigenous peoples have with different aspects of globalization. On the one hand, the oppressive and exploitative policies imposed by the Mexican state are replicated across the globe. On the other hand, the planetary reach of information technologies and communications networks enables the creation of forms of togetherness previously unfeasible. In a memorable response to allegations by the Mexican government that he was gay, claims meant to sabotage his credibility, Subcomandante Marcos, a spokesperson for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) in Chiapas, identified himself in this way:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the Metro at 10:00 PM, a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, an unhappy student, and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains. (Qtd. in A.J. Hall 145)

His statement invokes solidarity among global subjects who have historically been marginalized through colonialism, patriarchy, war, and economic inequality. He sees the violence against the Mayan peoples in Chiapas as linked with injustices and discrimination perpetrated across the globe by governments and corporations that perpetuate contemporary colonial relations.

This affirmation of shared concerns across cultural and international borders has been recently receiving more attention by Indigenous academics. In an article published in 2007 entitled “More Light Than Heat,” Jace Weaver (Cherokee) points to the ways that scholars have begun to investigate how diverse Indigenous peoples, communities, and cultures are transforming themselves within the present global era, and how new modes of collectivity are currently being articulated and explored. Weaver advocates approaching Native American Studies as a “borderless discourse” and notes approvingly that “more and more scholars are making connections and comparisons and forging solidarities with other Indigenous groups—Chamorros, Maoris, Ainus, Samis, Torres Straits Islanders, and so on—around the globe” (237). Weaver’s observation signals that Indigenous critics and activists are increasingly attending to the ways that building relationships among Indigenous peoples hemispherically and globally can lead to a greater understanding of the problems posed by neoliberal globalization, and to new and shared forms of resistance and knowledge. Over a decade earlier, in his 1995 work *Tribal Secrets*, Warrior asserts that what he finds inspiring about the writings of Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) and John Joseph Mathews (Osage) are “the global perspectives and international

experiences that are integral to their works [that] give the lie to any critical strategy that would seek to reduce them to narrow, stereotypical categories and formulations” (xx). What is especially promising about Deloria’s approach, claims Warrior, is his “search, at once pragmatic and visionary, for answers to the problems of Native communities in the context of the world as a whole” (33–34). Warrior applauds how the global outlooks of Deloria and Mathews strengthen and deepen their critiques of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations and ground their search for solutions to problems facing Indigenous communities. Both Warrior and Weaver make the case that it is essential for any expression or practice of Indigenous sovereignty (intellectual or political) to take into account the complex networks of local and global relationships within which Indigenous communities are entangled.

In her 2007 work *New Indians, Old Wars*, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux) makes the point that Indigenous history in the Americas is a useful lens through which to understand and contextualize the recent imperial wars pursued by the United States (and supported by many Western countries) in the Middle East: “nothing happens on the world stage without context and the old Indian wars are the backdrop for most of the modern events of horror” (74). Cook-Lynn acknowledges that it makes sense for scholars to read Indigenous texts within the context of global events, and global events in the context of Indigenous histories. Outlining the similarities between the imperial economic policies of allotment imposed upon Indigenous peoples in the United States and the neoliberal privatization of Iraq’s national oil companies, Cook-Lynn gestures

toward a sense of global solidarity among those peoples subjected to the neoliberal economic machinery of Empire. She adamantly supports nationalist readings of Indigenous texts and argues that Indigenous authors ought to deal explicitly with issues of sovereignty in their creative works, but she also maintains that comparisons must be drawn with global struggles against imperialism in order to develop solidarities and understand Indigenous struggles in globalized contexts.

Indigenous literary responses to globalization have occurred simultaneously with a renewed emphasis on Indigenous political, cultural, juridical, and literary sovereignty. Chapter 1 of this project thus explores the critical and socio-historical contexts with which Indigenous writers and critics in the latter part of the twentieth century have engaged. Examining the critical strategy of literary nationalism, which privileges readings of First Nations literatures as literatures of and from particular tribal nations, and the negotiation of international treaties and agreements, such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, this chapter argues that Indigenous texts and peoples are embracing the global while simultaneously asserting and defending their sovereignty in the global space. My methodological approach focuses on expressions of sovereignty within the context of neoliberal globalization. I am interested in the ways that Indigenous texts have, in the past few decades, articulated visions of sovereignty and resistance that challenge not only the ongoing colonialism of North American settler states, but also the intensified

subordination of Indigenous modes of being-in-relation to a neoliberal economic rationality of profit and consumption.

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* is the subject of Chapter 2. Silko's monumental novel is foundational in terms of its critique of the practices and ideologies of neoliberal globalization, its articulation of Indigenous modes of being-in-relation and resistance, its association of Indigenous sovereignty with transnational, inter-tribal, and alliance-based movements, and its prophetic vision of Indigenous survivance.<sup>1</sup> *Almanac* opens several narrative, discursive, and critical possibilities for literary representations of Indigenous modes of community at the turn of the twenty-first century. This chapter traces two central aspects of Silko's text. First, the novel is a naming and a critique of neoliberal globalization. Identified as members of the Gunadeeyah clan, or the Destroyers, various characters in the novel subscribe to ideologies of privatization and individualization, and reject any sense of community in relation. Tracing the transnational flows of capital, arms, drugs, and body organs and juxtaposing them to the simultaneously restricted movement of Indigenous and other disposable peoples, *Almanac* critiques the social, ecological, spiritual, cultural, and political effects of neoliberal globalization for Indigenous peoples, the environment, and

<sup>1</sup> In *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, Gerald Vizenor (Ojibwe) defines survivance as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (vii). Vizenor's term evokes both survival and resistance as ongoing, interrelated processes.

other marginalized communities. Second, the novel presents a vision of networked and alliance-based resistance to the violence of neoliberalism perpetrated by members of the Gunadeeyah clan. Opposition to the Destroyers is rooted in the almanac, a prophetic text that symbolizes both the continuity and adaptability of identity and culture. Adopting a discourse of tribal internationalism, the characters in *Almanac* enact a resistance to neoliberal policies pursued not only at American, Mexican, or Canadian federal levels, but also through international trade agreements and economic policies.

In Chapter 3, I examine Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*, which offers an Indigenous critique of neoliberalism from an environmental standpoint, foregrounding the importance of Indigenous ecologies, knowledges, and relations for the survivance of communities of resistance against neoliberal globalization. Hogan is well aware of the global and transcontinental struggles of Indigenous peoples for sovereignty, human rights, and dignity, and against colonialism and neoliberal globalization, drawing connections between practices of environmental exploitation, Indigenous dispossession, and Western imperial adventurism as manifestations of a shared logic of consumption and greed. Taking place in 1972 and 1973, the events narrated in *Solar Storms* predate many of the free trade agreements implemented in the 1980s and 1990s that marked the ascendancy of neoliberal economic frameworks in North America. However, through its narrator Angel Wing, *Solar Storms* offers a vision of ecological being-in-relation that challenges the neoliberal logics of market fundamentalism underlying the planned construction of a dam on Indigenous lands that will have devastating

consequences for the people. Drawing attention to specific assaults on Indigenous sovereignty for the sake of corporate profit, Angel's narrative also exposes the principles of deregulation and privatization that ground both BEEVCO's project and contemporary corporate attitudes globally towards both Indigenous peoples and the environment. My contention in this chapter is that Angel's representation of herself as entangled within a dynamic, entangled web of relations, and her role as active participant in her community's struggle for sovereignty, constitute an alternative vision of Indigenous survivance in the face of neoliberal globalization.

Chapter 4 investigates how, just as Silko's novel narrates modes of Indigenous being-in-relation in the context of neoliberal globalization, Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* articulates practices of urban Indigenous identity and community in resistance to urban neoliberal governmentality, ongoing colonial policies of erasure, and material and intellectual dispossession. *Indian Killer* explores and problematizes the ways in which urban Indigenous communities negotiate fluid, intersecting, contradictory, and interdependent discourses of imagination, performativity, intellectual sovereignty, nationalism, and intertribalism, while navigating conditions of poverty and structural, figurative, and physical violence. Throughout the novel, Alexie's characters underscore the fragility and precarity of urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous experience against the backdrop of global and urban neoliberalism. I argue that *Indian Killer* foregrounds the potential failure of particular modes of Indigenous belonging and community to offer sanctuary to those who are vulnerable to neoliberalism's violence

Finally, Chapter 5 considers Jeannette Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows*, which explores the context of Indigenous liberation struggles in the Americas, as well as global Indigenous activism at the international level. This chapter will address how *Whispering in Shadows* represents the main protagonist's Okanagan nation as the site of a spiritual, emotional, and intellectual formation that grounds analysis of and resistance to the processes of neoliberalism. Penny's rootedness in her culture allows her to see how she shares one skin with multiple peoples across borders of nation, language, ethnicity, and worldview. Armstrong's novel also problematizes the role of Indigenous artists, highlighting how Penny produces and markets works of art within the economic system she critiques. Participating with incredible mobility within a system of globalized cultural production, Penny struggles with her sense that she is complicit in a system that corrodes the intellectual, spiritual, and political sovereignty of her people. Ultimately, *Whispering in Shadows* valorizes international Indigenous activism that is rooted in a notion of solidarity and extended kinship.

This project's conclusion underscores the value of studying how Indigenous writers delineate modes of being in common in global contexts by exploring how they represent these relationships in fiction. This approach is not meant to suggest that these works are uniform in their engagement with cultural, political, and economic circumstances. Instead, this study aims to provide a more nuanced picture of how Indigenous literatures approach one small aspect of the

many relationships that constitute Indigenous lived experiences, and thus offers the potential for further studies of its kind.

## **Chapter 1: Indigenous Literary Criticism in a Time of Neoliberal Globalization**

In Joy Harjo's 1994 poem "Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century," the unnamed speaker relates how Rammi, an Igbo taxi driver from Nigeria, tells her a story as he drives her to the airport. He describes how a friend of his was murdered one morning by a man who had stopped to ask him for money. Restless, the spirit of the deceased man tracks his killer, a young Jamaican immigrant, to a jail cell, where he has the opportunity to kill him. Instead of taking revenge, Rammi's dead friend "gives the young man his favorite name and calls him his brother," allowing him to feel remorse and begin to love himself. This story, says the speaker, "follows me everywhere" and "sustains me through these tough distances" (112). A Muscogee poem about an Igbo man forgiving his Jamaican killer, Harjo's text is predicated upon the transnational mobility of peoples and exemplifies the way that globalization allows for narratives to circulate beyond their cultural and geographical borders to shape and inform each other. It also renders visible the conditions of poverty and violence that prevail under the imposition of neoliberal economic doctrines throughout much of the world at the turn of the twenty-first century. These opportunities for global mobility are complicated by important considerations in terms of Indigenous solidarity and international justice, about which different Indigenous academics and artists disagree. For example, Harjo's decision to disregard an academic and cultural boycott and perform in Israel in December 2012 was criticized in turn by

Robert Warrior and Hawaiian scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (see Abunimah). This chapter charts the multiple ways that contemporary processes of globalization and neoliberal ideologies have shaped the social, cultural, political, and environmental landscapes of Indigenous writers in the 1990s. It also explores how Indigenous literary critics have articulated and imagined forms of sovereignty, with particular attention to how literary nationalist approaches to Indigenous literatures have valorized Indigenous nationhood as a form of collectivity. At the same time, this chapter looks at how the international activism of Indigenous peoples has led to networked forms of social solidarity.

Throughout the twentieth century, and increasingly since the 1970s, the augmented pressures of international capital, population flows, and cultural and ecological changes continue to shape the ways that Indigenous communities articulate modes of sovereignty. In the introduction to their 2004 edited collection *In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Life Projects and Globalization*, Mario Blaser, Harvey Feit, and Glenn McRae characterize the contemporary lived experiences of Indigenous peoples as taking place “within complex transnational networks and alliances that traverse the boundaries between the state, markets and civil society, including the environmentalist and human rights movements” (1). Indigenous claims of sovereignty, then, are targeted to different government and corporate institutions operating at local, national, and international levels, including multinationals, the United Nations, and organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). Indigenous peoples assert their sovereignty not only to challenge states that claim to have jurisdiction over them, but also to engage the

international community and establish relationships and alliances with other Indigenous communities and nations. As Taiaiake Alfred (Kahnawake Mohawk) and Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee) point out in their 2005 article entitled “Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism,” “Given that Indigenous identities are (re)constructed at multiple levels—global, state, community, individual—it is important to recognize these multiple sites of resistance to state encroachment” (600). In a world increasingly linked through globalized media, information, financial and economic networks, where transnational capital penetrates and crosses borders in unpredictable ways, and where those working for dignity and justice for marginalized peoples can find solidarity and allies across the globe, Indigenous writers are increasingly exploring the complications and challenges globalization poses for the building and sustaining of community.

Globalization, of course, is a term fraught with contested meanings and implications. In his 2000 book *What is Globalization?* prominent sociologist Ulrich Beck makes a distinction among the related terms “globality,” which means that “all inventions, victories and catastrophes affect the whole world, and we must reorient and reorganize our lives and actions, our organizations and institutions, along a ‘local-global’ axis” (11), “globalism,” which reduces “the multidimensionality of globalization to a single, economic dimension that is itself conceived in a linear fashion” (9), and “globalization,” which designates “the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations,

identities and networks” (11). Beck further characterizes globalization as a form of global sovereignty in which there is “no world state—or, to be more precise, world society *without a world state and without world government*. A globally *disorganized* capitalism is continually spreading out. For there is no hegemonic power and no international regime, either economic or political” (13). Whereas globalization is multidimensional, consisting of multiple and divergent flows and networks of power, persons, commodities, capital, and narratives, globalism evokes the neoliberal privileging of the economic dimension of human life to the exclusion of others.

Beck’s understanding of globalization as constituted by a “globally disorganized capitalism” with “no hegemonic power” as its source differs from the claims of Gerald Vizenor, who, drawing upon the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, argues in his 2009 work *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*, that under the processes of economic globalization, “Territorial boundaries have been revised and ‘decentered’ to warrant and accommodate a new empire of global sovereignty” (113). Vizenor contends that the new form of global sovereignty is a decentered form of governmentality. According to Hardt and Negri in *Empire*, published in 2000, “Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *detritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (xii). Hardt and Negri maintain that Empire is not meant to be read as synonymous with American imperialism, claiming that no single state apparatus can be the centre of

the form of sovereignty they identify as Empire. Although they agree with Beck that contemporary forms of globalization operate without a world state or government in a decentered and expanding way, they disagree that this means that there is no hegemonic regime of power.

In his 1997 article “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity,” Stuart Hall reminds us that globalization is hardly a new process, and that when we speak of contemporary globalization, “we are talking about some of the new forms, some of the new rhythms, some of the new impetuses in the globalizing process” (173). Similarly, Alfred and Corntassel assert that “‘globalization’ in Indigenous eyes reflects a deepening, hastening and stretching of an already-existing empire” (601). The logic of neoliberal economic globalization, thus, merely extends and sustains previous logics of colonial and imperial expansion and expropriation. Underscoring the fact that First Nations’ international mobility is not a recent development, early Indigenous novels such as Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, published in 1968 and 1977 respectively, trace the lives of Indigenous characters marked by their respective transnational experiences. In both novels, encounters with the global are mediated through wars rooted in European histories of colonialism and empire. Novels like Métis author Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road*, published in 2005, continue this tradition, highlighting the world-wide circulation of Indigenous subjects in the early twentieth century.

Notwithstanding this historical continuity, in her 1999 book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori)

asserts that contemporary consequences of globalization pose new challenges: “While being on the margins of the world has had dire consequences, being incorporated within the world’s marketplace has different implications and in turn requires the mounting of new forms of resistance” (24). Smith argues that the particularities of contemporary global relations under the sign of the free market require new strategies of resistance, new modes of affiliation and solidarity, and new ways of combating the commodification of Indigenous cultures and the erosion of Indigenous sovereignty. As she explains, multinational capital approaches Indigenous communities in predatory ways: “The global hunt for new knowledges, new materials, new cures, supported by international agreements such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) brings new threats to indigenous communities” (25). Although Indigenous peoples are often viewed as the source of new (and lucrative) knowledges, Smith also reminds us that those “who have actively resisted moves to create regional free trade areas as part of the global market place are viewed as a major barrier to free trade. Trading the Other is big business. For indigenous peoples trading ourselves is not on the agenda” (90). Consequently, the demands of international capital, effected through free market deregulation, international trade agreements, and state sanctioned neoliberal economic practices, are resisted by Indigenous communities that see these policies as the continuation of colonial policies of dispossession and cultural destruction.

In his 1991 work *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson explicitly links the cultural exchanges of

globalization with the violent political relations that accompany them, arguing, “this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror” (5). Jameson illuminates the connection between the international dissemination of culture, the industrial practices that sustain it, and the unbridled violence of the American Empire. On the other hand, Arjun Appadurai contends in his 1996 text *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, that “Globalization does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization” (17), and later, in an article published in 2000, describes processes of what he calls “grassroots globalization,” consisting of emergent social mobilizations operating independently of multinational capital and governments on behalf of the poor and marginalized (“Grassroots” 3). Appadurai posits grassroots globalization as an autonomous process, or a project that asserts its autonomy from the structures of power that govern global capital. My study engages Appadurai’s notion of grassroots globalization by listening to how Indigenous writers and critics analyze, witness, and name global processes of oppression and liberation, as well as the local, national, and international networks of activism and vision that connect them.

Neoliberal economic policies are at the root of many of the threats to Indigenous communities, as the deregulation of environmental, cultural, and social protections brings new challenges to Indigenous sovereignty. In a series of

lectures on neoliberalism and biopolitics delivered in 1978 and 1979, Michel Foucault claims that the foremost concern of neoliberalism is to “adopt the free market as organizing and regulating principle of the state, from the start of its existence up to the last form of its interventions” (116), as opposed to having a market that is subordinate to the needs of the state. Similarly, David Harvey, in his 2005 work *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, identifies neoliberalism as a hegemonic mode of discourse that has become “incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (3). It is primarily a theory of political and economic practice that, according to Harvey, “proposes that human well being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). Given ideal conditions, neoliberals envision an extremely limited role for the state, restricted primarily to establishing and sustaining the institutional and legal conditions of possibility for the smooth functioning of free markets. However, Harvey reminds us that there is often tension between the utopian theoretical bent of neoliberalism and actual neoliberal practices on the ground, which frequently operate according to the dictates of political expediency.

In her 2005 monograph *The New Imperial Order: Indigenous Responses to Globalization*, Makere Stewart-Harawira (Māori) traces the roots of neoliberalism to the work of Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises and his follower, Friedrich von Hayek. According to Stewart-Harawira, the establishment of the Mont Pelerin Society, which strenuously opposed any form of state

interventionism, provided the academic foundation for the promulgation of neoliberal theory and enabled its “increasing influence in the construction of the transnational economic order and in the promotion of new forms of governance centered on the market and the ‘enterprise culture’” (104). Because, as Raewyn Connell suggests in her 2010 article “Understanding Neoliberalism,” neoliberalism is a “missionary faith” (23), political, financial, and corporate elites have sought to create new markets and expand existing ones. Through academic entities such as the Milton Friedman-led Chicago School of Economics, international institutions like the WTO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, think tanks including the American Enterprise Institute and the RAND Corporation in the United States, and the Fraser Institute in Canada, and trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the unsuccessful Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), neoliberal policies have been enacted at a global scale and imposed upon populations that are frequently unwilling.

As Connell maintains, “‘Neoliberalism’ broadly means the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market that has come to dominate global politics in the last quarter-century. It also means the institutional arrangements to implement this project that have been installed, step by step, in every society under neoliberal control” (22–23). The idea of the free market serves as the central image and the ideal of neoliberal theory which advocates the abolition of controls and regulations over banking, currency and trade. During the 1980s and 1990s, policies of deregulation and privatization

called structural adjustment programs were imposed by the IMF and WTO on developing countries in the global South. These programs required the privatization of social services such as education and healthcare and the sale of nationalized industries. Noting the particularly adverse effects of these measures on women, the poor, and marginalized groups, Connell points out that there is an inherent privileging of masculinity within neoliberalism, citing both the dearth of women in corporate leadership positions and the cultural coding of the figure of the entrepreneur as male, adding that “Its assault on the welfare state redistributes income from women to men and imposes more unpaid work on women as carers for the young, the old, and the sick” (33). Métis writer Gregory Scofield’s 2005 poem “No Peace,” inspired by the 2001 documentary *Señorita Extraviada, Missing Young Woman* by Mexican-American filmmaker Lourdes Portillo, gives voice to this exploitation of women. In the poem, the speaker relates how “The women in the maquiladoras / have eyes with doors / that refuse to close” and “talk / of charred remains” (62). These women, who comprise the cheap labour favoured by free markets, work under the constant threat of being disappeared. The speaker compares these murdered and missing women to the Indigenous women in Canada whose violent deaths are often uninvestigated, revealing a transnational connection between the patriarchal violence of neoliberalism and the colonial dehumanization of Indigenous women.

The spread of neoliberal doctrine has been global, but its practice has not been monolithic. Connell characterizes its various manifestations as “a sprawling family of related policies that are proposed and implemented in different

sequences and in a variety of institutional forms” (32). These policies are linked through the workings of global markets, but are instituted in unique ways depending upon social, regional, economic, environmental, and political realities. In terms of possibilities for resistance, Connell reminds us that “neoliberalism as a social project always requires the maintenance of alliances and the temporary solution of cultural tensions” (35). Accordingly, neoliberalism depends upon particular relations in specific cultural and political situations that are often unstable or can be destabilized.

Privileging the figure of the independent male entrepreneur as the good subject, and conflating the responsibilities of citizenship with consumerism, neoliberalism celebrates and encourages a form of hyperindividualism. Consequently, neoliberalism also seeks to undermine notions of the common good, social responsibility, solidarity and community. Stewart-Harawira maintains that “traditional forms of collectivity have been and continue to be integral to indigenous peoples’ struggles for political and legal recognition, for the revival and maintenance of their cultural and spiritual frameworks and in their social, economic and political organization” (199). As the processes of neoliberal globalization serve to challenge and displace Indigenous sovereignty, Indigenous critics see promise in the potential strategies for resistance that globalization enables. In his 2007 article “In Search of Theory and Method in American Indian Studies,” Duane Champagne (Chippewa), for example, writes that “Colonial and globalized contexts create new constraints and opportunities for American Indian communities” (360–61). Similarly, while she acknowledges that it is not yet clear

how the “self-determining indigenous world” will coexist in the current system of nation-states, Linda Smith contends “The rise and influence of different sorts of power blocs which cut across the nation state, such as multinational corporations, regional economic alliances and globally based interest groups suggest a possible space for indigenous peoples” (115). Both point to the liberatory potential in the sharing of resources and information, alternatives and strategies between Indigenous communities in a collaborative praxis of resistance.

In an essay in the 2008 collection *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, Daniel Heath Justice argues that the most ethical and useful approach to Indigenous literary criticism is “about relationships, about attending to the cultural, historical, political, and intellectual contexts from which indigenous texts emerge. This engagement provides a rich range of interpretive possibility, and it sensitizes us to the multiple relationships and contexts that make such study morally meaningful” (“Kinship” 165). Reading literary texts against the backdrop of the political, cultural, historical, intellectual, global, and local contexts within which they have been produced, published, and received, does not necessarily entail drawing causal connections between the social or political and the text. After all, cultural workers have always reacted in different ways to similar environments, producing wildly divergent texts and works of art under comparable social conditions. Instead, by drawing attention to the neoliberal contexts of recent Indigenous fiction, I want to mark the multiple ways that texts represent community, resistance, and complicity within these circumstances.

## Indigenous Literary Nationalism

One of the most influential recent critical movements with respect to Indigenous literatures has been literary nationalism. The scholarship of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, Robert Warrior, and Daniel Heath Justice has at its core a concern for a constellation of concepts including: Indigenous political and intellectual sovereignty, nationhood, community, and activism. Their work is extremely helpful for exploring First Nations literary representations of sovereignty and community in global contexts. In their 2006 book *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, Weaver, Womack, and Warrior acknowledge that

Nationalism is a term on a short list, one that also includes sovereignty, culture, self-determination, experience, and history, that is central to understanding the relationship between the creative expression of Native American literature and the social and historical realities that such expression embodies. It is also, of course, a term that describes a phenomenon that has given rise, on the one hand, to modern democracy and the thirst for liberation of oppressed people around the world, and, on the other hand, some of the worst forms of political repression and xenophobia in human history. (xv)

Weaver, Womack, and Warrior are cognizant of the promise and peril of nationalism, being well aware of the ways that it has been, and continues to be, used to justify repressive violence against marginalized peoples around the world.

In addition, they also highlight the liberatory potential of nationalism for subjugated populations in decolonial struggles. Previously, in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, co-authored in 1991 with Immanuel Wallerstein, Étienne Balibar cautions that the category of nationalism is ambiguous, and that we should be wary of equating “the nationalism of the dominant with that of the dominated, the nationalism of liberation with the nationalism of conquest” (45). It is with these two poles of domination and liberation in mind that Weaver, Warrior, and Womack seek to articulate a vision of critical literary nationalism that will give greater attention to the socio-historical and political contexts within which Indigenous writers work and create.

Thus far, Indigenous literary nationalism has been primarily an intellectual trend followed in the United States. However, Canadian Indigenous and non-Indigenous literary critics have recently engaged with it. For example, in his contribution to the 2009 multi-authored article “Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism?: Critical Approaches in Canadian Indigenous Contexts—A Collaborative Interlogue,” Niigonwedom James Sinclair (Ojibwe) argues that literary nationalism is a movement “interested in illuminating the intellectual histories, experiences, and knowledge structures available in Native (tribal/pantribal) nations’ creative and critical expressions, and embedding these in the history and politics of those nations’ community existences” (Fagan et al. 20). For Sinclair, literary nationalism values and celebrates the continuance of Indigenous peoples at the same time as it celebrates “the interconnectedness of Native peoples with other cultures through treaties, nation-to-nation sovereignty

struggles, models of cultural adaptation, and linguistic exchanges” (20). Sinclair outlines the ways that literary nationalism seeks to clarify the connections between Indigenous literary and critical production and the specific contexts of the nations from which these works emerge. As well, he draws attention to how literary nationalism can serve as a methodology of examining solidarities and affiliations within, among, and beyond Indigenous nations.

One of the most important trends in literary nationalist criticism, Justice asserts in his 2006 work *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*, is that emphasis shifts “from the *self* to the complications of *community* to what I see as the central concern of Native literary nationalism: *community-in-relationship*” (*Our Fire* 210–11). For Justice, the notion of community-in-relationship privileges the ways that Indigenous peoples represent and understand themselves and their relations with the rest of the world. He continues,

It’s a pragmatic model of scholarship that doesn’t presume that change is synonymous with erasure, nor does it pretend that the People are without flaws. Above all, tribal-specific criticism links the critic and her/his work to a living kinship community with political, cultural, and historical specificity, and it connects those concerns to the People’s dignity and continuity in ways that are offered by no other mode of criticism. (*Our Fire* 211)

Justice’s use of the term ‘complications’ to refer to community reinforces the fact that community-in-relationship should be understood as an ongoing, emergent process rather than as a static, reified entity. In her contribution to “Canadian

Indian Literary Nationalism,” Labrador Métis scholar Kristina (Fagan) Bidwell reminds us that belonging to a community is a complex process that comprises multiple ways of connecting with others, but “also involves conflict, difficult relationships, pressures, feelings of exclusion and inheritances that we would often rather do without” (Fagan et al. 36–37). Narrating community then, entails an ongoing negotiation of conflicts and difficulties, responsibilities and relationships, exclusions and inclusions, and shared identities, hopes and pressures.

In his 1997 monograph *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community*, Weaver coins the term “communitism” as an analytical tool with which to approach Indigenous literatures. Communitism, he writes, “is formed from a combination of the words ‘community’ and ‘activism’ or ‘activist.’ Literature is communitist to the extent that it has a proactive commitment to Native community, including the wider community” (43). Weaver outlines an understanding of community as a shared project, as a “praxis-oriented” (164) and continual process of (re)construction and (re)vision. He stresses that community is not a monolithic term, describing how Indigenous peoples “exist in many different kinds of community—reservation, rural, urban, tribal, pan-Indian, traditional, Christian” and how these different locations “will inevitably lead to different conceptions of what survival, liberation, and communitism require” (45). Acknowledging multiple modes of belonging, Weaver’s communitism is committed to an idea of community as a range of diverse and divergent processes, contingent upon history, geography,

culture, and specific kinship relations encompassing other-than-human entities. Likewise, Justice claims that kinship “is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun, because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something that’s *done* more than something that simply *is*” (“Kinship” 150). He advocates a vision of community as a dynamic set of relations that must be constantly (re)enacted, performed, (re)articulated, and remembered, instead of a static, monolithic, unchanging entity.

One of the central concerns of literary nationalism is Indigenous sovereignty, both political and intellectual. In *Tribal Secrets*, published in 1995, Warrior argues that sovereignty ought to be conceptualized as “an open-ended process” (97) and that scholars committed to intellectual sovereignty must “allow the definition and articulation of what that means to emerge as we critically reflect on that struggle” (98). Nonetheless, Warrior continues, exercising sovereignty “is not a matter of removing ourselves and our communities from the influences of the world in which we live” (114). Noting the ways that Vine Deloria Jr. and John Joseph Mathews each drew upon non-Indigenous intellectual influences—Darwinism, ecological theory, Alfred North Whitehead, Paul Feyerabend, Marshall McLuhan—Warrior suggests that to proceed from the assumption that Indigenous peoples are living or can live free from external influences is “to unwittingly play a parochializing, monolithic Anglo-versus-Indian game, the rules of which have been set up for our failure” (115). Theorizing that the assumption it is in fact possible to remove oneself from the external influences of geography, ecology, society, and human and nonhuman others is a Western Christian

delusion, Warrior emphasizes that the pursuit of sovereignty (both political and intellectual) does not require isolating the self or the community from whatever lies outside its borders. To fixate on what constitutes the essence of indigeneity would be to play a game set up explicitly to force Indigenous peoples to lose. For Warrior, the key critical endeavour is not proving that Mathews's or Deloria's work is Indigenous in spite of its reliance on non-Indigenous intellectual traditions. Rather, the task is to explore how their work strengthens and builds intellectual sovereignty for Indigenous communities. Womack makes a similar argument in his 2009 book *Art as Performance, Story as Criticism: Reflections on Native Literary Aesthetics*, stating that "No tribal literary nationalist that I know of claims that the value of sovereignty resides in its purity, its isolation, or its ability to go undetected. A sovereignty that fails to interact across its borders would be no sovereignty at all" (87–88). The praxis of sovereignty, then, always involves interaction across linguistic, cultural, and political borders. For Womack and Warrior, intellectual sovereignty implies the freedom to decide what influences and relations matter, and how they will impact the continuance of the community.

Literary nationalism is not without its critics. David Treuer (Ojibwe), for example, in *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual*, published in 2006, asserts that "ultimately, the study of Native American fiction should be the study of style" (4). He reiterates that "as far as literature is concerned, style IS culture; style creates the convincing semblance of culture on the page" (5). Treuer's contention is that literature ought to be read as stylistic approximations of culture,

and not as culture itself. He is right to claim that what we find on the pages of a novel is style and that literary and fictionalized representations of peoples ought not to be taken for reality. Nevertheless, he ignores the ways in which literary expression *is* cultural expression and how culture and community are themselves processes of narration. Making an argument that Vizenor, in *Native Liberty*, characterizes as “nostalgia for dominance” (9), Treuer writes, “Our written literature in English is responsive to a set of historical circumstances, inventive in its evasiveness, rich in its suggestive capabilities, but ultimately, it is not culture. Books are not reality, and prose, in English, is not a culture, and should not be put in the position of trying to duplicate it” (201). To claim that books are not reality is one thing. No one would seriously argue that fictional narratives can be interpreted as unmediated representations of ‘real’ history. Yet Treuer’s refusal to acknowledge Indigenous narratives in English as cultural expressions seems to rely on an assumption that Indigenous cultures consist of a specific set of fixed practices that cannot be narrated or expressed in other languages. Is it just English prose that he discounts as culture? Or do all stories, including oral narratives and prose in Indigenous languages, fail to qualify as culture? After all, stories in any language or medium are expressions of style. Treuer does not appear to conceive of culture as praxis—transformative and alive. Nor does he account for how narrative is constitutive of and constituted by culture. Treuer concedes that literature responds to historical circumstances, but he does not take seriously enough the ways in which this occurs. To simply dismiss any connection between

story and culture confines Indigenous cultures to the past and negates the experiences, expressions, and stories of actually existing Indigenous peoples.

Where I think Treuer's work warrants closer attention is when he evinces the desire to be free as a writer to produce whatever he wants. Here he echoes Angel, the aspiring science-fiction writer in Drew Hayden Taylor's 2000 play *alterNatives*, who refuses to be conscripted to any writing ideology, either from his literature professor girlfriend or his activist friends. Angel wants to write science fiction, saying, "Unless there is a race requirement, I like the concept of having no boundaries, of being able to create and develop any character, any environment or setting I want" (102). Similarly, Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee) does not want to restrict the aesthetic or political potential of Indigenous literature. Despite the fact that many Indigenous critics and artists are undoubtedly caught up in a project of articulating political resistance to imperialism, in *Mixedblood Messages*, published in 1998, Owens insists upon his "privilege to write of experience outside [his] immediate ethnic tribal heritage and outside [his] gender as well" (21). The idea that there is a set of prescribed subjects upon which Indigenous authors *must* write is one that Owens rejects. More recently, literary scholar Sam McKegney worries in "Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism" that "Just like postmodernism or any other 'ism,' literary nationalism can be imposed on a piece of literature in a manner that forwards the critic's agenda—however ethically laudable, politically generative, or socially empowering that agenda might be—while disregarding the creative autonomy of the piece itself" (Fagan et al. 29). Concerned about the possibility of imposing

unwarranted readings upon texts, which he views as enacting a form of violence upon the literature, he writes, “I want to suggest that true commitment to ‘the literature itself’ is a commitment to community, nationhood, and sovereignty” (Fagan et al. 29). For McKegney, it is important that any form of literary criticism remain open and responsive to the novelty and unpredictability of Indigenous literary expression. In his words, ethical literary criticism of Indigenous texts must be committed to Indigenous communities and sovereignties as well as “to the autonomy of Indigenous literary production and attentive to Indigenous voices as manifest in literary art” (Fagan et al. 31).

In many ways, Treuer’s and McKegney’s concern parallels the famous exchange between Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad over Jameson’s 1986 article “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.” In his article, Jameson states, “All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (69). Jameson acknowledges that this statement is a “sweeping hypothesis” and that the term Third World is problematic in its totalization of diverse and multiple geographies, cultures, histories, and trajectories. Nonetheless, he continues his analysis of these texts, claiming that “even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of*

*the public third-world culture and society*” (69). Jameson foregrounds how the political and socio-historical contexts within which texts are produced are vital to an understanding of the texts themselves, yet Indigenous literary nationalists’ particular emphasis on the commitment to community seems absent here.

In his 1987 article “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” Ahmad takes issue with several aspects of Jameson’s argument, forcefully critiquing his use of the expression “Third World,” a term that he claims has “no theoretical status whatsoever” (4). Conceding that the designation “Third World” might be useful in polemic, Ahmad maintains that it is not an epistemologically rigorous category for the construction of objects of knowledge. Another objection Ahmad raises is that not all literature produced in the post-colonial world necessarily speaks to the nation. Specifically, he identifies writers working in languages not available in the metropole and contends that these texts are often not concerned with nationalism. Finally, Ahmad cautions that “To say that all third-world texts are necessarily this or that is to say, in effect, that any text originating within that social space which is not this or that is not a ‘true’ narrative” (11). Ahmad takes issue with the imposition of epistemological categories upon literary texts that may resist such categorizations, and with the policing of what constitutes, in this case, “Third World literature.” As well, he is worried about the processes of exclusion that potentially operate in the staking of such claims.

In terms of Indigenous literatures, Ahmad’s objections to Jameson’s argument must be taken seriously if critics are to avoid discounting what counts as

Indigenous literary production. In “Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism,” Keavy Martin reminds us that in order to resist the dangers posed by potentially totalizing definitions or understandings of nationalism, critics must value dissent and “celebrate the slippages—the texts and histories that are unruly, that do not fit, or that cause discomfort and healthy disagreement” (Fagan et al. 24). By focusing on the unruly and the messy, the slippages and fissures, literary nationalist criticism can better avoid falling into totalizing and restrictive readings of Indigenous literatures, and remain committed to the creation of new visions and narratives. As well, critics must attend to the potential exclusions and silencings that arise from privileging one particular critical trajectory.

In the 1990s and 2000s, there has been much perceived and actual conflict between cosmopolitan, or mixedblood, and nationalist critical approaches in Indigenous literary studies. Those critics perceived as advocating for cosmopolitan approaches include Vizenor, Owens, and Swiss scholar Elvira Pulitano, whose 2003 book *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* was subjected to a vigorous critique from Womack.<sup>2</sup> In *Art as Performance*, Womack asks,

<sup>2</sup> In his prefatory remarks about a panel discussion he participated in with Lisa Brooks, Arnold Krupat, and Elvira Pulitano in June 2011, Womack reflects, “I began to realize that my own language has sometimes been problematic, especially for someone who claims an interest in waging peace in our world. [. . .] *Red on Red* and *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, books I had written with great passion, at some point, began to haunt me. Passion, yes, but compassion? I wasn’t as sure. I had made arguments, maybe even convincing ones. But had I learned anything about listening? Had I sometimes closed down communication instead of opening it up?” (Brooks

Given the central role of sovereignty in Native American Studies, then, a key question is can one be a nationalist and, at the same time, committed to inclusivity, dialogism, alternative histories, diversity of perspectives, plurality, cosmopolitanism, global awareness, border crossing, and justice? Do the nationalistic aspects of sovereignty, at best, compete with diversity, and, at worst, make diversity impossible? (87)

Womack's questions suggest a movement away from the "literary separatism" he espouses in the title of his 1999 book *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, and toward ways that commitments to literature, communitism, justice, and sovereignty might be upheld through analytical approaches cognizant of and engaged with globality. These questions animate much of my discussion on the convergences and divergences of nationalist and cosmopolitan perspectives.

In his outline of critical approaches to Indigenous literatures in his 2002 work *Red Matters: Native American Studies*, Arnold Krupat identifies three

et al. n. pag.). His comments reflect a fear that the often combative tone of the debates between nationalists and cosmopolitans may have foreclosed opportunities for constructive dialogue and critical analysis. Although literary nationalism has emerged triumphant in terms of those debates, many critics are now exploring transnational and trans-indigenous modes of analysis, as evidenced by recent works such as Alice Te Punga Somerville's *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania* and Chadwick Allen's *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*.

principal perspectives: “nationalist, indigenist, and cosmopolitan” (1). For him, these are overlapping and interrelated positions, each of which “may be enlisted for the project of an anticolonial criticism, as all three may also operate to reproduce colonial dominance under other names” (1). Krupat does not perceive as much of a critical divide between nationalist and cosmopolitan positions as some would. Indeed, even Womack argues that a truly cosmopolitan criticism, able to sustain critical solidarity and inter-tribal affiliations, must stem from being rooted in a national space, asserting, for example, that Harjo’s “Creek grounding strengthens her pan-tribal vision” (*Red* 224–25). For Krupat, the central concern of nationalist critics has to do with sovereignty (2). Even though Krupat maintains that terms such as “sovereignty,” “citizenship,” and “nation” are European in origin, he argues, following Neil Lazarus, that Indigenous and anticolonial nationalisms are powerful ways for expressing the desires and aspirations of colonized peoples. Ultimately, Krupat concludes that despite the fact that a focus on Indigenous nations is essential for anticolonial work, literary nationalists “need other positions, those of indigenists (as persons with different bodies of systematic knowledge) and cosmopolitans (as persons who can translate between different bodies of knowledge), for their anticolonial projects to succeed” (7). As he sees it, at their best, these critical approaches complement and augment each other, leading to more complex articulations of relations between Indigenous nations and the world.

One of the central complaints that Weaver, Womack, and Warrior have about cosmopolitan approaches is that their privileging of hybridity has the effect

of eliding and effacing Indigenous nations and the material, legal, economic, and political struggles they face. The critical debate between Pulitano and Weaver, Womack, and Warrior serves to illuminate their central objections to Owens's cosmopolitan critical practice, or to Pulitano's representation of his critical practice. In their Preface to *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, Weaver, Womack, and Warrior contend that "Pulitano, trained at the University of New Mexico by the late Louis Owens, embraces the footloose, rootless, mixed-blood hybridity that people too casually take away from Owens's work, in which both everyone and no one is Indian" (xx). Weaver, Womack, and Warrior worry primarily that emphasizing hybrid and cosmopolitan identities actually limits the political and cultural agency of Indigenous communities, scholars and artists. Hybridity, as Womack argues, "is neither ahistorical nor universal. Nonetheless, theorists often speak of hybridity, ironically enough, as if it were its own kind of essentialism; that is, they often speak of it apart from history" (*Art* 85). Womack concedes that Indigenous nations are influenced within and across borders, but reminds us that these instances of hybridity have their own particular gendered, political, linguistic, cultural, and geographical histories, contexts, and differences, and cannot themselves be universalized. Hybridity, in other words, must be understood as the product of specific conjunctions of local and global relations.

In her 1995 article "Literary and Political Questions of Transformation: American Indian Fiction Writers," Cook-Lynn contends that a cosmopolitan critical praxis is often "more interested in establishing a relationship to Anglo-American society than in examining the relationship of the modern novel to First

Nation reality” (50). According to her, scholars who privilege a cosmopolitan approach to Indigenous literatures do little to establish or assert the agency of Indigenous nations. Instead, they privilege the relationship of First Nations literatures to Euroamerican culture and taste and, in so doing, reinforce Euroamerican aesthetics as the standard against which Indigenous works must be measured. Cosmopolitan or “mixedblood” writing, Cook-Lynn argues in her 1996 article “American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story,” shares the characteristics of “an aesthetic that is pathetic or cynical, a tacit notion of the failure of tribal governments as Native institutions and of sovereignty as a concept, and an Indian identity which focuses on individualism rather than First Nation ideology” (67). As she sees it, no matter what nominal critiques of colonial aggression and repression cosmopolitanism might offer, its overall effect is to represent tribal sovereignty and nationhood as failed or doomed projects. Moreover, she perceives in mixedblood writing a focus on individual as opposed to tribal identities, a trend that she argues comes from a tradition of American ideologies of exceptionalism, capitalism and consumerism. For Cook-Lynn, the focus on what Justice refers to as “hyperindividualist creeds of industrialization and atomization” (“Kinship” 150) marks an ideological accommodation on the part of cosmopolitan or mixedblood critics to the discourses of colonialism.

For example, when it comes to *Almanac of the Dead*, Cook-Lynn praises Silko’s refusal to cater to the desires of non-Indigenous readers, but ultimately faults what she sees as the novel’s failure to acknowledge “the specific kind of tribal/nation status of the original occupants of this continent” (“American” 34).

Primarily, Cook-Lynn fears that privileging transnational Indigenous alliances and networks over Indigenous nationalism dismisses and devalues a discourse that has affirmed and empowered Indigenous struggles against colonial aggression. When asked in a 1998 interview with Ellen Arnold about Cook-Lynn's assessment of *Almanac*, Silko contends that Cook-Lynn's "criticism grows out of more of a non-Indian way of looking at things" and insists that "indigenous people welcomed the newcomers. They didn't draw lines like that" ("Listening" 171). To Silko, the danger of emphasizing nationalist perspectives and strategies is in the erecting of artificial and potentially (self-) destructive boundaries between communities and constituencies with shared hopes and goals. Silko continues, "That attitude about nationalism comes in much later, that's much more a European way of looking at things. The truth of the matter is, if you really want to think about the retaking of the Americas, it has to be done with the help of everybody" ("Listening" 171). Responding to Cook-Lynn's critique, Silko argues that nationalist arguments are grounded upon Eurocentric assumptions and attitudes that have become internalized. For her, they have more to do with drawing lines and establishing borders that separate rather than draw people together. However, Silko does acknowledge that the openness of Indigenous peoples to newcomers did have negative consequences:

It's true that the way the old folks looked at things got them into trouble, because they welcomed these newcomers. But that was how they saw the world, and it was the right way. Just because everyone wants to fall in and draw lines and exclude, well, that's

the behaviour of Europeans. A lot of that's been internalized. A lot of the times when my work is attacked, it's attacked by people who aren't aware of how much they've internalized these European attitudes. ("Listening" 172)

Though European colonizers did not reciprocate the spirit of generosity shown by the Indigenous peoples who welcomed them, Silko maintains that Indigenous practices of hospitality and generosity were, and remain, central to Indigenous understandings of being with others.

Cosmopolitan critics, too, are wary of uncritically adopting the terminologies and methodologies of Eurowestern theory, including postcolonial theory. Owens uses the work of postcolonial theorists, but he acknowledges the "suspicion by Native Americans that critical theory represents little more than a new form of colonial enterprise," raising important questions about the role that postcolonial criticism has played in silencing Indigenous voices while claiming to provide methodological tools for liberation and sovereignty (*Mixedblood* 51). In his 2001 collection *I Hear the Train: Reflections, Inventions, Refractions*, he is critical of what he calls the "erasure of Native American voices" from seminal works of postcolonial theory such as the seminal 1989 book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (209). As well, he denounces the expectation that Indigenous critics should be familiar with the work of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha when there is no reciprocal expectation that "mainstream" postcolonial critics should be conversant with the theories of

Vizenor, Womack or Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo). What Owens finds particularly problematic about these expectations in the discourse of postcolonial criticism is that postcolonialism prides itself on being a critique aimed at asserting the agency of the marginalized in the face of colonial oppression. He sees the general failure of postcolonial critics to engage with and take up Indigenous literature and criticism as a repetition of the logic of the colonial erasure of Indigenous presence.

Addressing the specific political context of North America, Owens maintains that these settler-states do not share “in what is sometimes termed the ‘colonial aftermath’ or postcolonial condition” (*I Hear* 214). There has been no decolonization of the Americas in the way that there has been in Africa and Asia. Thus, postcolonial criticism often fails to address the lived reality of Indigenous peoples, for whom there is no “post” in an ongoing colonial present. Earlier, Thomas King (Cherokee), in his 1997 essay “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial,” raises a similar objection to the way in which postcolonial terminology “organizes the literature progressively suggesting that there is both progress and improvement” and “supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression” (243). What King warns against is the way in which the use of postcolonial terminologies and methodologies can actually divert attention away from the concerns of Indigenous peoples and focus attention on the colonizers as a catalyst for cultural production. These objections demonstrate that cosmopolitan critics are quite critical of theoretical approaches that, while ostensibly liberatory, function to elide and silence Indigenous voices.

It is important to point out that even though Owens, as a cosmopolitan critic, makes humanist claims that all art “speaks to the human spirit and therefore clearly transcends the specific culture from and within which it was and is created” (*Mixedblood* 15), he does not advocate ignoring the specific contexts from which Indigenous literature is produced. For example, Owens identifies James Welch’s Blackfoot and Gros Ventre heritage and argues, “While the shared human characteristics of his fiction will certainly engage us, to be fully involved in his work we should know something about the history and culture of the Blackfoot and Gros Ventre people” (*Mixedblood* 15). In other words, cosmopolitan criticism should also be attentive to the text in light of tribally specific discourses and paradigms and should acknowledge that the text has specific local tribal meanings and readings. In many ways, Owens’s critical praxis has much in common with Anthony Appiah’s notion of cosmopolitan patriotism. In his 1997 article “Cosmopolitan Patriots” Appiah maintains, “the cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which *everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of one’s own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people” (618). He argues for a cosmopolitan praxis that acknowledges the local character of cosmopolitanism and takes pleasure in difference and otherness. By linking the ideas of cosmopolitanism and patriotism, Appiah proposes a critical approach that engages in dialogue with geographical and ideological others at the same time as it maintains a solid grounding in one’s own sense of place and community.

Just as Appiah sees potential in the notion of rooted cosmopolitanism, so too does Bhabha, in his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*, draw a distinction between a cosmopolitanism of (Western, male, white, economic) privilege and a form of “vernacular cosmopolitanism” that offers liberatory potential for marginalized groups. According to Bhabha, the cosmopolitanism of privilege, which valorizes neoliberal ideologies, “configures the planet as a concentric world of national societies extending to global villages” (xiv). This form of cosmopolitanism celebrates diversity as long as those who cross borders are educated migrants rather than exiles or refugees. In contrast, vernacular cosmopolitanism valorizes “the commitment to a ‘right to difference in equality’ as a process of constituting emergent groups and affiliations has less to do with the affirmation or authentication of origins and ‘identities,’ and more to do with political practices and ethical choices” (xvii-xviii). For Bhabha, vernacular cosmopolitanism manifests a political praxis based upon shared goals and affiliations rather than upon toleration for marginalized groups. It emphasizes the living, vibrant, and complicated nature of the practices of communities engaged in common political endeavours, rather than searching for or affirming the authenticity of group identities.

In contemporary literary criticism of Indigenous texts, literary nationalist approaches are clearly ascendant. Nevertheless, in my project, I strive to bear out a critical commitment to Indigenous sovereignty and agency, to the ongoing relations of community and nationhood, by drawing upon the work of critics in both nationalist and cosmopolitan camps. I do not necessarily see as great a divide

between the two (acknowledging that even these respective labels serve to group together critics with diverse and divergent concerns and approaches) as some. Womack writes, “Tribal nationalism should be seen as central to any mature understanding of globalism and the fluidity of borders rather than some kind of obstacle blocking a superior postmodern enlightenment” (*Art* 88). Similarly, in his 2012 book *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*, Chadwick Allen (Chickasaw) advocates a critical approach that “locates itself firmly in the specificity of the Indigenous local while remaining always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global” (xix). Building upon Womack’s and Allen’s insights, my project, which examines the representations of Indigenous modes of community and nation within texts which have also been shaped and conditioned by contemporary forms of globalization, must take seriously the ways in which these texts are rooted in particular local, cultural, national communities, as well as within larger inter-tribal and global Indigenous ones. It is my contention that Indigenous literary works of the late twentieth century increasingly assert that Indigenous experiences are global experiences.

### **The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

For Indigenous peoples, one of the modes of confronting global pressures and harnessing global opportunities is through international institutions such as the United Nations (UN). Linda Smith argues that international treaties and alliances can offer opportunities for the critique of oppressive state and corporate practices, as well as the celebration of Indigenous survivance (105). She reminds

us that Indigenous peoples have a history of international relations both before and after colonial contact, noting that encounters between peoples have included alliances, conflicts, trade, intermarriage, and treaties. Chickasaw scholar James Youngblood Henderson describes how the roots of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) can be found in the work in the 1920s of the Haudenosaunee and the Māori to become recognized by the League of Nations (24). Likewise, Stewart-Harawira contends that “The strengthening of international networks of indigenous peoples since the 1970s has seen the emergence of a new ‘politics of indigeneity’ as a critical component in the affirmation of indigenous peoples’ determination to reclaim their histories, their epistemologies and their political autonomy” (115). The formation of the International Indian Treaty Council in 1974 and the inaugural conference of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) in British Columbia in 1975 are notable moments in a tradition of Indigenous international activism and political agency has shaped and informed the work of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the eventual adoption of the UNDRIP, and comprises an important component of the late twentieth century intellectual and political context for Indigenous writers.

The UN General Assembly’s adoption of the UNDRIP on September 13, 2007 demonstrates at the very least an increased acknowledgement of the unique rights and concerns of Indigenous communities at the international level. The origins of this declaration can be traced to the 1977 UN-sponsored International Nongovernmental Organization Conference on Discrimination Against

Indigenous Populations in the Americas in Geneva, which Mary Lawlor calls “a landmark event for indigenous groups” (358), and which Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz argues was the “key event that marked the beginning of indigenous peoples’ direct activity in the international context” (64). This conference helped to foster transnational solidarities among diverse Indigenous groups in the Americas and around the world. The participants at the conference developed two major resolutions that have had a role in shaping the UN’s subsequent relations with Indigenous peoples. First, they resolved to create a Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) at the UN. Second, the Indigenous representatives created a document entitled “Draft Declarations of Principles for the Defense of the Indigenous Nations and Peoples of the Western Hemisphere” to serve as a foundation for a Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Dunbar-Ortiz 64–65; Lawlor 358–59). Established in 1982, the WGIP has supported many projects on behalf of Indigenous peoples, and in 1993, submitted a Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for discussion at the Commission of Human Rights. But the apprehensions of some states about provisions regarding “the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples and the control over the natural resources existing in their traditional lands, meant that an agreement on the proposed text could not be reached” (Errico 743). Instead of approving the document, the Commission of Human Rights commissioned a Working Group on the Draft Declaration to serve as a space for negotiations between states and Indigenous groups.

The UNDRIP is influenced by the discourse of human rights prevalent in the twentieth century decolonization movements in the Third World, and the civil rights movements in the West. Article 3 reads: “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (United Nations 4). Article 9 explicitly guarantees the right “to belong to an indigenous community or nation” (United Nations 4), and Article 19 requires that states obtain the “free, prior and informed consent [of Indigenous peoples] before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them” (United Nations 6). Article 26 declares that “Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired” (United Nations 8). Finally, Article 32 instructs states to obtain the “free and informed consent” of Indigenous communities “prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources” (United Nations 9). Each of these articles enshrines and establishes increased levels of self-determination and autonomy for Indigenous peoples in the form of collective rights in relation to political status, land, and legislation.

The negotiation process, though, has not been without critics. In an article published in 2007, Corntassel maintains that state representatives within the UN system can, through processes he terms “blunting” and “channeling,” “create an

illusion of inclusion for Indigenous peoples participating in global forums” (140). Corntassel employs the term “blunting” to refer to processes whereby “an Indigenous political agenda is shifted and altered to fit the dominant norms of existing institutional structures” (140). He uses “channeling,” to designate how, once they have been accepted into global institutions, Indigenous peoples are persuaded to “confine their activities solely within these official structures and cease other forms of political mobilization outside of the UN system” (140). Both of these processes work to co-opt activist energies and confine them within the bounds of what state actors consider to be acceptable. Although he considers the WGIP to be a relatively inclusive forum, Corntassel critiques the way in which the voices and concerns of Indigenous delegations are limited by procedural rules and time constraints imposed by the institution.

While Alfred voices the concern that the “concept of ‘rights’, especially in the common Western sense, leads nowhere for indigenous peoples because it alienates the individual from the group” (140), the UNDRIP highlights the notion of collective rights, as well as the interdependence of diverse communities in relation to each other and to the land. It is through this emphasis on collective rights that the UNDRIP extends the potential for the articulation of Indigenous nationhood in terms of relationships and challenges neoliberal ideologies of individualism. Although it is not legally binding, lacks an enforcement mechanism to obligate states to negotiate in good faith with Indigenous nations within their territories, and does not grant Indigenous peoples the right to

statehood, the UNDRIP does propose increased recognition of Indigenous sovereignty over land, culture, language, and development.

Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States voted against the UNDRIP; their collective rejection of the declaration constitutes a latent recognition of its liberatory potential. The document's recognition of Indigenous collective rights to land, nationhood, redress for past injustices, and political and cultural self-determination, enacts a globalization of solidarity between and among geographically disparate and culturally diverse peoples and communities. In an official statement in 2007 by Chuck Strahl, then Canadian Minister for Indian and Northern Affairs, and Maxime Bernier, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Harper government<sup>3</sup> rejected the document because of

significant concerns with respect to the wording of the current text, including the provisions on lands, territories and resources; free, prior and informed consent when used as a veto; self-government without recognition of the importance of negotiations; intellectual property; military issues; and the need to achieve an appropriate balance between the rights and obligations of indigenous peoples, member States and third parties. (par. 6)

<sup>3</sup> The Canadian House of Commons adopted a resolution on April 8, 2008, endorsing the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, with Conservative MPs dissenting. See Hartley, Joffe, and Preston ("Appendix III" 216).

Citing Article 26's requirement to acknowledge and protect the land rights of Indigenous peoples, Strahl and Bernier claim, "This could be used by Aboriginal groups to challenge and re-open historic and present day treaties and to support claims that have already been dealt with" (par. 7). Both statements emphasize a concern with land claims, representing Indigenous groups as seeking to disrupt the status quo, to question matters already "settled" and "dealt with" by treaty. However, the allegation that the UNDRIP recognizes a right to "self-government without recognition of the importance of negotiations" is a misreading and misrepresentation of the actual text of Article 27 of the declaration, which asserts:

States shall establish and implement, in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned, a fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to indigenous peoples' laws, traditions, customs and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of indigenous peoples pertaining to their lands, territories and resources, including those which were traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used.

(United Nations 8)

The text of this article privileges the role of the state in implementing processes for the recognition of rights including those of self-determination and self-government. The objections by Canadian officials to the perceived veto power implied by "free, prior and informed consent" undercut their apparent concern about the process of negotiations. After all, if one party disallows the possibility of the other to object or withhold consent, then "negotiation" is probably not the

appropriate word to use for the process. Furthermore, it is in the vague reference to military issues that the violence of neoliberalism and neocolonialism reveals itself most forcefully. Adopting the discourse of the securitization of the state, it also evokes, in the Canadian context, military operations mobilized against the Mohawk community of Kanesatake in 1990 and the Secwepemc First Nation at Gustafsen Lake in 1995. By linking these two discourses, Canada's government implicitly represents Indigenous peoples as security threats and as dangerous Others within the state.

The objections raised by the Harper government to the UNDRIP are rooted in colonial assumptions about Indigenous peoples that have been used to justify policies of removal and displacement towards First Nations for centuries. Thus, it is useful to look briefly at Tom Flanagan's *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, published in 2000, in order to understand the neoliberal ideological foundations of the Harper government's policies. A former close adviser to Harper, and disciple of von Hayek, Flanagan is an unapologetic advocate of free market neoliberalism, considering it "The only economic system that has brought a high standard of living to a complex society" (9). He appeals to the discourses of "civilization" and "savagery," using the term "civilization" to refer to "societies that have passed a certain threshold of technology and complexity" (33), and claims that at the time of contact, "None of the aboriginal societies of Canada were civilized in the sense in which the term is used here" (36). Although he tries to divorce his use of the term from implying any kind of value judgement, Flanagan rejects the notion of Indigenous nationhood outright and asserts the

legitimacy of the doctrine of *terra nullius* to justify the sovereignty of the Canadian settler-state (85). His arguments against Indigenous nationhood are not original—they follow and repeat the claims of Western colonial elites throughout much of Canada’s history—but they are significant in light of Flanagan’s political prominence. Linking colonial assumptions to an espousal of neoliberal free market economic policies, Flanagan provides an insight into settler-state attitudes towards Indigenous peoples.

### **Indigenous Nationhood**

Contemporary discussions of nations often begin with Benedict Anderson’s observation in his 1983 book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, that the nation “is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). Anderson draws attention to the way in which nations are communities bound together by socially constructed narratives of shared values, histories, geographies, kinship bonds, cultures, and traditions. That nations are imagined entities indicates the possibility of contesting particular imaginings, and raises the question of *whose* imagining shapes a community’s shared conception of itself. Anderson also echoes Ernest Renan’s contention, almost a century earlier, that “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things” (11). These two aspects of imagining and forgetting underscore the principle that the nation is never a fixed entity, but is always in a state of flux, a state of becoming. Members of a nation participate

and share in a process of narrating that collectivity into existence. Articulations of nationhood are always contested, and particular hegemonic narratives of historical beginnings and significant events will be dominant at different times.

Nevertheless, the socially constructed reality of the nation does not mean that we should completely dispense with the subject.

In his 1996 work *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Rogers Brubaker contends that we must reject “the realist and substantialist way of thinking about nations” (16). In its place, he suggests that we reconceptualize the nation “not as substance but as institutionalized form; not as collectivity but as practical category; not as entity but as contingent event” (16). He advocates looking at the nation as a set of institutionalized practices and contingent processes dependent upon specific relations of power. Advocating a similar view, Michael Billig coins the term “banal nationalism” in 1995 to illustrate the importance of the everyday habits and practices that constitute and enable the daily (re)production and performance of the nation (6). What Brubaker and Billig gesture towards is an account of the nation as a set of practices in addition to its status as an imagined and narrated community.

Just as neoliberalism is an ideology that is coded as masculine, which in practice often limits the agency of women, the nation also is a gendered construct. Anne McClintock asserts in her 1997 essay “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Gender, Race, and Nationalism” that, “despite many nationalists’ ideological investment in the idea of popular *unity*, nations have historically amounted to the

sanctioned institutionalization of gender *difference*. No nation in the world grants men and women the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state” (89). She explains, “Not only are the needs of the nation typically identified with the frustrations and aspirations of men, but the representation of male *national* power depends on the prior construction of *gender* difference” (89). McClintock’s point that the nation is often represented in terms of male power and agency, and that even so-called developed nations deny women the same rights and opportunities as men, is a call to critically examine articulations and practices of Indigenous nationalism in terms of gender relations. In an essay entitled “Two Concepts of Self-Determination,” originally published in 2001, political scientist Iris Marion Young, drawing on feminist critiques of individual autonomy, argues that notions of self-determination as articulated in international law ignore “the relations of interdependence peoples have with one another, especially in a global economic system” (177). Rejecting a conception of autonomy and self-determination that elides interdependent relationships and expanding upon Philip Pettit’s conception of freedom as nondomination, Young argues that “peoples can be self-determining only if the relations in which they stand to others are nondominating” (177). For her, any feminist account of nationalism must take into account principles of interdependence, negotiation, and freedom from coercion.

Contemporary accounts of nation and sovereignty take place within a discursive arena where theories and articulations of cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, globalization, and mobility compete for critical attention with

calls for increased securitization of the state and its borders in the face of incursions by the (racialized) Other. In his 2004 essay “Is It Time to Be Postnational?” Craig Calhoun argues that although Westphalian notions of sovereignty may be increasingly understood as problematic and acknowledged to be inadequate for dealing with the complexities of the contemporary global community,

it would be hasty to imagine we are embarking on a postnational era—when all the empirical indicators are that nationalism is resurgent precisely because of asymmetrical globalization—so it would be hasty to forget the strong claims to collective autonomy and self-determination of those who have been denied both, and the need for solidarity among those who are least empowered to realize their projects as individuals. (251)

According to Calhoun, the resurgence of nationalism today can be explicitly linked to the unequal power flows implicit in the processes of globalization. Indeed, in his 2001 essay “Turn to the Planet: Literature, Diversity, and Totality,” Masao Miyoshi contends that “The world is sectioned into nations and nationalities only for those who cannot afford to move or travel beyond their home countries. For the rich, the world is indeed transnational and deterritorialized” (292). Miyoshi points out the ways in which nations function as barriers to those without sufficient wealth to travel across and beyond, but it is also the case that nationalism serves as a project of solidarity and collective autonomy for peoples under threat from neoliberalism.

One of the major criticisms levelled at nationalism is that it elides internal differences of gender, class, religion, language, and culture, and imposes essentialized identities upon the members of a given nation. Anthony Marx, in his 2003 monograph *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism*, asserts that nationalism operates according to what he calls “the logic of exclusionary cohesion” (24). As he explains, elites often exclude various ethnic subgroups from the national imaginary, “contrary to the presumed imperative for pervasive unity or ethnic homogeneity” (24). Marx’s argument is that nations were (and are) formed on the basis of an originary exclusion rather than on the basis of an imagined unity or community. Drawing upon Renan’s notion that nations are built upon a shared foundation of forgetfulness, Marx reasons that the originary violence of exclusion is quickly forgotten in the interests of producing narratives of unity.

In his 2001 book *The Politics of Ethnicity in Settler Societies: States of Unease*, David Pearson contends that increasingly, “‘master narratives’ about nation and state building, modernization and national identity have seemingly given way to a new relativism in which national and ethnic boundaries are viewed as discourses in flux and cultural identities are multiple imaginings in what is often viewed as post-colonial times” (2–3). Identifying the nation as a concept that is “imagined,” some critics argue that appealing to a national identity involves invoking an essentialist discourse that will invariably exclude or marginalize members of that community. However, critics who too-quickly dismiss the notion of the nation as an essentializing or totalizing construct often

privilege the concerns of the individual above the very real material concerns of oppressed and marginalized communities. Excessive emphasis on the “imagined” nature of nations elides the material realities and consequences of very real exploitative neoliberal state and corporate policies towards Indigenous peoples. As Pearson states, the nation “is still the chief bulwark against the globalization process” (3). Asserting a national identity and maintaining the authority to define what constitutes that identity must, therefore, be read as a strategy of resistance and decolonization.

In a similar way, Calhoun argues that discourses of nationalism ought not to be seen as deviations from or in opposition to a supposed cosmopolitan impartiality: “In the first place, cosmopolitanism is not neutral—though cosmopolitans can try to make both global institutions and global discourse more open and more fair. In the second place, national projects respond to global projects” (249–50). Calhoun reasons that discourses of cosmopolitanism cannot be read as the unprejudiced ideals of a mobile, deracinated, global citizenship. Instead, cosmopolitan claims often mask unacknowledged privileges that have accrued due to legacies of colonialism, gender or class privilege, and racial discrimination. Thus, a cosmopolitan critical praxis does not necessarily mean an unproblematic deployment of Western literary theory or critical methodologies in dialogue with Indigenous literary theory. Recognizing the differences among multiple iterations of cosmopolitanism, Timothy Brennan writes in his 2001 essay “Cosmo-Theory,”

One's judgment of cosmopolitanism's value or desirability, in other words, is affected by whose cosmopolitanism or patriotism one is talking about—whose definitions of prejudice, knowledge, or open-mindedness one is referring to. Cosmopolitanism is local while denying its local character. This denial is an intrinsic feature of cosmopolitanism and inherent to its appeal. (659–60)

Brennan highlights the fact that appeals to cosmopolitanism, in hegemonic discourse, often serve to project a local cultural worldview upon any others that one encounters, simultaneously denying that this projection takes place. In other words, cosmopolitanism is not necessarily a dialogic discourse, and is frequently employed to colonial ends.

Indigenous discourses of the nation must be read (in North America) as assertions of political and cultural self-determination in the context of ongoing projects of decolonization and resistance to colonial state apparatuses. Because, as Pearson reminds us, “Ethnic, racial and national categorizations have material consequences for those so named and represented” (17), applying or refusing to apply the label of “nation” to a particular community can have material consequences in terms of access to land, resources, autonomy, and preservation of culture. Asserting agency as a nation is a way for particular marginalized groups to confront ongoing discriminatory practices. The nation may seem an outmoded concept to those who privilege and aspire to a more cosmopolitan vision of a global citizenry, but Calhoun's observation that “for many of those treated most unfairly in the world, nations and traditions are potentially important resources”

(251), is a reminder that discourses of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism are not neutral, and that the mobility ascribed to agents within such a system is often limited to a privileged few.

It is within the context of neocolonial domination and paternalism that Indigenous intellectuals are currently engaged in the process of articulating and conceptualizing Indigenous nationhood. Although an in-depth discussion of the diverse experiences of Indigenous peoples in North America with respect to nationhood and sovereignty is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to note that in Canada, the political and jurisdictional obstacles facing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are highly distinct. As Métis scholar Chris Andersen has argued in his 2008 article “From Nation to Population: The Racialisation of ‘Métis’ in the Canadian Census,” one of the strategies employed by the Canadian state to manage Indigenous populations has been to deploy the term Métis as a racial rather than national identity, as seen, for example, in the use of the term “Métis” as a census category (347). Andersen claims that the Canadian Census operates as a technology of governmentality, ordering and sorting peoples into racialized colonial categories that prove useful for administrative purposes. As such, it undermines the understanding of Métis identity as a national one predicated upon historical territorial boundaries, a common ancestry, shared language and political institutions, and “collective self-consciousness” (Andersen 362). Paul Chartrand (Métis) notes, in his 2008 essay “Defining the ‘Métis’ of Canada: A Principled Approach to Crown-Aboriginal Relations,” that without a land base (except for the Métis Settlements in Alberta) over which they have

jurisdiction, Métis organizations have organized themselves along provincial lines, with different understandings of what constitutes Métis identity. Given this situation, Chartrand contends, “It may reasonably be concluded that securing agreement among the Métis regarding their own self-definition is a difficult political challenge (31). These pressures with respect to Métis identity and lack of territory mean that Inuit and First Nations communities are frequently better positioned to articulate and achieve national aspirations.

In her 2007 essay “Native American Feminism, Sovereignty and Social Change,” Andrea Smith argues that it is necessary to differentiate between conceptions of the nation-state and Indigenous nationhood: “Whereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, Indigenous sovereignty and nationhood is predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility” (104). Echoing Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities,” Smith draws attention to the work of Indigenous women in imagining a notion of the nation founded on principles of responsibility and connections with others. She maintains that the institutional mechanisms of gendered and racialized coercion and violence associated with the state have no place within Indigenous worldviews. Likewise, in her 2007 chapter “Balancing Strategies: Aboriginal Women and Constitutional Rights in Canada,” Joyce Green comments on the ways that “Aboriginal women have been visible and active in constitutional negotiations and have dramatically increased the public space for Aboriginal women’s voices and participation” (148). By privileging the multiple and divergent voices of women in their articulations of nation and community, First Nations constructions of nationhood seek to diverge

from patriarchal structures of dominance and hierarchy into models of non-domination and interdependence. It is important to note here that the theorizations of Indigenous nationhood by Smith, Green, and others should be read as forward-looking and aspirational.

In his 1999 book *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* Alfred argues that articulations of Indigenous nationhood cannot be equated with Western conceptions of the state, but reflect a more fluid, relational model founded in people's experiences. For him, "Traditional indigenous nationhood stands in sharp contrast to the dominant understanding of 'the state': there is no absolute authority, no coercive enforcement of decisions, no hierarchy, and no separate ruling entity" (*Peace* 56). Echoing the interrelatedness that Smith posits as central to Indigenous nationhood, Alfred and Corntassel ground their notion of nationhood on "a dynamic and interconnected concept of Indigenous identity constituted in history, ceremony, language and land, ... consider[ing] relationships (or kinship networks) to be at the core of an authentic Indigenous identity" (609). Rejecting a Western liberal paradigm that presupposes a fundamental separation between human beings and the natural world, Alfred and Corntassel emphasize the entangled and relational nature of Indigenous nations.

Champagne maintains that the term 'nation' often takes on very different meanings within Indigenous communities, "usually impl[ying] a specific combination of kinship, government, world view, and cosmic community" (358). He argues that even though the term may be useful in English and understood in Eurowestern culture, the goals and ends of nationalism as theorized by European

and postcolonial scholars are not necessarily shared by Indigenous peoples. While theories of insurgent and anticolonial nationalism may provide a strategically useful language within which to articulate resistance to colonial oppression, Champagne asserts that “tribal cultures have their own interpretations of individual and collective good and well-being. Rather than liberation from the constraints of the world, American Indian world views emphasize ways of life that seek spiritual or moral balance with the human and nonhuman forces of the world” (358). Indigenous nations, then, are not necessarily isolationist, but rather emphasize modes of being-in-relation with other communities and forces, both human and nonhuman.

Of course, theorizing an Indigenous national model based upon nondomination and freedom from coercion does not necessarily mean that actually existing Indigenous nations are always predicated upon these principles. For example, Sherman Alexie states in a 2010 interview, “There’s an anti-intellectualism on Indian reservations, inside Indian communities” (“Humor” 41), and claims that this kind of atmosphere drove him away. In a recent example of the injustice and anti-intellectualism that Alexie is critiquing, on March 3, 2007, “the Cherokee Nation voted to disenfranchise approximately 2,800 Cherokee Freedmen citizens, in violation of the 1866 treaty with the United States that gave Freedmen the rights and status as citizens within the Cherokee nation” (Byrd 126). Drawing condemnation from many quarters, as well as several legal challenges, this vote exemplifies the complex and fraught ways in which

realpolitik and legacies of colonialism, removal, and complicity in slavery shape the negotiation of Cherokee nationhood and sovereignty.

Likewise, narrative depictions of Band Office politics and tribal governance are often messy and complicated. In *Almanac of the Dead*, Sterling is banished from his Laguna nation for a transgression he believes was not his fault. In Drew Hayden Taylor's 2011 novel *Motorcycles and Sweetgrass*, the narrator describes how "colonization had a nasty tendency to work its way into the DNA, the beliefs and philosophies and the very ways of life of the people being colonized," making some of the members of the Otter Lake First Nation "indistinguishable from White people" (83). Taylor's novel evokes internal colonialism, where colonial attitudes are reinforced and go unquestioned and unchallenged. In a similar vein, Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale*, published in 2008, describes how Dwight, a corrupt member of the tribal government of a remote community, invokes years of tradition in order to justify holding a whale hunt, but does not consult with community elders. Instead of planning the hunt in a respectful way, he meets "with the Japanese businessmen and [makes] a quiet deal to sell the whale meat to them" (59–60). In these texts, the realities of family politics, bureaucratic paperwork, corruption, greed, and human fallibility—present at all levels of government—collide with and complicate idealized theorizations of Indigenous nationhood.

Nevertheless, in the context of intensifying globalization, increased assaults on cultural, political, and territorial sovereignty, and hegemonic neoliberal policies and institutions that erase and devalue Indigenous lifeways,

aspirational models of nationhood that emphasize modes of relationality, kinship, interdependence, nondomination, and openness can provide the groundwork for opposition to state and corporate practices of domination. Maintaining that they are not isolationist or separatist, Indigenous theorists seek to assert Indigenous sovereignty and assure the survivance and continuity of peoples, cultures, languages, and stories. Still, there are both oppressive and liberatory practices of nationalism and nationhood, and any responsible criticism will not shy away from an honest examination of those practices in the interests of remaining committed to the dignity and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and communities.

### **Reading Indigenous Texts in Global Contexts**

In this chapter, I have outlined the various political, historical, and social contexts, both local and global, within which this dissertation will situate the works of Silko, Alexie, Hogan, and Armstrong. Each of their novels has been generated within the context of specific First Nations cultures, as well as within the context of a hegemonic neoliberalism, increased critical attention to Indigenous nationalism, and the work of the WGIP. Each of their works represents practices of Indigenous community, whether national, and tribal, or international, in different ways. Each text participates in a tradition of Indigenous engagement in and with international institutions and processes of global interconnectedness. Not all of these works valorize the nation form; some represent international affiliations positively whereas others do not find hope in these directions. Thus, rather than imposing a totalizing theory on these texts, I

am open to how their representations of the processes and practices of community and being-in-common diverge from each other.

My interest in looking at these texts and their relationships to their national and global contexts stems in part from a desire to, in Miyoshi's words, "look out at the world and interconnect all the workings of political economy and artistic and cultural productions" (295). It is to join the particularity of Indigenous texts with the 'totality' of the local and global relations from within which they emerge. Global contexts are Indigenous contexts as much as they are anyone else's. The work of narrating community, of narrating survivance, and of narrating resistance leads to new expressions of solidarity, critique, affiliation, and sovereignty within this context of globality.

## Chapter 2: Opposing the Gunadeeyah: *Almanac of the Dead* and Neoliberalism

Recalling a trip to post-unification Germany in 1994, Leslie Marmon Silko describes seeing what she interprets as the people of Leipzig, in old East Germany, being “colonized by huge construction cranes to build skyscrapers,” and comments that “Capitalism was trampling them and crunching them under its boot” (“Listening” 165). Observing the intensification of neoliberal policies of deregulation and privatization on the newly unified Germany (see Brenner “Building”), she notes the similar consequences for Indigenous peoples in the Americas (and globally) of unrestrained neoliberal globalization. Silko maintains that her awareness of the reality of being-in-relation with the rest of the world consistently informs her thinking and writing, explaining, “I believe that the Pueblo people, the indigenous people of the Americas, we’re not only Indian nations and sovereign nations and people, but we are citizens of the world” (“Listening” 165). Silko’s affirmation of Indigenous sovereignty goes hand in hand with an acknowledgement that Indigenous peoples are simultaneously implicated in global events and that expressions and practices of sovereignty and nationhood must be understood in relation to other peoples, geographies, and species. For her, Indigenous nationhood and world citizenship are not mutually exclusive. In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko explores multiple practices of Indigenous agency in a world increasingly shaped by neoliberal globalization. From Angelita La Escapía’s commitment to Indigenous sovereignty, to the

representation of international alliances and global networks of resistance and solidarity, the novel depicts a complex and differentiated portrait of opposition to neoliberal global capitalism alongside the negotiation of Indigenous sovereignty and survivance.

Silko's text opens several narrative, discursive, and critical possibilities for literary representations of Indigenous modes of community at the beginning of the 1990s. Although *Almanac* can be read as participating within a long tradition of Indigenous resistance literature in the Americas, I suggest that Silko's novel is a foundational text in addressing the material, cultural, political, spiritual, and economic consequences of neoliberal globalization on Indigenous practices of community. *Almanac* delineates the contemporary colonial relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers in terms of how neoliberal capital operates through networks of corporate power and corrupt government elites. It articulates, in a prophetic mode, a vision of alliance- and network-based decolonization that anticipates the alter-globalization movement, the UN Declaration of Indigenous Rights, the increased political agency of Indigenous peoples in Mexico and South American countries such as Bolivia and Venezuela, as well as movements such as Occupy Wall Street and Idle No More. Highlighting the historical mutations of colonialism, Silko's novel outlines and critiques neoliberal manifestations of colonial practices, anticipating Indigenous and international resistance to economic treaties including the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, the 1988 Free Trade Agreement, and the stalled negotiations towards a Free Trade Area of the Americas.

Silko's first novel, *Ceremony*, was published in 1977 to wide critical acclaim, soon becoming a staple of university syllabi. It recounts the story of Tayo, who returns to his home on the Laguna Pueblo reservation in order to recover from his experiences as a soldier during the Second World War. Tayo is particularly haunted by the memory of a group of Japanese soldiers he was ordered to execute. Unable to pull the trigger, he is forced to look at a body by his cousin Rocky, the sight of which causes him to scream "because it wasn't a Jap, it was Josiah," his uncle (8). Tayo's journey underscores how international travels have long been part of First Nations' experience, although in his case, mediated through war. In addition to *Ceremony*, Silko has authored *Storyteller*, a collection of stories and poetry published in 1981, and, after *Almanac*, another novel, *Garden in the Dunes*, published in 1999. *Garden in the Dunes* follows the travels of Indigo, a young girl of the Sand Lizard people, who accompanies an affluent white couple, Hattie and her husband Edward, on their botanical explorations through Europe and South America. Set in the nineteenth century, the text explores themes including the Ghost Dance, colonialism, and biopiracy, as Edward smuggles plant cuttings across international borders. In addition to these works of fiction, Silko has published a collection of essays entitled *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* in 1997 and a memoir entitled *The Turquoise Ledge* in 2010.

Published in 1991, Silko's second novel, *Almanac of the Dead*, clears the ground for an Indigenous literary critique of neoliberal globalization. Referring to Irish literature, Seamus Deane asserts:

A foundational text is one that allows or has allowed for a reading of a national literature in such a manner that even chronologically prior texts can be annexed by it into a narrative that will ascribe to them a preparatory role in the ultimate completion of the narrative's plot. It is a text that generates the possibility of such a narrative and lends to that narrative a versatile cultural and political value. (1–2)

Borrowing Deane's definition, I argue that Silko's text inaugurates the possibility of a critical Indigenous literary engagement with neoliberal globalization. Groundbreaking texts make possible critical or narrative perspectives hitherto unexplored. They also enable a revised understanding of a particular literary tradition refracted in a new light. Previous texts can then be read as anticipatory narratives that have created the conditions of possibility for the new and innovative. *Almanac* opens a new Indigenous literary trajectory with its powerful and encompassing critique of the devastation caused by neoliberal globalization to Indigenous and other marginalized communities across the Americas. Within *Almanac*, representations of Indigenous sovereignty, spirituality, nationalism, inter-tribalism, and tribal internationalism collide with neoliberal globalization, resulting in narrative depictions of complicated, precarious, and potentially liberating practices of community. The novel's emphasis on networks and alliances across ethnic, cultural, spiritual, tribal, national, and international borders privileges the liberatory potential of openness on the part of Indigenous communities towards the possibilities offered through modes of globalized

resistance to oppression. *Almanac*, I maintain, is a text that opens literary and critical spaces for the narration and imagination of Indigenous communities in an increasingly globalized world. The novels that I examine in later chapters—Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*, Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer*, and Jeannette Armstrong’s *Whispering in Shadows*—can be read in *Almanac*’s wake as texts that complicate, challenge, and expand the narrative representations of Indigenous sovereignty in relation to neoliberal globalization and capitalism articulated in Silko’s novel.

*Almanac of the Dead* is a sprawling text that ties together numerous plot lines and characters and defies easy summarization. However, there are several key narrative strands on which this chapter focuses. On a ranch outside Tucson, the sisters Lecha and Zeta work together to transcribe an ancient almanac given to them by their grandmother Yoeme. Lecha has returned to Tucson after spending time as a television psychic, locating those who have died. She hires Seese, a young woman who is searching for her lost baby, to help her with the almanac. In Tucson, a pair of Vietnam veterans, Roy and Clinton, recruit an army of homeless veterans to fight against government and corporate injustice. In Mexico, a Mayan woman named Angelita, a.k.a. La Escapía, together with the brothers El Feo and Tacho/Wacah, leads an army of Indigenous people on a march north to take back land lost over five centuries of colonialism. Alongside characters pursuing revolutionary goals, there are those who seek only personal profit through the exploitation of land and people, and those who delight in the suffering of others. In Tuxtla Gutiérrez, a businessman named Menardo establishes an insurance

company which promises to protect elites from “acts of God, mutinies, war, and revolution” (261), and begins an affair with an architect named Alegría who has had previous associations with radical communists. Menardo maintains close ties with generals, mayors, and police chiefs, participating in a network of elites concerned with protecting their privilege and power. Leah Blue, a real estate investor, plans to replicate the city of Venice in the middle of the desert on expropriated Indigenous land. Her business partner, Trigg, runs a company that supplies black market blood and organs taken from the homeless and poor. Another member of the elites, Beaufrey, spends time in both San Diego and Mexico City with his lovers David, Eric, and Serlo. Beaufrey delights in manipulating and destroying others, including Seese, David, and Eric. The novel concludes with an International Holistic Healers Convention in Tucson, where Lecha, Zeta, Angelita, Clinton, and Roy are joined by other characters who come together to plan the eventual overthrow of the United States government and the return of stolen Indigenous land.

Silko’s novel focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on Indigenous communities in the United States-Mexico border region living under conditions imposed by neoliberal capital—the intensification of the privatization of land, resources, services, water, bodies, and warfare. Written during the 1980s and published just before the quincentennial of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas, the text adopts a prophetic mode of enunciation in its exploration of Indigenous resistance, resurgence, and sovereignty. Also published in 1991 were two other novels by well-known Indigenous authors: *The Heirs of Columbus* by Gerald

Vizenor and *The Crown of Columbus* by Louise Erdrich (Chippewa) and Michael Dorris (Modoc). Of the three novels, only *The Crown of Columbus* spent time on the New York Times bestseller list (“Best Sellers”). These novels each mark the arrival of the quincentennial and respond to the legacy of five hundred years of colonization. Bridget O’Meara situates *Almanac* within the context of ongoing Indigenous efforts to resist colonial and imperial violence, as well as the violence of capital. Placing the writing of the novel “five hundred years after Columbus stumbled across an island in this hemisphere and nearly a decade before the WTO protests,” she argues that it “recovers and recreates the submerged (fragmented, partial, transformed) knowledges of oppressed peoples, while affirming and strengthening vital social, ecological, and spiritual relationships” (65). Her description demonstrates how the text is deeply invested in articulating praxes of Indigenous community within an historical moment marked by growing consciousness of and resistance to global neoliberal economic policies.

Events that have taken place in the wake of *Almanac*’s publication, such as the Zapatista resistance and the election in 2005 of an Aymara President in Bolivia (Evo Morales), speak to its anticipatory and prophetic narrative qualities. Rebecca Tillett proposes that the text, emerging from a legacy of United States-Mexican conflict, foregrounds “the histories of Euroamerican conquest and empire, questioning the idea of borders and ‘free’ trade, and emphasizing the national, cultural, and racial misinterpretations that have such profound effects in individual lives” (334). The novel’s critique of free trade anticipates the deleterious effects of NAFTA, an agreement negotiated in the late 1980s and

signed in 1992. NAFTA was the catalyst for the January 1, 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, as it represented an increase in the intensity and severity of predatory neoliberal economic practices imposed upon Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities in North America, particularly Mexico. Prior to the implementation of NAFTA, then Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari changed Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which previously sanctioned communal ownership of land, to require the privatization of all Mexican land. This change afforded American and multinational corporations increased opportunities to exploit oil reserves and other resources on Indigenous lands (Tillett 333). Tillett explains that in the Mexican context, negotiations and official state discourse about NAFTA demonstrate that “indigeneity is clearly excluded from Mexico’s present or future” and has become equated with poverty and regression (333). In other words, the language of state proponents of NAFTA creates a binary opposition between a reified notion of indigeneity locked in a regressive and primitive past, and a narrative of free trade tied to progress. Craig Womack maintains that “the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, from its beginnings, has been anti-NAFTA, and their struggle has much to teach us about the connection between autonomy, cultural integrity, and economic issues such as taking back the land and controlling one’s own resources” (*Red* 225). As Womack asserts, NAFTA and similar neoliberal policies contribute to the ongoing dispossession and exploitation of Indigenous lands and resources. In this sense, *Almanac of the Dead*, in its anticipation of and resistance to those policies, clears

the ground for Indigenous imaginings of sovereignty and autonomy in an increasingly globalized world.

Silko explicitly draws parallels between her experience of writing *Almanac* and the preparations for the Zapatista uprising. She explains, “What’s interesting is that Commander Marcos [spokesman for the Zapatistas] went to the mountains in 1980, and that’s when I started to have transmissions. I started to spontaneously write down things from the *Almanac*” (“Listening” 169). The shared context of neoliberal reforms and increased repression of Indigenous peoples that manifests in Silko’s work corresponds with many aspects of the Zapatista movement including Marcos’s critique of neoliberalism and privileging of networked resistance. Silko contends that the Zapatista uprising was “one of the most important signalings of what is to come” and that the subsequent demonstrations held all over the Americas demonstrated “the solidarity of Native American people throughout the Americas” (Boos 143). For Silko, the Zapatista insurgency “is no new war; this war has a five-hundred-year history; this is the same war of resistance that the indigenous people of the Americas have never ceased to fight” (*Yellow* 153). George Collier and Elizabeth Quaratiello suggestively describe how *Almanac of the Dead* was widely read in Chiapas in the summer of 1993, before the Zapatista declaration of war on January 1, 1994 (1), and other critics have speculated about the novel’s role as a possible partial catalyst for this revolution (Romero 636–37). Although I am not arguing that the text was a primary driver of the uprising, it clearly tapped into and reflected contemporary social and political desires. The Zapatista resistance continues the

struggle against colonization, but as Silko points out, it is fought now in additional modes, through Indigenous networks, international gatherings, the Internet, and social media. Silko positions *Almanac* as participating in, and stemming from, this 500 year shared project of decolonization. However, the conditions and possibilities for decolonization under a neoliberal regime of governmentality have changed, and modes of resistance have adapted.

As noted in the Introduction, Silko's conception of being with other beings challenges the existence of boundaries arbitrarily constituted and imposed by colonialism, neoliberalism, patriarchy, and other hegemonic discourses on the basis of gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, and class. To be clear, the notion of being with other beings that Silko appeals to is not an erasure of difference or an attempt to assimilate. Rather, her rejection of divisions is a rejection of ideological constructions of difference that serve to dehumanize and exploit.

The privileging of the notion of being with other beings as constitutive of practices of community necessitates an understanding of communities as living entities open to change. In an essay in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Silko argues,

human communities are living beings that continue to change; while there may be a concept of the "traditional Indian" or "traditional Laguna Pueblo person," no such being has ever existed. All along there have been changes; for the ancient people the notions of "tradition" necessarily included the notion of making do with whatever was available, of adaptation for survival. (200)

Her understanding of community as process entails the rejection of hegemonic, static notions of “traditional” identities as having any concretized, reified existence. Instead, she asserts, tradition should be understood as embodying an openness to adaptation and making do with what is available. It is with the understanding of community as being with other beings that I approach Silko’s novel *Almanac*.

This chapter traces two central aspects of *Almanac*. First, the novel is a naming and a critique of neoliberal globalization. Identified as members of the Gunadeeyah clan, or the Destroyers, various characters in the novel articulate ideologies of privatization and individualism, and reject any sense of community-in-relationship. These advocates of neoliberalism create and sustain systemic violence against Indigenous peoples and other expendable populations. The novel explicitly depicts and critiques the social, ecological, spiritual, cultural, and political effects of neoliberal globalization on Indigenous peoples, the environment, and other marginalized communities. *Almanac* traces the networked exchanges of capital, arms, drugs, and body organs and juxtaposes them to the simultaneously restricted movement of the peoples who belonged to the land long before the imposition of borders. The activities of the novel’s political and corporate elites reveal linkages between generals, arms dealers, land expropriations, water rights, and organ harvesting, manifesting a system of oppression that extends into almost every level of society.

Second, the novel offers a vision of networked and alliance-based resistance to the violence of neoliberalism perpetrated by members of the

Gunadeeyah clan. Opposition to the Destroyers is rooted in the almanac, a prophetic text that symbolizes both the continuity and adaptability of identity and culture. The stories held within the almanac, a repository of communal knowledge, sustain the people physically (they eat and are nourished by part of the book) as well as spiritually and psychically through the promise of the prophecies. In *Almanac*, a network of resistance envisioned by Silko comprises not only Indigenous peoples, but also other marginalized groups—African Americans, Mexicans, veterans, the homeless, women, and the poor. They stand in opposition not to “the white man” or Europeans, but rather to the representatives of neoliberalism, the Gunadeeyah clan with members in every culture who manipulate flows of capital, drugs, and arms. The adoption of the discourse of tribal internationalism by the characters in *Almanac* points to the fact that oppressive practices and resistance to them operate not only at the United States, Mexican, or Canadian federal levels, but also at and through international trade agreements, economic policies, the mobilizations and migrations of peoples, the environmental consequences of state and corporate policies, and the international trade in arms.

### **Storytelling and Survivance**

The role of storytelling in *Almanac of the Dead* is central to the projects of Indigenous continuance, survivance, and resistance. Several of *Almanac*'s characters ascribe to stories the power to invoke ancestral spirits and to foment revolutionary change. Angelita, for example, draws upon her Indigenous

understanding of stories as sacred and her extensive reading of Marx to argue that “Stories of depravity and cruelty were the driving force of the revolution, not the other way around” (316). For her, Karl Marx’s key insight had been that “stories or ‘histories’ are sacred; that within ‘history’ reside relentless forces, powerful spirits, vengeful, relentlessly seeking justice” (316). Angelita believes that narratives possess the power to induce not only material, political, and social change, but also tap into a spiritual need for vengeance and justice. These stories do not necessarily need to bind people together irrespective of difference and or homogenize the people. Instead, as Cherniavsky argues, “the value of the stories resides in their power to forge alliances between radically dispersed and incommensurate subjects—to effect a collective ‘becoming’ without ‘the *universalizing* movement’ endemic to dialectical process” (120). Through narrative, Angelita mobilizes the people for a common project without eliding or diminishing difference and local specificities. She draws upon Marx’s writings to make this point, observing, “The words of the stories filled rooms with an immense energy that aroused the living with fierce passion and determination for justice” (520). Marx, according to Angelita, held that it was in stories that “the people lived on in the imaginations and hearts of their descendants. Wherever their stories were told, the spirits of the ancestors were present and their power was alive” (520). The telling and transmission of stories, as well as the safeguarding and translation of the almanac, become expressions of sovereignty.

Outlining her own thinking on the power of narrative, Silko explains that she turned to writing because she “decided the only way to seek justice was

through the power of stories” (*Yellow* 20). Dismayed at the corruption and ineffectiveness of the United States’ justice system, Silko turns to stories as a way of redressing ongoing social, cultural, and material oppression, as well as environmental degradation. When she speaks of Pueblo storytelling, Silko emphasizes the communal nature of sharing, performing, and disseminating stories. She writes, “Traditionally everyone, from the youngest child to the oldest person, was expected to listen and be able to recall or tell a portion of, if only a small detail from, a narrative account or story. Thus, the remembering and the retelling were a communal process” (*Yellow* 32). In this way, the existence of the story is not dependent upon any one individual, but upon the collective memory of those who have heard and participated in telling the story. Silko describes this mode of communal storytelling as a “self-correcting process in which listeners were encouraged to speak up if they noted an important fact or detail omitted” (*Yellow* 32). Pueblo storytelling, in other words, is a dialogic process, in which stories grow and change depending upon the relationships between storyteller and audience.

This mode of storytelling, for Silko, emphasizes a communal, contingent, and mutable worldview, not an infallible or absolute one: “this truth lived somewhere within the web of differing versions, disputes over minor points, and outright contradictions tangling with old feuds and village rivalries” (*Yellow* 32). Silko privileges the relational, co-creative, and co-created nature of stories and communal truths. Stories are told within and for particular social, political, spiritual, and geographical contexts. In addition, the storyteller must be aware of

the ways in which a story might strengthen or weaken relations of loyalty, trust, kinship, or friendship between members of the community. Silko is cognizant of the power of stories to divide people and incite conflict, but she emphasizes the ways that, “stories are always bringing us together, keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together” (*Yellow* 52). Her privileging of the ability of stories to keep people together reflects an understanding of that togetherness as work, as project, as needing constantly to be reinforced, strengthened, and narrated. Stories reinforce a sense of community and play an integral role in shaping and maintaining particular wholes, families, and clans, although this often happens by excluding others. Without the narrative, imaginative, and memorial work performed by stories, communities would struggle to stay together. *Almanac*’s narrative structure emulates this process of communal and co-creative truth-telling. The many characters and points of view within the novel bring into conversation multiple culturally and historically contingent notions of truth.

Critiquing a Western intellectual tradition that frequently posits the existence of an untethered, disembodied observing subject, Silko highlights the situatedness and rootedness of Pueblo (and human) epistemology. Stories, for her, are “the medium through which the complex of Pueblo knowledge and belief was maintained. Whatever the event or the subject, the ancient people perceived the world and themselves within that world as part of an ancient, continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories” (*Yellow* 30–31). Silko emphasizes that the nature of stories, for Pueblo peoples, necessitates a view of

the world as a unified story composed of an infinite multiplicity, or “innumerable bundles,” of other stories and narratives. It is this trajectory of unity within multiplicity that strengthens the relations between the different narrative strands of *Almanac* and between the different subaltern groups and projects envisioned by the characters within the text.

The ancient almanac that Lecha is in the process of transcribing exemplifies the power of narrative as a mode of survivance and continuance that does not remain static or reified. According to Yoeme, Lecha and Zeta’s grandmother, the almanac had been divided up into four sections and given to three girls and one boy to carry to safety. The children were told that the almanac held “countless physical and spiritual properties to guide the people and make them strong” (252). Yoeme describes for her granddaughters how “the four children left at night with pages of the almanac sewn into their ragged garments” (246). In addition to clothing the children, the almanac proves to be edible, providing them with bodily sustenance. To ease their hunger, the eldest girl drops a page of the manuscript into a vegetable stew. As the girl and a woman they have encountered on their travels watch,

The thin, brittle page gradually began to change. Brownish ink rose in clouds. Outlines of the letters smeared and then they floated up and away like flocks of small birds. The surface of the page began to glisten, and brittle, curled edges swelled flat and spread until the top of the stew pot was nearly covered with a section of horse stomach. (249)

The images of words and letters becoming flocks of birds and the page becoming a horse stomach highlight the almanac's narrative and material relations to land and environment, and testify to the ways that its pages nourish and preserve the children physically, spiritually, and culturally.

The stew saves them from being murdered by the old woman, but the children become afraid that their actions might have erased the part of the almanac in which the invaders are destroyed. To allay their fears, the eldest girl tells the others, "I know that part of the almanac—I have heard the stories of those days told many times. Now I'm going to tell you three. So if something happens to me, the three of you will know how that part of the story goes" (250). In this way, the children, having ingested the page of the almanac, also absorb the narratives contained within it, becoming the human repositories of the almanac. Sharing the pages of the almanac binds the children together through their relation to both the physical documents that they carry in their clothes and ingest into their bodies, and the oral narrative that they now share and protect.

As the almanac is preserved through the ages, the traces of its protectors and guardians are written into its pages. Lecha describes the state of the almanac as she works to transcribe it:

For hundreds of years, guardians of the almanac notebooks had made clumsy attempts to repair torn pages. Some sections had been splashed with wine, others with water or blood. Only fragments of the original pages remained, carefully placed between blank pages;

those of ancient paper had yellowed, but the red and black painted glyphs had still been clear. (569)

The almanac is not a fixed text, bound to one time and place. Instead it is mutable, a living entity marked by the bodies, desires, sacrifices, and pleasures of those who have guarded it. It is a fragmented text, yet the stories remain. A document that has been revised, excised, lost, remade, and reconstituted, it has also sheltered, clothed, and fed those who have carried it. Lecha notes that sections of the almanac “had been stolen from other books” and that “Not even the parchment pages or fragments of ancient paper could be trusted; they might have been clever forgeries, recopied, drawn, and colored painstakingly” (570). The novel’s description of the almanac raises questions about investing texts with the authority of cultural authenticity. The almanac is not a “pure” text. Rather, it is marked by the choices of the people whose stories it carries and sustains. Perhaps most importantly, the almanac preserves in its physical form the traces of histories of struggle and resistance against imperial and colonial oppression.

Critics have noted how the representation of the almanac serves as a metaphor for Indigenous continuance. Eva Cherniavsky argues that the almanac functions as a kind of “genetic code” of the people “insofar as the people may be recreated [...] from any surviving fragment of text,” but a code without “a fixed or closed sequence” (120). The additions and revisions made to the almanac seem to be governed “by no established or continuous criteria of inclusion,” and thus, “the very fact of [the people’s] textuality opens every figuration of their collective existence to the dis-figuring process of an entirely contingent reinscription”

(Cherniavsky 121). Similarly, Muthyala claims that the almanac is “a hybrid text in script, form, status, and genre, whose meanings and interpretations are constantly changing as its preservers struggle to maintain a sense of continuity in the face of European domination” (373). Both Cherniavsky and Muthyala suggest that the almanac signifies a rejection of static notions of reified tradition.

The almanac’s role in the people’s continuity highlights the ways in which stories serve both to preserve and remember, as well as to erase and forget. Silko argues that the preservation of stories depends upon their relation to the communities within which they circulate. She makes a distinction between the preservation of narratives as texts or audio-visual recordings, and the continued life of stories as they are told and exchanged among members of the community. “Nobody saves stories,” she says in an interview with Kim Barnes, “Writing down a story, even tape recording stories, doesn’t save them in the sense of saving their life within a community. Stories stay alive within the community like the Laguna Pueblo community because the stories have a life of their own” (“Leslie Marmon Silko Interview” 72). Instead, for Silko, “If it’s really important, if it really has a kind of substance that reaches to the heart of the community life and what’s gone before and what’s gone later, it will be remembered. And if it’s not remembered, the people no longer wanted it, or it no longer had its place in the community” (“Leslie Marmon Silko Interview” 73). Describing their relation to communities in this way, Silko conceives of stories not as static, monolithic or eternally unchanging repositories of “authentic” or “pure” versions of identity. Instead, as the people and their needs, desires, and relations change and alter, so

too do their stories, preserving what is meaningful and required at a given moment in the community's collective becoming.

### **The Gunadeeyah Clan and Neoliberal Globalization**

The telling of stories that name and identify an adversary—the Destroyers, neoliberal globalization—builds community solidarity, and opens spaces where alternative visions can be articulated and pursued. Silko's novel depicts current neoliberal practices as being merely the latest in a long series of corrupt, destructive, and deliberate imperial and colonial enterprises. In *Almanac*, the members of the Gunadeeyah clan (the Destroyers) represent and incarnate the varied and multiple desires of neoliberal capital. Revelling in the monetization, exploitation, and privatization of bodies, desires, lives, deaths, and land, the Destroyers articulate a vision of individualism and increased separation of elites from the masses. The novel's identification of certain characters as Destroyers enables a naming of neoliberal globalization from within an Indigenous Pueblo epistemological framework. When Yoeme describes the history of the Destroyers in the Americas, she makes clear that their presence predated the arrival of Europeans, and asserts that the Destroyers are members of all nations and cultural groups. As she tells Lecha and Zeta, "the Aztecs ignored the prophecies and warnings about the approach of the Europeans because Montezuma and his allies had been sorcerers who had called or even invented the European invaders with their sorcery" (570). In Yoeme's narrative, the so-called European "discovery" of

the Americas is understood to be the workings or invention of Montezuma's sorcerer allies. Yoeme asserts:

Those who worshiped destruction and blood secretly knew one another. Hundreds of years earlier, the people who hated sorcery and bloodshed had fled north to escape the cataclysm prophecied when the "blood worshipers" of Europe met the "blood worshipers" of the Americas. Montezuma and Cortés had been meant for one another. Yoeme always said sorcery had been the undoing of people here, and everywhere in the world. (570)

As Yoeme makes clear, it is not the ethnicity of the Destroyers that is problematic, but rather the fact that they share a delight in blood-worship and destruction.

The novel's depiction of the Destroyers reveals the linkages between parasitic elite social classes that usurp land and labour and privatize Indigenous cultures and knowledges. The corporate and government officials with whom Menardo conducts his business comprise a stratum of society that preys upon the poor and marginalized. Invested in exploiting and preserving patriarchal structures of power, these men (and they are with few exceptions men) prey upon the women in their employ and reduce their wives to status symbols. The novel carefully details the connections among arms dealers, drug traffickers, corrupt political and law enforcement officials, the judiciary, and business elites who consort together and manipulate the levers of power. The processes and policies that these elites follow and implement, namely the free flow of capital, drugs,

arms, and useful bodies, as well as the privatization and commodification of life and death—the business in organs, weapons, the theft of land, snuff films—are characteristic of a predatory neoliberal economics of greed and consumption. These policies and practices are the vehicles through which the Destroyers presently enact their desires for destruction, pain, and profit.

Another way in which the Destroyers work is by limiting the possibilities for being with other beings. Identifying many commonalities between peoples across the world, Silko explains that “those who would make the boundary lines and try to separate them, those are the manipulators. Those are the Gunadeeyah, the Destroyers, the exploiters. I’m glad that comes through, because that’s what I was trying to do, to get rid of this idea of nationality, borderlines, and drawing lines in terms of time” (“Listening” 170). Silko’s implication is that the construction and imposition of barriers between groups, peoples, and communities establishes and maintains the power of the Destroyers. These obstacles also manifest one of the ways in which neoliberalism works: by liberating capital flows and increasing barriers between peoples. In other words, those who limit the possibilities for thinking the in-common of peoples, those who erect, enforce, or police arbitrary borders and boundaries, and those who advocate the privatization of the commons, including land, culture, food, bodies, and relations are the Destroyers. Drawing a connection between what she calls “big capitalism” (*Yellow* 113) and the need to perpetuate the divisions between people(s), Silko identifies the valorization of individualism as a strategic move by global capital to disrupt practices of solidarity and cooperation, leading to the violent repression of

Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups for the sake of expanded profit margins.

Several characters in the novel voice critiques of neoliberal practices when they speak of the Destroyers. Tacho, who works as Menardo's servant before joining Angelita and his brother El Feo, links the human sacrifices demanded by capital to the history of the Destroyers: "The Europeans who came had been human sacrificers too. Human sacrificers were part of the worldwide network of Destroyers who fed off the energy released by destruction" (336). He outlines the work of the Destroyers in terms of networks, similar to the way that modes of resistance are presented in the novel, explaining that "those who secretly loved destruction and death ranged all over the earth" (475). According to Tacho, these networks existed prior to colonial contact, "Long before Europeans ever appeared" (336). Describing how the Destroyers secretly prayed and waited for destruction, Tacho depicts them as "humans who were attracted to and excited by death and the sight of blood and suffering. [. . .] Secretly they were thrilled by the spectacle of death" (475). Tacho's characterization of the Destroyers anticipates Naomi Klein's argument in *The Shock Doctrine* that politicians and policy-makers need to enact a kind of shock therapy on vulnerable populations in order to enable neoliberal policies. Connecting the privatization of schools in post-Katrina New Orleans to the selling-off of Iraq's state-owned assets and companies after the U.S. invasion in 2003, Klein illustrates the neoliberal manifestation of what Tacho identifies as the Destroyers' bloodlust. Klein explains, "I call these orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the

treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities, ‘disaster capitalism’” (6). She outlines how neoliberal elites—ostensibly distressed by whatever tragedy has occurred—take advantage of natural, economic, and other human-caused disasters to profit from the destruction. The desires and actions of members of this worldwide network of Destroyers coincide metaphorically with the economic positions and policies adopted by neoliberal thinkers.

Of all the characters in Silko’s novel, it is Beaufrey who articulates and manifests an utter callousness and implacable delight in violence, springing, in the words of Sandra Baringer, “full-blown from the womb as the incarnation of a Destroyer” (24). Portrayed as having “complete indifference about the life or death of other human beings” (534), Beaufrey is meticulous in his destruction of human lives. His disregard for others lies at the root of his hunger for violence and drives the games he plays with David, Eric, and Seese. Beaufrey conceives of himself as a blue blood, believing that “Those with *sangre pura* were entirely different beings, on a far higher plane, inconceivable to commoners” (535). Employing the discourse of bloodlines and lineage, he subscribes to a worldview wherein class and ethnic hierarchies are entirely rooted in natural, biological phenomena. His indifference to the lives of others is manifest in his advocacy of neoliberal economic policies. According to Beaufrey, an absence of sentimentality gives “free-world trade the edge over all other systems” (565). He approves of the way that “Every ounce of value, everything worth anything, was stripped away for sale, regardless; no mercy” (565). He sees neoliberalism as a kind of pure state of capital and market relations, in which everything and anything ought to be for

sale unburdened by regulations or ethical considerations. In *Almanac*, Beaufrey represents the intersection and interdependency of the notions of *sangre pura* and neoliberalism. For him, privatization and deregulation are ideologically linked to the naturalization and codification of hierarchies of blood, gender, race, and class. The market becomes the ethical determinant. If a thing *can* be bought or sold, then it *ought* to be bought and sold. The attitude of the Destroyer, then, is linked intrinsically to the drive to strip all mercy from social relations and subsume everything to the interests of neoliberal, global capital.

Beaufrey's understanding of the relations between governmental institutions and the people is representative of elites' attitudes towards democracy within the novel. Cynically, Beaufrey sees social relations through the lens of class warfare. To him, the best way to contain the revolutionary impulses of the marginalized and dispossessed is to "allow the rabble their parliaments, congresses, and assemblies; because the masses were soothed and reassured by these simulations of 'democracy'" (565). Once a population is sufficiently docile, government and corporate elites can enact "secret agendas unhindered by citizens" (565). His political philosophy aligns itself with that of Leo Strauss and the "noble lie," eliminating any real agency from the processes of democracy or the desires and will of the people. In a political era dominated by corporate lobbyists, where legislation is often written by lobbyists and think tanks, Beaufrey advocates a version of democracy that consists of the simulation of the people's agency and sovereignty, while in reality, government and corporate officials follow their own agenda.

Some critics have argued that Silko's novel depicts homosexuality in a negative light, as Beaufrey, David, Eric, Ferro, Serlo are constantly involved in activities that are violent, corrupt, and unethical. Most forcefully, Janet St. Clair asserts that "these freaks that [Silko] has created as metaphors of collective trespasses unfortunately tap into the traditional negative stereotypes that have defaced male homosexuality for at least the last fifty years" (208). St. Clair contends that even though Silko's novel is invested in "denouncing oppression" of Indigenous peoples, it does so "by exploiting the stereotypes by which another group is oppressed—by the same oppressor" (216). She observes that the novel's representation of a parasitic neoliberal capitalism frequently employs discourses of perverse and cruel male homosexuality. However, other critics have contended that within *Almanac*, "Sexualities—and certainly not only homosexuality—have become exploitive and abject in their emptiness, commodification, and disassociation from human love" (Fischer-Hormung 110). What the novel seems to critique, at least in Beaufrey's case, is not homosexuality per se, but rather the corruption of power and privilege incarnated in Beaufrey. Baringer, in particular, denies that homosexuality is the novel's target, insisting that the text attacks "the abuse of power and phallogentric race privilege" (25). As one of Alegría's Basque student compatriots warns her, "Someday you'll know. You'll feel it. How men use you. Treat you like a thing. The rich man. The powerful men. You feel how they fuck" (285). In Alegría's case, wealth and power pervert the sex act, emphasizing its entanglement in relations of class, race, power and male privilege. This complex of relations leads the men around her to view her as a commodity.

Similarly, in a pattern of behaviour condoned by their peers, the Governor and police chief engage in the systematic rape of their female employees. Thus, a wide spectrum of sexual activities in the novel takes place within a nexus of power relations in which those with power, queer or not, exploit those without.

In addition to Beaufrey, several other characters in *Almanac of the Dead* seek to take advantage of natural disasters and vulnerable populations in order to pursue their own profit-seeking agendas. Leah Blue's efforts to create a privatized Venice in the middle of the desert reveal linkages and networked connections between elites who share a vision of radical deracination and separation from the ordinary citizenry. To her, the land is a means to riches, not an end in itself, or part of a wider conception of being-in-relation or community. Leah is in business "to make profits, not to save wildlife or save the desert" (375). From her point of view, the desert is a lost cause due to pollution, so she may as well get as much wealth as possible. Leah's vision of an exclusively privatized community exemplifies the trend that Slavoj Žižek draws attention to in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*: the superrich are moving more and more towards self-enclosed spaces that are inaccessible to outsiders, the poor, and the dispossessed. Gated communities are becoming increasingly common and frequently manifest fear of outsiders. The inhabitants of these communities shut themselves off from the rest of the world and often deny the agency of those outside of their gates. According to Žižek, members of this global class, for whom unfettered mobility is the norm, are "creating a life-world of their own" and limiting their contacts with the world to "business and humanitarianism" (4). Žižek explains,

These global citizens live their lives mostly in pristine nature—whether trekking in Patagonia or swimming in the translucent waters of their private islands. One cannot help but note that one feature basic to the attitude of these gated superrich is *fear*: fear of external social life itself. The highest priorities of the “ultrahigh-net-worth individuals” are thus how to minimize security risks—diseases, exposure to threats of violent crime, and so forth. (4)

Leah is capitalizing on the prevalence of both a desire for separation and the fear of the social in all of its messy multiplicity. The fears Žižek cites—diseases and crime—have long been part of the discourse of colonialism, which attributes to the colonized qualities that serve to justify a fear of the other. In the case of Leah’s Venice, buyers will be purchasing “an identity that will, ironically, release and safeguard them from, rather than connect them to, a surrounding locality” (Brigham 314).

Leah intends Venice to be a sanctuary from the perceived threats of the Indigenous, the homeless, the poor, and the marginalized. It will be an artificial oasis in the desert, inaccessible to those not living there, and predicated upon the dispossession of Indigenous peoples’ lands, water, and resources. For De Ramirez and Baker, “Pollution, dwindling water resources, and the displacement of Native peoples are largely irrelevant to Leah, for her mantras are destruction and development and thereby, wealth” (223). Leah’s efforts to privatize the land and subject it to her vision of development reveal a worldview deeply informed by neoliberal principles that dismiss concerns about ecological sustainability and

Indigenous displacement. Leah asks her husband Max Blue, a “retired” mafia hitman with connections to the elites in Phoenix and other cities, to intercede with a judge in order to dismiss a water rights suit: “All Judge Arne had to do for Leah was dismiss a cross-suit by the Indians in the Bullhead City case, and the State of Arizona would have to grant Leah Blue her deep-well drilling permits” (376). Leah’s efforts reveal the interconnectedness of elites in their quest to create wealth out of what they perceive as empty land. Her actions represent the ongoing nature of Indigenous dispossession and corporate exploitation of Indigenous land. As Brigham points out, “Leah’s subdivision exemplifies how new formations of the local and regional are made by and for outsiders who rescale themselves as insiders, simultaneously disavowing the violence of that transformation by insisting that nothing was there to begin with” (314). By reconfiguring outsiders as insiders, and erasing Indigenous presence, Leah’s Venice illustrates the links between neoliberalism and colonialism. In an effort to privatize and monetize Indigenous territory, Leah’s project shares the logic of Salinas de Gortari’s changes to the Mexican Constitution, condoning Indigenous dispossession and erasure for the sake of corporate profits.

Leah taps into the impulse of global elites to insulate themselves from the world at large and from being forced to acknowledge the underside of the economic and state policies that keep them in power. But as the novel makes clear, at the root of this drive to disavow the social world lies a fear of the people. Representations of groups of people that are focalized through elite characters in the novel express this apprehension. Menardo, for example, is a successful

businessman who markets a privatized army to government and other elite corporate officials in the United States and Mexico. His entire business is premised upon a racialized fear of Indigenous peoples, the poor, and the dispossessed. The chief of police with whom Menardo has developed a relationship characterizes migrants from Guatemala as “secret agents and rabble-rousers, sewage that had seeped out of Guatemala to pollute ‘the pure springs of Mexican democracy’” (272). Dehumanized as sewage and pollution, these migrants, primarily poor, Indigenous, and socially excluded, are perceived as the effluent of a system that has no use for them. However, the existence of these surplus and waste populations strikes fear into the hearts of the elites who purchase Menardo’s services, and to whom Leah markets her desert Venice.

This fear, and the desire to protect against it, exemplified in Universal Insurance’s policies offering indemnification “against violent uprising or revolution” (292), indicates that the economic policies pursued by political and corporate elites within the novel are deeply cynical strategies to maintain and increase the degree of wealth and privilege enjoyed at the expense of others. Menardo is just as susceptible to the trepidation that he profits from; a fear of the people manifests itself in his dreams and in the liminal state between waking and sleep. The novel describes how, on one occasion, “Menardo had awakened to a loud buzzing sound. The screen of his television had been filled with what appeared to be larvae or insects swarming. When Menardo had raised the volume and looked closely, he saw the swarms were mobs of angry brown people swarming like bees from horizon to horizon” (481). Swarms, larvae, insects, bees,

mobs—these terms are inextricably linked to race in Menardo’s worldview. His fears are formed and informed by a long tradition of colonial discourses in which Indigenous and colonized peoples are depicted as subhuman, animalistic, and primal. In the *Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon identifies a colonial fondness for the use of zoological terms to describe the colonized. The settler, Fanon writes, “speaks of the yellow man’s reptilian motions, of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations” (42). Menardo has internalized this colonial discourse and sees Indigenous peoples through this lens. His use of these animalistic images also speaks to a fear of collectivity. The insect imagery emphasizes the fact that elites see Indigenous peoples as incapable of forming communities based upon any organizational structures beyond instinct. Rather, swarms and mobs evoke notions of spontaneity, disorganization, affect, and modes of coming together bereft of individual intent or agency.

In addition to being haunted by visions of swarms of “angry brown people,” Menardo is uncertain that his technologically advanced weaponry will protect him from revolution. In a second dream,

Menardo had been running to find his security units in armored trucks; but when he reached the village square, the trucks were there, but his men were not. With the crowd advancing toward him, Menardo had frantically tried to fire upon the mob from a truck, but the mechanism in the machine gun had malfunctioned, and instead of exploding shells, all Menardo had heard was *click-click*,

*click-click*. Then the armored truck with Menardo inside had been engulfed by the mob, who rolled the vehicle down the street ahead of them. The mob pushed the vehicle into the sea. As the dark, cold water had closed around the Menardo to suffocate and crush him, he awoke sweating and panting with the bed sheet twisted partially around his neck. (482)

Menardo's nightmares stem from a fear of being "engulfed by the mob." His dream symbolizes the direct threat to the radical individualism celebrated by neoliberalism; Menardo is afraid of losing his individuality by becoming absorbed in this collective and undifferentiated sea of humanity. The mob, once again, is figured as a wholly violent entity. There is no sense of rational agency behind its actions; rather, Menardo conceives of its movements as completely random and inexplicable, arising out of affect and emotion. The click-click that Menardo hears is another aspect of his representations of the people as insect-like. Silko's novel taps into a Western colonial discourse of the masses in order to play upon the fears of the neoliberal elite. These masses, for Menardo, are homogeneous, animalistic, primal, impervious to reason, and can only be reached through violence. His fears are articulated through a colonial vocabulary that, according to Fanon, includes terms such as "Those hordes of vital statistics, those hysterical masses, those faces bereft of all humanity, those distended bodies which are like nothing on earth, that mob without beginning or end" (42–43). This discourse can be traced to Hegel's description of the people as "an *aggregate*, a formless mass whose commotion and activity can therefore only be elementary, irrational, wild,

and frightful” (291). The armoured trucks, exploding shells, and his attempt to use the machine gun underscore Menardo’s involvement in the machinery of war, as well as his justification of this violence in the face of what he considers to be the random violence of the mob.

Menardo’s fear of the mob is related to his curiosity regarding what he will perceive when he decides to touch a dead girl’s body at her funeral. Being in the business of war has left him relatively sheltered from the material reality of death and bodily decay. However, the nothingness that he experiences when he touches the girl’s body shakes him deeply:

He was not sure he was actually touching her hand, but when he pushed, the corpse’s left arm had shifted, leaving the right hand alone on her chest with a pink rosary threaded through the fingers. The movement of the left arm horrified Menardo. Everything was supposed to be in its place and remain there. It had frightened him so badly he could not remember *what* he had felt with his forefinger. He had not been able to distinguish her flesh from his own. (304)

What Menardo finds terrifying is the fact that the dead body does not remain still, that it does not remain in its place. The body’s movement poses a challenge to his assumptions about death and the ability to differentiate between dead bodies and live ones. Equally disturbing to Menardo is his failure to distinguish his flesh from that of the dead girl. On the one hand, this might stem from a fear that he is, in a sense, already dead. However, his inability to distinguish the body he has

touched from his own is also a manifestation of his realization that he is actually connected to another human being. It reveals his corporeal fragility and his body's dependence upon other bodies. This connection strikes at the heart of the logic of radical individualism that underlies his entire enterprise of offering protection and isolation to clients. Ultimately, Menardo fears the loss of his individual agency, and this dread underlies his horror at the touch of the dead girl. It is this fear that leads him to purchase and wear a suit of body armour at all times to shield against forming any kinds of relationships with those around him. He keeps the body armour secret from his business associates and trusts it to preserve his life and his bodily integrity, which he now associates with his individuality and sense of self. In the end, Menardo's increasingly expensive suits of body armour fail in spectacular fashion when he asks Tacho, his driver, to demonstrate the armour's strength by firing a bullet at him. Menardo's death reveals the impoverishment of vision involved in this drive to separation and protection.

Both Leah's and Menardo's business ventures take advantage of the desire of corporate and political elites for isolation and protection from the people, from community, and from any sense of being with other beings. Serlo's fascination with Alternative Earth vessels carries this urge to its logical conclusion. Inspired by the assumption that the planet will soon be uninhabitable due to environmental ruin, these vehicles are intended to provide a refuge for the wealthy:

The Alternative Earth modules would be loaded with the last of the earth's uncontaminated soil, water, and oxygen and would be launched by immense rockets into high orbits around the earth

where sunlight would sustain plants to supply oxygen, as well as food. Alternative Earth modules would orbit together in colonies, and the select few would continue as they always had, gliding in luxury and ease across polished decks of steel and glass islands where they looked down on earth as they had once gazed down at Rome or Mexico City from luxury penthouses, still sipping cocktails. (542)

Containing soil and water unspoiled by the pollution inflicted upon the land by corporate wastes and externalities, the modules will be uncontaminated by the presence of the mob, of the rabble. To Serlo, the earth will become a spectacle to observe from a perspective free from any sense of being-in-relation with the world and its inhabitants, living, nonliving, and spirit. According to Brigham, Serlo's vision "represents a modernized version of a familiar class structure, one steeped in a nostalgia for monarchy in its desire for an imperialist state, where the only contact with 'the other' is by a long tube that will extend back to the earth when needed, to mine it as raw material" (315). These modules are about the ultimate rejection of any conception of Earth and the land as living entities with which we are in relation. Rather, those who can afford it can completely sever themselves physically from the land, which will be used, from a distance, to sustain those who orbit it. Notably absent from Serlo's dream of post-planetary existence is an account of those bodies required not only to build the modules, but to service them, perform maintenance on them, and to attend to the needs of those gliding around within their metallic and glass confines. This absence is

significant, in that it reveals a profound ignorance of (or a deliberate forgetting of) the fact that such acts of privilege and wealth are ultimately dependent upon the labour of others.

The novel's critique of neoliberal capitalism is furthered through the depiction of Trigg's trade in human organs. Applying neoliberal terminologies of surplus, expendability, and commodification to human bodies, his business venture is founded both on a fear of marginalized and Indigenous others, and a desire to sever notions of being with others. Trigg shares Menardo's and Serlo's aversion for ties to community and his commodification of those he deems to be surplus humanity transforms the populations Menardo fears into profit-generating bodies. Trigg labels those whose organs he harvests as "alleged human beings" and "filth and scum" (386). His reference to the "alleged" humanity of his victims illustrates the dehumanizing processes at work in the rhetoric of neoliberal globalization. To be made into commodities, human beings must first be stripped of their dignity through a discourse of dehumanization and disposability.

Trigg justifies his actions in various ways. He blames his victims "for being easy prey" and believes that he is doing both them and the world a service: "They got a favor from him. To go out taking head from him. He doubted any of them could hope for a better death. They were human debris. Human refuse" (444). Trigg's company, Bio-Materials Inc., is a literal representation of what O'Meara terms the "parasitic or vampire-like relation of dead capital to living labor" (67). Trigg drains the bodies of expendable and surplus populations of blood and organs and transforms them into commodities to be traded and sold

internationally. The fact that many of the bodies deemed to be surplus are homeless veterans of U.S. imperial wars highlights the ways in which war, disposability, neoliberalism, and colonialism are linked in *Almanac*. As O'Meara points out, "Not surprisingly perhaps, while bodies become both raw material for and the final product of the mode of capital's economic production, circulation, and exchange, the enactment of death becomes both raw material for and the final product of the mode of capital's cultural production" (67). Likewise, Clinton's critique of colonial wars shows that he is cognizant of the general attitude of disposability towards people of colour. He argues that "Vietnam had been a trap for people of color" and explains that the "Forces sent to destroy indigenous populations were themselves composed of 'expendables'" (407). Surplus populations and bodies either serve to extend the military aspirations of empire, or become products to be consumed by the global market for biomaterials.

*Almanac* stresses that Trigg's trade in disposable bodies is a highly racialized one. Trigg is afraid of the influx of people of colour into his neighbourhoods, as it interferes with his gentrification projects: "Mexicans and blacks could drift up from the bottom of the cesspool—and it only took a few of those brown floaters to stink up and ruin an entire neighborhood Trigg was 'rehabilitating'" (387). His assistant, Peaches, indicates that Trigg "bought a great deal in Mexico where recent unrest and civil strife had killed hundreds a week. Mexican hearts were lean and strong, but Trigg had found no market for dark cadaver skin" (404). Profiting from the violence in Mexico brought about by the drug trade and paramilitaries, Trigg is acutely aware of the financial value of

physical markers of ethnicity: the market for organs is booming, but the market for brown skin is not. Vampire capital is racialized here, as the non-white other becomes sustenance for those who are not brown. Fanon, focusing on the moment of decolonization, writes that it is at this moment that “the native discovers that his life, his breath, his beating heart are the same as those of the settler. He finds out that the settler’s skin is not of any more value than a native’s skin; and it must be said that this discovery shakes the world in a very necessary manner” (45).

Biomaterials Inc. reveals the morbid neoliberal reformulation of Fanon’s insight. Although Mexican and Indigenous hearts are literally of the same value as a settler’s heart—and even become the settlers’ hearts—their skin is not worth the same as settler skin. The organ trade must also be read as an attempt to indigenize colonizer bodies. By incorporating those harvests of strong hearts and organs into their bodies, the colonizers attempt to legitimate their claim to the land, their claim to belonging. It is a move that clears Indigenous bodies from the land while simultaneously incorporating them into the physical bodies of the colonizing elite.

In its representation of Biomaterials Inc., Silko’s novel reveals how neoliberalism places a monetary value on the colonial relationship, a relation wherein colonized body organs can be priced and purchased to replace settler organs. As Baringer contends, narratives of black-market organs resonate with the fact that sweatshop and maquiladora workers literally give their lives and body parts to satisfy the demands of capital. Acknowledging that Third World conspiracy theories about black markets in body organs can claim a “limited basis in fact,” Baringer argues that “Symbolically, sweatshop workers in the global

economy *are* being robbed of their body parts: their sweat, their health, their youth, their children” (24). Furthermore, as Brigham points out, Trigg’s trade in organs also highlights how *Almanac* represents the dispossession, displacement, and deterritorialization of predominantly Indigenous, poor, marginalized, brown bodies: “Focused on why and how people ‘go missing,’ the novel’s critique of colonialist capitalism takes shape as an extreme literalization of positions available within that system (and often embraced by postmodernism) namely, fragmented identity, displacement, and placelessness” (308). Brigham outlines how this trade in body parts, the disassembly of bodies, is embedded in the same geography of capitalism and neoliberalism wherein the body becomes merely another frontier to be colonized by private capital: “here, in the stories of relentless capitalist greed, the body, originally perceived as one’s own space (even as it is subjected to the values of a larger order), materializes not as private but open to privatization” (308). Silko’s depiction of Trigg’s enterprise anticipates the current corporate rush to patent life, as exemplified by genetically modified crops and the human genome project (all systems that subsume bodies, land, and relations to private ownership).

Trigg employs the vocabulary of harvesting to instrumentalize the bodies he purchases and disposes of, converting them from human waste to lucrative commodities that prolong the lives of those who can afford them. As Brigham asserts, the terminology Trigg uses to describe his operation “transforms the disenfranchised back into the productive, not as producers, but as products” (311). Just as the labour of brown bodies builds the wealth of the elite, the labour of the

organs harvested from brown bodies also prolongs the lives of those elites. When bodies can no longer be exploited for their labour power, they become the very sites of resource extraction. *Almanac* links the language of harvesting with Clinton's accusation that European environmentalists consider overpopulation to be a more pressing concern than pollution from industrial wastes. Clinton draws attention to the ways in which environmental discourse can be aligned with colonial, anti-immigrant, and racist policies. Rhetoric condemning environmental despoliation can employ implied racialized discourses of purity, cleanliness, dirtiness, and pollution. As Clinton maintains, assertions that the planet is overpopulated can easily be interpreted to mean that there are "too many *brown-skinned* people" (415). His fear is that the same logic that leads Trigg to speak of human debris and refuse underlies environmentalist concerns. The rhetoric of saving the earth potentially ignores capital's destructive impact upon the land and attributes the destruction to so-called excess and surplus peoples.

Trigg, Leah, Beaufrey, and Serlo can all be considered Destroyers, members of the Gunadeeyah clan who subscribe to a neoliberal ideology which subsumes cultures, bodies, land, and life itself to an economic rationality. When asked in an interview with Laura Coltelli about the reaction on the part of some reviewers who read her novel as a reductive condemnation of "white culture," Silko replies, "*Almanac* never says that the white culture is a cancer. The cancer is the secret Gunadeeyah clan which has members all over the world; their worship of suffering and destruction is the cancer which afflicts all cultures to some degree" ("*Almanac*" 130). Silko identifies the Gunadeeyah clan as one which

transcends borders and cultures, as a clan that is drawn together by a shared worship of suffering and destruction. There is nothing essentially European about this worship (and Yoeme and Tacho emphasize that the Gunadeeyah presence in the Americas predates Europeans), but the fact that several characters in the novel proclaim that “all things European” will disappear indicates an intimate Indigenous experience with European manifestations and representatives of this clan. Silko also challenges accusations that her novel exaggerates the pleasure taken in violence from mainstream white society, stating that the first U.S. invasion of Iraq—Desert Storm—as well as the conflict in Bosnia and Serbia “easily rebut the charges that *Almanac* portrays white society too violently” (“*Almanac*” 134). What Silko argues is that the revolutionary violence depicted in *Almanac* is actually far less destructive than the violence enacted by neocolonial policies followed by the United States and other Western states today. Together, the Destroyers share a fear and distrust of certain forms of collectivity and social solidarity. The colonial, patriarchal discourses through which they depict and perceive women, Indigenous peoples, African Americans, and the poor as insects, swarms, and irrational mobs indicates an extreme antipathy toward marginalized social constituencies. *Almanac* suggests that Destroyer ideologies have at their hearts a deep and abiding suspicion of social relations that move beyond a sense of hyperindividualism fostered by neoliberalism.

### **Clinton and Angelita: Narrating Histories of Resistance-in-Common**

Silko's novel juxtaposes the Destroyers' fears of collectivity and being-in-common with narrative strands that privilege praxes of alliance-building and solidarity in the interests of Indigenous sovereignty and resistance to neoliberalism. Posed against the disdain and fear of collectivity expressed by Menardo, Beaufrey, Serlo, and Leah are the representations of community and sovereignty as articulated through Angelita, Clinton, El Feo and Tacho. Their practices of community are tied intimately to the land, to social and historical justice, and to kinship and spirituality. Together, they offer divergent yet similar visions of collective being-in-relation to others and the land. *Almanac* does not articulate a programmatic, unified vision of internationally networked peoples working in concert to defeat or challenge the Destroyers and reclaim the land. Instead, what the novel depicts is a complex, messy convergence of diverse interests and desires manifested in characters with different worldviews, histories, classes, genders, ethnicities, social constituencies, and from different nations and states. *Almanac* emphasizes the precarity and fragility of a politics of alliance while maintaining its necessity. Revealing the dangers and the possibilities of alliance-making in the political sphere, *Almanac* proposes a vision of Indigenous peoples as "Tribal internationalists" (515) that positions globalized networks and alliances not as liberating in themselves, but as necessary tactical and strategic modes of resistance against neoliberal globalization.

Beginning at the paratextual level, the novel challenges the presumption that human needs, desires, and movements can be constrained by or subordinated

to a calculus of market efficiency. The illustrated 500 Year Map positioned before the text of the novel details movements and flows of characters, (illicit) goods, and populations (14–15). This map identifies the journeys of characters such as Leah Blue and El Feo to Tucson, the movement of “cocaine to finance arms” (14) from Tuxtla Gutiérrez across the United States-Mexico border to Tucson, and the movement of military arms from Tucson south to Menardo and Angelita. It marks the movements of organized crime families (Max, Sonny, and Leah Blue), and finally the mass movement north, as “The Twin Brothers walk north with hundreds of thousands of people” (15). Emphasizing the interconnections of history, land, culture, the map locates characters and their activities, and delineates the ways in which flows of capital, arms, and drugs are co-opted and manipulated by those, such as Angelita, who are working for the return of stolen Indigenous land, and those, such as Leah Blue, who seek to dispossess and deterritorialize Indigenous nations. The map manifests many of the same contradictions and tensions with which resistances in *Almanac* are sustained and fought. It points to the notion of communities as sets of relations in various stages of becoming, always fluid, contingent, transforming and transformative. Several prominent absences mark the map. Mexico is the only country identified; neither the United States nor Canada is indicated by name. In its refusal to designate these countries, the map firmly establishes the sovereignty and agency of Indigenous resistances within a conception of time, space, and movement that challenges the fixed understanding of space revealed in conventional Eurocentric maps.

Just as the map illustrates the complex and ambiguous nature of the flows of arms and weapons that constitute practices of both Destroyers and resistance movements, so too does the novel complicate Indigenous practices of community and resistance in a global context. Several critics have explored the ways that *Almanac* privileges network- and alliance-based collaborative decolonizing practices. To Cherniavsky, for example, *Almanac* depicts communities responding to neoliberalism by taking modes of tribal social solidarity and adapting them to global and transnational contexts. Examining Silko's novel in the context of Indigenous articulations of identity in the face of U.S. neo-colonialism and the colonizing practices of transnational capital, she argues that Silko's characters mobilize "tribal affiliations and knowledges in an effort to define a transnational strategy of resistance to both the old and the new colonialisms" (111).

Cherniavsky posits that *Almanac* narrates a vision of tribal identity that is not "traditional" in the colonial sense of the word—primitive, fixed, dying, vanishing, or incompatible with modernity. Instead, she claims that in the text the tribal "is not rooted in a particular place or mode of transmission" (111). Her assertion runs the risk of dismissing Angelita and El Feo's insistence upon the centrality of the land in the interests of sovereignty. Maintaining ties and relations to place may take different forms, but the novel's privileging of commitment to the land in the plans to reclaim the Americas and confront the Destroyers signals that Indigenous identities are constructed in relation to specific geographies. In *Almanac*, she continues, "the tribal is not pre-modern, and therefore not undone by the displacements and discontinuities that mark the experience of industrial and post-

industrial modernity” (111–12). Cherniavsky’s reading points to the way Silko imagines and narrates a form of tribal social solidarity that regards as irrelevant the borders and epistemological structures of empire and capital. This apparent rejection of colonial borders is complicated by the novel’s organization into major sections with titles such as “United States of America,” “Mexico,” and “Africa.” Canada is conspicuously absent from the North American context, and the fact that the bulk of the action in the “Africa” section takes place in New Jersey, Arizona, and El Paso suggests a certain U.S.-centeredness to the novel. However, the titles of the latter sections of the novel—“The Americas,” “The Fifth World,” and “One World, Many Tribes”—reflect an attempt to move away from settler-state categories.

In a reading comparable to Cherniavsky’s, Muthyala argues that *Almanac*’s vision of the Indigenous reclaiming of the Americas does not evoke a return to the pre-modern past, but advocates the

forging of a ‘one world/many tribes’ in which organic notions of ethnic and tribal identity, *sangre pura*, and national conceptions of time and history yield to the determining power of transborder processes and the unpredictable nature of local forces acting upon the international flow of people and cultural commerce in the Americas. (374)

He approves of the novel’s refusal to sentimentalize the pre-contact Americas as a paradise free from conflict. Instead, the text foregrounds the ways that resistance is not so much a return to an imagined past as it is a creating of futures and modes

of belonging resistant to difference-erasing notions of purity and nationalism. Similarly, drawing upon Stuart Hall's notion of an open-ended politics, O'Meara contends that although the novel imagines possibilities for coalitions and networked politics, it also "opens up a space for exploring conflicts and tensions within alliances and networks" (70). In other words, *Almanac* does not simply set up a binary between hierarchical Western domination and networked, broad-based, Indigenous resistance, but insists on exploring the tensions and contradictions within Indigenous practices of resistance, subjecting them to what Hall calls an "ongoing politics of criticism" (qtd. in O'Meara 70), thereby protecting them from becoming reified, dogmatic, and easily co-opted by capital.

In addition to valorizing networked modes of being with others, *Almanac* offers alternatives to the dominant neoliberal economic logics of privatization, deregulation, and market rationality. Tillett characterizes the novel's proposed alternative to corporate greed and neoliberalism—an Indigenous Free Trade Agreement—as a "communal, cooperative and [. . .] potentially *indigenous* approach to commerce: one that emphasizes people over profit" (341). Just as the text critiques the economic imperatives and assumptions underlying the commodification of human organs and bodies, and the exploitation of human suffering and dignity for profit, it advocates an economic vision built upon sustainable practices and just social relations. The Indigenous Free Trade Agreement has the potential to challenge the predatory economic relations established by neoliberal capitalism, but it also has the potential to replicate them; Indigenous characters frequently participate in and exploit the networks of drug

dealing and arms trading comprising neoliberal power relations. Muthyala agrees that many of Silko's characters involved in projects of resistance are "in some way or another and to some degree, products of the very system they are eager to resist" (374). *Almanac*'s characters cannot operate outside of the effects of neoliberal globalization or critique the dominant hegemonic forces of capital from without. Resistance, in Silko's text, is a messy, contradictory, and ambiguous endeavour. None of the characters is untouched by the drug and arms trades; none of the leaders of the resistance sacrifices pragmatism for the sake of ideological purity. However, as Muthyala asserts, the characters' awareness of their simultaneous inclusion and marginalization within the structures and flows of global capital "lead[s] them to form strategies of resistance and survival across racial divisions and national borders, a mode of resistance that Gayatri Spivak views as the practice of negotiating" (376–77). Common to these strategies of resistance is an acknowledgement of the role that the spiritual has to play in contesting neoliberalism. While Muthyala, Cherniavsky, and O'Meara are quick to identify and analyze the economic, traditional, and cultural conditions that lead to the adoption of alliances across nations, continents, and cultures, Channette Romero reminds us of the spiritual elements involved in this alliance-based politics of resistance. According to Romero, "Silko believes that these cross-national spiritual connections have the power to resist injustice in the Americas more effectively than secular political and nationalist movements" (623). Silko's foregrounding of the spiritual as an essential component of resistance indicates the

inseparability of the spiritual from political, economic, ecological, cultural, and other social spheres.

The emergence of alliances and coalitions of resistance grounded in commitments to decolonization and a renewal of spiritual connections to land and ancestors is manifest in the two armies depicted in the novel: Clinton's Army of Justice and the Indigenous force led by Angelita, El Feo, Tacho, and others. Clinton's group of soldiers is composed of a range of social outcasts, from homeless veterans of U.S. imperial wars to the ethnic groups targeted by Trigg's Biomaterials Inc. Clinton and Roy recruit those who now find themselves expendable and disposable. As Roy explains, these veterans "fought and suffered for the U.S., but the U.S. had no place for them" (395). The veterans inhabit precarious subject positions as soldiers who have been used to enforce and impose U.S. economic and geo-strategic interests upon countries of the global south, but who now find themselves deemed disposable. In the language of the Destroyers, they are simply bodies constituting the human debris and refuse that Trigg seeks for harvesting.

Clinton's strategy involves tactics of resistance, such as occupying the winter houses of the rich, that exploit the excesses of neoliberal elites. Brigham notes that the army of homeless veterans "utilizes free enterprise and privacy to their advantage; people with two homes cannot occupy both simultaneously. Furthermore, since their money buys them the luxury of being out of the public eye, no one will check on the properties" (316). It is ironic that the isolation from poor, black, Indigenous, and marginalized populations that Beaufrey, Serlo, Leah,

and Menardo strive for is strategically co-opted by Clinton's forces. The drive to separation leads to the establishment of gated communities that are easily occupied by the poor. The vacant homes are reterritorialized as common ground and shelter for the Army of Justice, which in turn is protected by the isolation offered by the gated communities. The accumulation of places, homes, and luxuries by the wealthy necessitates a form of absentee ownership over these spaces, making it relatively easy for Clinton and Roy's followers to appropriate them. In essence, what Leah's neoliberal vision of Venice offers is a privatized, gated community of absentee owners, where land is colonized by the wealthy and remains empty. Her vision culminates in a city where the poor have been evicted to serve the needs of capital, but where, in all probability, not even the elite will live.

As he outlines his vision for the Army of Justice, Clinton makes the point that he is not a Marxist. Instead, he draws upon practices of sharing and being-in-common from Indigenous traditions from Africa and the Americas, declaring, "African and other tribal people had shared food and wealth in common for thousands of years before the white man Marx came along and stole their ideas for his 'communes' and collective farms" (408). Clinton privileges African and First Nations conceptions of relationships that valorize being-in-common and being with others, and he describes how the roots of his movement can be traced to the ways that the land of the Americas has changed and altered the African peoples and spirits brought there through the slave trade:

The people found in the Americas that the spirits did not quite behave in the same manner as they had in Africa. In Africa the spirits had been predictable and generous. Ogoun, the Ironmaker, had been a gentleman-warrior and doctor back in Africa. The slave-hunting and the death on the ocean's crossing had changed everything. The Africans had been changed by the journey just as Ogoun, or Eurzulie, and Damballah themselves had been transformed by the slaughter in the Americas. Ogoun was no gentleman-warrior here; Ogoun was the guerrilla warrior of hit-and-run scorched earth and no prisoners. (417)

Clinton's account of the mutable and changeable natures of Ogoun, Eurzulie, and Damballah manifests the ways in which he conceives of the interdependence of land, spirits, peoples, and narrative. The stories of these deities change as African peoples encounter a new land already populated with peoples and spirits.

Clinton's narrative subscribes to notions of cultural hybridity in the sense that the African orisha take on new aspects in the Americas. In addition, he also endorses the notion that a people's existence and identity are intimately tied to their relations to the land they inhabit, work, and ingest. Silko makes a similar argument when she claims that the moment Europeans and immigrants from other countries arrive in the Americas, the land and the spirits begin to alter them: "You get this dirt on you, and you drink this water, it starts to change you. Then your kids will be different, and then the spirits start to work on you" ("Listening" 180). Of course, given the fact that the Destroyers, too, have ingested the land and water

of the Americas, the changes wrought by their relations to new environs cannot be assumed to be uniformly positive. Clinton's story of how Ogoun and the other African deities have been changed by the land emphasizes the interdependence of the land with its spiritual dimension and narrated dimension. His account of spirits travelling and becoming influenced by the land of the Americas informs his wish to foreground a history of shared struggles between blacks and Indigenous peoples in the Americas.

Building upon his explanation of how the spirits that accompanied African peoples across the Atlantic have been changed by their new home, Clinton states, "No outsider knows where Africa ends or America begins" (421). As he understands it, African spirits and peoples have established themselves anew in the Americas. They have changed and adapted to the new geographies of spirit, land, and water. Ogoun is still recognizable as Ogoun, but he is now an American orisha as well. For Clinton, the spirits are the motivating force behind the resistance against neoliberal globalization. The spirits instruct and compel people to act, to resist. He knows that the spirits have been speaking to "dreamers all over the world. Awake, people did not even realize the spirits had been instructing them" (419). Again, the linkages between peoples, activists, struggles, and resistance manifest on a spiritual level as well as a material and cultural one. Clinton situates his Army of Justice firmly within the context and history of collaborative struggles against colonization. According to O'Meara, Clinton's radio broadcasts "not only disseminate a critique of interlocking systems of domination but also chart a long and still evolving tradition of collaboration

between blacks and Indians” (69). Restoring an awareness of intertwined histories of resistance to oppression, Clinton’s broadcasts coincide with Angelita’s notions of history and justice.

Angelita, a.k.a. La Escapía, is one of the leaders of the Indigenous army from South America which, by the end of the novel, is poised to advance north. Through her, Silko’s text considers transnationalism, Marxism, nationalism, and sovereignty in ways that challenge many of the arguments of literary nationalist critics. Angelita is deeply fascinated with Marx and his writings, and her revolutionary impulses are shaped, to some extent, by her relationship with his critiques of capitalism. Comparing Marx’s descriptions of the effects of capital upon England’s poorest with European colonialism in the Americas, she observes, “The Indians had seen generations of themselves ground into bloody pulp under the steel wheels of ore cars in crumbling tunnels of gold mines. The Indians had seen for themselves the cruelty of the Europeans toward children and women” (312). Angelita finds Marx trustworthy because his descriptions of the economic conditions in his own time affirm her own observations of the predatory practices of neoliberal capitalism. Nevertheless, as much as she draws upon Marx in her analysis of the struggles her community faces, she, like Clinton, wants to excavate and reveal what she believes to be the Indigenous roots of Marx’s analysis and her own revolutionary project. As she explains to her people, “Marx stole his ideas from us, the Native Americans” (311). She is proud of the roots of his model, and reads his understanding of time, history, and the past as having much in common with the beliefs of her people.

Angelita believes that Marx's terms "commune" and "communal" are "words that described the lives of many tribes and their own people as well" (314). Her use of Marx's ideas demonstrates Angelita's willingness to incorporate analyses from other contexts into her own project, although she considers Marx's ideas to have Indigenous origins. Be that as it may, her rejection of the actual practices of communists such as Bartolomeo shows that she is only committed to using theory, both Indigenous and Western, to strengthen the sovereignty of her people and their resistance to hegemonic modes of thought. Muthyala argues that Angelita's "embrace of Marxism is tempered by her sensitivity to the common values that underpin both Marxism and capitalism, namely, the industrial development of the earth, which are antithetical to indigenous thought" (376). What Angelita critiques, therefore, is a Western episteme, common to both neoliberalism and Marxism, that posits an originary separation of humanity from nature, and conceives of human beings as somehow apart from and disentangled from the non-human world.

Even though Angelita is inspired by Marx's writings, she finds Bartolomeo, her liaison to a group of Cuban Marxists, repellent. Angelita thinks of Bartolomeo merely as a "funnel for financial aid" and believes that "When the issue was the indigenous people, communists from the cities were no more enlightened than whites throughout the region" (291). Bartolomeo is a useful point of contact for accumulating weapons and money. However, when it comes to resistance and revolution, Angelita is quick to assert, "There was no revolution and there would be no revolution as long as 'outsiders' like Bartolomeo were

telling the people how to run their revolution” (291–92). The Marxists and communists Bartolomeo represents might be sympathetic towards Indigenous struggles, but as they try to assimilate Indigenous struggles into the rubric of communism, they disregard Indigenous sovereignty. The conflict between Angelita and Bartolomeo mirrors, in some respects, the encounter between Subcomandante Marcos and other Mexican Marxist revolutionaries and the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas in the 1980s. Alex Khasnabish describes this encounter as resulting “not in the revolutionizing of the Indigenous communities but rather in the defeat of Marxist dogma at the hands of these Indigenous realities, a defeat that actually allowed for the emergence of the Zapatista struggle itself. The significance of this defeat cannot be overstated” (225). The struggle between Angelita and Bartolomeo foregrounds the ways in which adherence to a strict Marxist dogma does not adequately address issues of Indigenous sovereignty, history, and resistance. Putting Bartolomeo on trial, Angelita charges him with “crimes against history, specifically, crimes against certain tribal histories” (516). Bartolomeo represents a European, and Euro-American, desire to cleanse history of its non-European others. His fears of what he identifies as Angelita’s “nationalistic, even tribal, tendencies” (310) betray an inability to conceive of alternative sovereignties and alternative world views. Bartolomeo mistakes her goal of the recovery of land for nationalism of a state-based Western model. Instead, she believes sovereignty consists in the lived projects of Indigenous communities expressing their being-in-relation to the land.

Bartolomeo's desire to erase tribal histories, Indigenous agency and Indigenous sovereignty is evident at his trial. Refusing to take Angelita's accusations seriously, Bartolomeo asserts, "Jungle monkeys and savages have no history!" and goes on "to make scornful remarks about 'dumb and gullible squaws' who had confused themselves reading too many books with ideas that were over their heads—like water too deep" (525). He follows these declarations with the accusation that Indigenous "primitive animalistic tribalism" is "the whore of nationalism and the dupe of capitalism" (526). The rhetoric Bartolomeo employs is colonial, his racist and sexist remarks revealing a deep-rooted set of paternalistic and hierarchical assumptions that he shares with colonial ideologies. In this sense, his communism is rooted in the paternalistic, ethnocentric strand of Eurocentrism that underpins coloniality. Angelita is quick to dismiss his accusation that she and her movement are in any way nationalistic, but what are we to make of Bartolomeo's critique of her movement as succumbing to tribalism and nationalism? Also, what are we to make of Angelita's response that she represents a group of tribal internationalists? On the one hand, the critique is coming from a character who, to be sure, is depicted in strongly negative terms. Bartolomeo accuses Angelita of nationalism in the same breath as he accuses her and her people of primitivism, savagery, and adherence to capitalism's values. To be nationalist, for Bartolomeo, is to be mired in the past, stuck in a worldview that does not see or acknowledge the interplay, interdependencies, and interrelations across borders erected by states, language, ethnicity, or religion. His is a critique that associates nationalism with the primitive and animalistic. Moreover, it is a

critique that Angelita, in large part, shares. She objects to the assumptions grounding Bartolomeo's accusations of savagery, intellectual inadequacy, and primitivism, but she too dislikes nationalism. When her movement is accused of being too tribal and isolated, she responds by claiming "*Us? Not us! Their spies are liars! We are internationalists! We are not just tribal!*" (515). Angelita's use of the term tribal internationalists evokes Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion of rooted cosmopolitanism, where attachments to home and cultural specificity do not preclude an openness to difference. She sees her people as committed to sovereignty over their land, language, culture, and future, yet prepared to embrace those around the world that are engaged in similar struggles and willing to offer aid.

Although Angelita refutes Bartolomeo's accusation that she is a nationalist, she is passionately committed to Indigenous sovereignty. The language Angelita uses to justify putting Bartolomeo on trial in the first place privileges Indigenous sovereignty: "*You set foot in our sovereign jurisdiction,*" she tells him (526). Angelita may reject the idea of nationalism, but she is committed to enacting and establishing the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples in their own lands. At Bartolomeo's trial, she insists that there is more to the movement she participates in than tribalism or nationalism, evincing a clear distaste for these labels. Uncomfortable with the charge that she is a nationalist, she articulates a sense of sovereignty that goes beyond remaining committed to a static notion of a singular nation or community. Her list of Indigenous acts of resistance in the Americas reveals a history encompassing multiple modes of

sovereignty and survivance, including, but not limited to, Indigenous nationalism. She references events such as acts of cooperation between Indigenous and black slaves, the pope's designation of Simón Bolívar as "Indian," and the Yaqui declaring themselves a sovereign nation in 1825 (527–30). The inclusion of the Yaqui declaration in Angelita's list indicates that she considers asserting national presence to be of value as a strategy of Indigenous resistance in the Americas. Though suspicious of nationalism, Angelita gives equal weight to the Yaqui declaration of national sovereignty as to the slave rebellion in Haiti, and to the alliances between Indigenous and African peoples in the Americas. For her, histories of resistance from different peoples across the Americas can become part of a shared history of the will to decolonize.

In her struggle against the effects of neoliberal globalization, Angelita takes advantage of the opportunities provided by the presence of global financial and communication networks. Dealing with her international financial backers, she is aware of the power of performative indigeneity, of manipulating hegemonic discourses of Indigenous identity to suit the desires of those who offer them material support. When shopping for weapons and supplies, Angelita has no qualms about lying to her allies, with the exception of those from Africa. As the narrator explains:

If Angelita was talking to the Germans or Hollywood activists, she said that the Indians were fighting multinational corporations who killed rain forests; if she was talking to the Japanese or U.S.

military, then the Indians were fighting communism. Whatever their “friends” needed to hear, that was their motto. (513–14)

She exploits discursive constructions of indigeneity, the stereotypes perpetuated by colonial modes of thought, and manipulates them in order to acquire material and financial support.

Angelita shares with Clinton a commitment to the agency of the oppressed and dispossessed. In addition to taking advantage of globalized opportunities, Angelita sees her people’s struggle as one facet of larger global processes of change: “Change was on the horizon all over the world. The dispossessed people of the earth would rise up and take back lands that had been their birthright, and these lands would never again be held as private property, but as lands belonging to the people forever to protect” (532). Situating her people’s efforts in a global context, Angelita asserts a shared project with the dispossessed peoples of the earth, her tribal internationalism calling into being a community grounded upon shared experiences of injustice. The fight for Indigenous sovereignty, for the reclaiming of the Americas, is pursued in solidarity with others who oppose the kinds of dispossession depicted in the novel through the actions of Trigg, Beaufrey, Menardo, and Leah. Angelita conceives of a globalized community of those dispossessed through colonization or corporate exploitation participating in a shared struggle against neoliberal privatization and deregulation.

## Rhetorics of Spontaneous Resistance

Both Clinton and Angelita stress how movements that challenge neoliberalism are predicated upon shared experiences of colonization and dispossession. Each of them foregrounds the task of building alliances and coalitions locally and internationally in order to combat the Destroyers. Nonetheless, several other characters in the novel, including the Barefoot Hopi and Angelita herself, use a discourse of spontaneity and apparent passivity in their descriptions of the forms that resistance will take. The Barefoot Hopi, for example, proposes a strategy of waiting for a spontaneous outpouring of public dissent and resistance. As the narrator explains, “The Barefoot Hopi’s entire philosophy was to wait; a day would come as had not been seen in five thousand years. On this day, a conjunction would occur; everywhere at once, spontaneously, the prisoners, the slaves, and the dispossessed would rise up (617). The Hopi’s vision emphasizes a process of conjunction, whereby the dispossessed rise up spontaneously. Identifying the agents of revolutionary change as “prisoners,” “slaves,” and the “dispossessed” seems to elide or diminish the role of Indigenous efforts to assert sovereignty over land. However, it does mark the Hopi’s struggle as one in common with those who are similarly oppressed by globalized neoliberal economic policies. Similarly, when she proposes to “wait for the tidal wave of history to sweep us along” (518), Angelita encourages passivity and spontaneity as strategic modes of resistance. At the International Holistic Healers Convention, her message to the audience is that there is “nothing to fear or to worry about. People should go about their daily routines” (735). She

addresses her audience's desire for a revolution that will not disrupt the social and economic conditions they have internalized as normal and routine. Angelita's advice reassures her listeners that the coming changes will be painless, and allows her to allay their fears. The Indigenous peoples on their way north are not coming to wreak indiscriminate violence, but rather have as their targets the purveyors of greed and injustice through neoliberal policies—the Destroyers.

Angelita's and the Hopi's emphasis on waiting has the danger of appearing to encourage a sense of complacency and of passive disengagement from the issues at hand. Indeed, a sense of political apathy and passivity is integral to the ideological functioning of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism's privileging of individualism and personal responsibility elides the contingent specificities of people's embodied and lived experiences, including gender, ethnicity, class, disability, and discrimination. This process results in a

new mode of depoliticizing social and economic powers and at the same time reduces political citizenship to an unprecedented degree of passivity and political complacency. The model neoliberal citizen is one who strategizes for her- or himself among various social, political, and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options. (Brown 42–43)

Through a discourse that naturalizes free market efficiency as a neutral arbiter of value, power, and knowledge, obscuring the political motivations behind particular policy decisions, citizens are enjoined to accept the options set before them, and dissuaded from proposing alternatives. As Wendy Brown indicates

above, neoliberal governmentality requires and encourages a sense of passivity upon the part of the governed. In this sense, the danger of a strategy of waiting, as Angelita and the Hopi advocate, is that it merely reinforces the very passivity that neoliberalism fosters.

In many ways this appeal to passivity and spontaneity is a rejection of modes of organizing based upon hierarchical structures of leadership and command. The Korean computer hacker Awa Gee enthusiastically endorses an anti-hierarchical vision of resistance: “No leaders or chains of command would be necessary. War machines and other weapons would appear spontaneously in the street” (686). Awa Gee’s (perhaps unintentional) allusion to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of war machines evokes their valorization of rhizomatic linkages as opposed to arborescent hierarchy (see Deleuze and Guattari).

Adopting the language of spontaneity is to employ a discourse that depicts social movements as organic, natural mobilizations for land reclamation and social justice. In addition, identifying a movement as spontaneous implies that the people and their concerns stem from, are rooted in, and move in time with the earth, unencumbered by Western notions of progress or development.

Nevertheless, the rhetoric of spontaneity, as Gramsci maintains, frequently obscures and mystifies qualities of leadership, discipline, and agency. According to Gramsci, “The fact that every ‘spontaneous’ movement contains rudimentary elements of conscious leadership, of discipline, is indirectly demonstrated by the fact that there exist tendencies and groups who extol spontaneity as a method (197). Gramsci’s point is that spontaneity can be used as a strategic discourse for

a variety of purposes. It can serve to deflect attention from leaders, to distinguish a movement from other prevailing ideologies of the moment, and also to encourage a sense of ownership over the processes on the part of a wider popular base (Gramsci 198).

Gramsci's elaboration of the discourse of spontaneity is a useful lens through which to examine its presence in *Almanac*. Angelita's and the Barefoot Hopi's public approval of the virtues of waiting for spontaneous conjunctions is belied by the detailed descriptions of vast networks of financial, humanitarian, and military aid that they seek out and access:

All sources of "direct" and "humanitarian" aid were known to Angelita; one week she would be gone, and the next week she would return, with little Korean vans to transport the village "baseball teams." Her secret had been simple: the world over—from foreign governments to multinational corporations—they all wanted to be called "friends of the Indians." (471)

Angelita cultivates networks of those who would be "friends of the Indians," persuading and manipulating them to provide material resources necessary for sustaining the impending revolution. Donors from African nations newly liberated from colonial powers as well as donors from Japan, Korea, Germany, Holland, and the Middle East contribute capital and supplies to Angelita's cause for their own political purposes, and often draw funds from sources which might themselves be corrupt and ethically questionable. Petrodollars from autocratic

Gulf States, the novel implies, might not be donated out of a genuine desire for social justice and Indigenous liberation.

The Barefoot Hopi also dedicates an enormous amount of time to organizing and building alliances. When he speaks of waiting, he understands that the changes he envisions will take place over many years, even centuries: “One human lifetime wasn’t much; it was over in a flash. Conjunctions and convergences of global proportions might require six or seven hundred years to develop” (618). In the context of the Hopi’s expansive timeline for resistance, the discourse of spontaneity and passivity assumes a different resonance. This kind of waiting need not imply non-action, nor need it imply a lack of agency. The novel acknowledges that the Hopi works constantly to make preparations for these anticipated global convergences, highlighting the tension between his public exhortations to wait and his practice of continual preparation. Thus, we should not read Angelita and the Hopi’s commitment to waiting as sanctioning complete passivity or lack of agency. Tacho, who shares Angelita and the Hopi’s faith in the power of waiting, is cautious about the benefits of military resistance. He recalls that in arguments held in his village on the topic of the eventual departure of Europeans, the prophets had maintained “the disappearance would not be caused by military action, necessarily, or by military action alone. The white man would someday disappear all by himself. The disappearance had already begun at the spiritual level” (511). Drawing upon the stories of his elders, Tacho questions the efficacy of militaristic actions, believing that passive resistance will allow the Destroyers to consume and destroy themselves. While the notion of spontaneity

might serve to elide the social and historical contexts for Indigenous resistance, Angelita and the Barefoot Hopi deploy the discourse of spontaneity to open their actions against the Destroyers to a wider group of allies. Their goal is to give both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples a consciousness of being co-creators in this project of resistance to neoliberalism.

### **The International Holistic Healers Convention: Networks and Coalitions**

Near the end of *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko explores Indigenous sovereignty, resistance against neoliberal globalization, and modes of being-in-common through her depiction of the International Holistic Healers Convention. A vehicle through which the novel satirizes the appropriation and commodification of Indigenous cultures and practices, the convention also provides a venue wherein Silko can explore the convergences of resistance movements against the neoliberal ideologies of the Destroyers. The central concern of those gathered together for a secret meeting in room 1212 is to discuss “a network of tribal coalitions dedicated to the retaking of ancestral lands by indigenous people” (737). This meeting, and the convention itself, anticipates a variety of gatherings in the interests of Indigenous sovereignty as well as global social and ecological justice. In August 1996, the Zapatistas held their first Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism (Kingsnorth 36). In January 2001, the first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre (Kingsnorth 210). During the 1980s, 1990s, and most of the 2000s, Indigenous peoples gathered within the institutional framework of the UN

Working Group on Indigenous Populations, negotiating towards the eventual adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Each of these gatherings, similar to the one in room 1212, brought together peoples considered disposable, peoples disappeared from prevailing neoliberal economic models of market efficiency. After the Encuentro, Subcomandante Marcos voiced the Zapatista desire to “make a collective network of all our particular struggles and resistances, an intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism, an intercontinental network of resistance for humanity” (117). His reference to networks and collectivity echoes (whether deliberately or not) the language of being with others that emerges from Silko’s novel, positioning her text at the forefront of an Indigenous literary discourse of alliances of resistance against neoliberalism.

Opening a space for texts such as Hogan’s *Solar Storms*, Alexie’s *Indian Killer*, and Armstrong’s *Whispering in Shadows, Almanac* foregrounds the idea of neoliberalism as a war waged on a global scale against Indigenous peoples and other marginalized and disposable peoples and populations. The Barefoot Hopi, for example, characterizes radioactive pollution and capital punishment as “acts of terrorism” (734). As Marcos asserts, “It is not possible for neoliberalism to become the world’s reality without the argument of death served up by institutional and private armies, without the gag served up by prisons, without the blows and assassinations served up by the military and the police” (110). In other words, the imposition of neoliberal ideologies requires the assistance and cooperation of military and paramilitary forces. The Destroyers in *Almanac*

constitute a privileged class composed of politicians, mobsters, drug lords, and corporate and financial elites. The conditions of life brought about through the social policies and laws that they enact are a continuation of war waged against those who are deemed surplus or expendable. The novel's privileging of the network model of resistance is contingent upon what it represents as the central problematic facing Indigenous peoples. The worldwide network of Destroyers intent on globalizing neoliberal policies of privatization, deregulation, and deterritorialization necessitates an opposition similarly networked and committed to praxes of being-in-common that respect and sustain human dignity and interdependence, Indigenous survivance and sovereignty, cultural difference, spiritual regeneration, and ecological justice.

### **Chapter 3: Swamp Roots Resistance: *Solar Storms*, Ecology, and Neoliberalism**

Recounting her experiences as an Indigenous woman participating in the opposition mounted by the Indigenous peoples of Two-Town to the impending construction of a dam on their land, Angel Wing, the young narrator of Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*, describes how many Indigenous activists and supporters travelled "through waters and forests to help us, having heard about our grassroots organizing, 'swamp roots,' as we called it" (308). Angel's articulation of the notion of swamp roots links practices of inter-tribal solidarity to an emphasis on an ecology of resistance to the neocolonial imperatives of neoliberal globalization, manifested in the BEEVCO corporation's decision to construct dams on Indigenous territory. In Hogan's novel, the notion of grassroots globalization, which Appadurai characterizes as the expression of social forms relying on "strategies, visions, and horizons for globalization on behalf of the poor" or "globalization from below" (3), receives a swamp roots twist, resulting in local, ecologically informed modes of Indigenous activism in relation to global solidarity. Poised against corporate dispossession and exploitation of their land, the people of Two-Town resist by mobilizing inter-tribal and international kinship networks as well as coalitions of Indigenous activists. Messengers traverse the swamp roots by canoe, and when Angel and her Auntie Bush and grandmothers Agnes and Dora-Rouge hear their story, they decide to make the journey to Two-

Town by canoe, becoming part of the international swamp roots resistance against the dam.

Published in 1995, *Solar Storms* offers an Indigenous literary examination and critique of neoliberalism from an environmental standpoint, foregrounding the importance of Indigenous ecologies, knowledges, and relations for the survivance of communities of resistance against neoliberal globalization. Hogan is well aware of the global and transcontinental work of Indigenous peoples for sovereignty, human rights, and dignity. In an essay entitled “The Two Lives,” she claims, “The struggles of Indian people in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and other countries are the same as our own have been, and we must interfere in the genocide of those living beings that share our continent. We know that the struggles of the hungry are our own” (247). Reflecting on her own writing practice, Hogan asserts, “I think of my work as part of the history of our tribe and as part of the history of colonization everywhere.” She writes with the conviction that world events are directly connected “to our [Indigenous] stories, to the continuing destruction of Third World and tribal people, and the exploitation of our earth” (233). Hogan ties together processes of environmental exploitation, Indigenous dispossession, and Western imperial adventurism as manifestations of a shared logic of consumption and greed that must be opposed.

Taking place in 1972 and 1973, the events depicted in *Solar Storms* predate and anticipate the free trade agreements, implemented in the 1980s and 1990s, that marked the ascendancy of neoliberal economic frameworks in North America. Angel Wing becomes intimately aware of the influence of world events

and the impending changes wrought by economic and technological demands that are reshaping and re-intensifying colonial relations between North American states and Indigenous peoples. At the start of the novel, Angel returns to the community of Adam's Rib, her childhood home, in order to discover her heritage and learn of her mother. As she rekindles relationships with Bush, Dora-Rouge, and Agnes, the four set out on a journey north to Two-Town, the home of the Beautiful People (or, as they are also named in the text, the Fat Eaters) to help resist the construction of dams that will have catastrophic ecological and social consequences. In *Solar Storms*, the BEEVCO dam represents neoliberal capital's assault on the sovereignty of Indigenous communities, their relations to their land and cultures, and ecological health. Simultaneously, the dam alludes to the James Bay hydroelectric project, which included the construction of dams vigorously opposed and resisted by the Cree and Inuit of northern Québec. In his exploration of Cree opposition to the proposed dams, Adrian Tanner describes how "Hydro-Quebec, the provincial government utility most directly involved in the project, took the position that concern over social impact was beyond the utility's area of responsibility, and that no social issues associated with the project would be allowed to influence the decision whether or not to go ahead with the development" (122). Similarly, Stanley Warner has examined the social impacts of the James Bay project, including the effects of ongoing development in the region, and the loss of traditional hunting grounds and burial sites (93–120). *Solar Storms* is not the only Indigenous text to explore issues of sovereignty and ecological impacts in relation to the construction of dams. As other critics have

noted, the BEEVCO dam is “reminiscent” of the Grande Baleen Dam in Thomas King’s 1993 *Green Grass, Running Water* (Baria 89), a similarity that also highlights the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty over land and water. In King’s novel, Coyote’s destruction of the dam results both in the death of Eli Stands Alone and in the creation of possibilities for renewal (420–24).

Although *Solar Storms* explores the impact of dams in the North American context, it is important to underscore how dams are a global social justice issue. Laura Castor, for example, explains that the BEEVCO dam “has implications for comparable struggles around hydro power development and Native land rights that have been reenacted in British Columbia and Manitoba in Canada, as well as in Alta, Norway, and in India, China, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, Brazil, and Guatemala since the 1940s” (173). In a report for the United Nations in 2000, titled *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making*, the World Commission on Dams documented the multiple serious consequences of dams for Indigenous peoples, including displacement, lost livelihoods, and the erosion of language, culture, and spiritual traditions (97–133). Dam projects throughout the globe are frequently promoted by neoliberal policy makers and corporate interests. In a collection of essays entitled *The Cost of Living*, Arundhati Roy documents how the Narmada Valley Projects in India, consisting of a planned 3,200 dams supported by the World Bank, have resulted in the dispossession and displacement of millions of people, mostly Adivasis and Dalits. She concludes that the dams constitute “a brazen means of taking water, land and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich. Their reservoirs displace

huge populations of people, leaving them homeless and destitute” (14). Pursued without consideration for the ecological and social effects upon the lands and peoples affected, the planned dam projects are driven by neoliberal ideologies that subsume everything under economic values. Once displaced from their land, the people are simultaneously effaced from official discourses and accounts of the dams: “The millions of displaced people don’t exist anymore. When history is written they won’t be in it. Not even as statistics” (Roy 20). As Heid Erdrich (Ojibwe) argues, Hogan’s novel “may as well be read as allegory—destruction of indigenous lands happened then, it happened centuries ago, it is happening all over the globe right now” (11).

According to Rob Nixon, the construction of megadams in the twentieth century has been driven primarily by two factors. “The first,” he claims, “was the cold war, which saw the superpowers vying to demonstrate greater scientific and engineering supremacy, in the hydrological as in the nuclear domain” (166). The second was decolonization. For countries newly independent of colonial rule, decolonization and nation-building became motivators behind dam construction projects. As Nixon puts it, these construction projects “rendered material the trope of nation building: to erect a megadam was literally to concretize the postcolonial nation’s modernity, prosperity, and autonomy. No nation boasting such solid grandeur could be dismissed as backward or puny” (166). In other words, to nations seeking recognition as modern, progressive, and technologically advanced, megadams provided an apparent material symbol of independence and prestige. The BEEVCO dam construction project in *Solar Storms* can be linked

firmly to the context of the cold war, providing both a projection of engineering supremacy and energy independence for both the United States and Canada. The novel's condemnation of NATO's use of Indigenous lands for bombing practice makes this cold war context more apparent.

Hogan's text articulates a critique of neoliberalism in terms strikingly similar to those in *Almanac of the Dead*. In *Almanac*, for example, Leah Blue is involved in a scheme to appropriate Indigenous land and use precious water resources to create an artificial Venice in the desert. Likewise, *Solar Storms* narrates a vision of ecological being-in-relation that challenges the neoliberal logics of market fundamentalism underlying the BEEVCO dam project. In addition, Hogan acknowledges the influence of a variety of authors from the United States, including Zitkala-Ša (Sioux) and D'Arcy McNickle (Cree/Salish), non-Indigenous writers such as Meridel Le Sueur and Tillie Olson, as well as writers from other countries engaged in similar struggles for survival and dignity. Taking Audre Lorde's warning about the dangers of using the master's tools<sup>4</sup> to heart, Hogan contends that her writing efforts "have gone into new tools, the dismantling, the rebuilding. Writing is my primary crowbar, saw, and hammer. It is a way of not allowing ourselves to be depowered by disappearance" ("Two" 244). Writing becomes a powerful act in *Solar Storms*, as Bush's articles

<sup>4</sup> Cautioning against implicitly accepting colonial worldviews when critiquing patriarchy, Lorde warns that "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (112).

on the dam are smuggled out to a wider audience. Hogan's novel also ties together Angel's spiritual growth with her political engagement, reflecting Hogan's view that "to be spiritually conscious means to undertake a journey that is often a political one, a vision of equality and freedom" ("Two" 247). Donelle Dreese characterizes Hogan's poetry as "directly activist" (13), a label that applies equally to *Solar Storms*. Ultimately, the novel is a critique of neoliberal relations to the environment and corporate exploitation, privileging Indigenous sovereignty and community through modes of being-in-relation with others and the Earth. Drawing attention to how the text explores manifestations of solidarity across international and tribal borders, Grewe-Volpp suggests that Hogan's purpose with *Solar Storms* is "not only to end the dispossession of northern indigenous tribes, but to end environmental destruction on a global scale" (282). Recounting specific assaults on Indigenous sovereignty for the sake of corporate profit, Angel's narrative also exposes the underlying neoliberal logics of deregulation and privatization that ground both BEEVCO's project and contemporary corporate attitudes towards Indigenous peoples and the environment. Angel's journey, her perception of herself as entangled within a dynamic web of relations, and her participation in Two-Town's struggle for sovereignty constitute an alternative vision of Indigenous survivance in the face of neoliberal globalization.

### **Neoliberal Ecology: "Units, Measures, and Standards"**

Through Angel's narrative, *Solar Storms* offers a trenchant critique of corporate and government systems that deterritorialize Indigenous peoples and

exploit and destroy ecosystems for the sake of economic growth. Angel is aware that the effects of the dam on the Beautiful People are related to a global context of increasing demand for hydroelectric power, industrialization, and militarization. Early in the novel, Agnes tells her granddaughter that Bush “had fought hard for [Angel] against the strongest of our enemies, a system, a government run by clerks and bureaucrats” (72). Initially, for Angel, the oppressive system Agnes describes is synonymous with a colonial government whose various bureaucracies have shaped and conditioned her life as a child. By the end of the novel, her analysis of this system has expanded to include corporate interests as well as the military and security industries. Colonialism and neoliberal globalization are manifested in systems of power that are implemented and supported by ordinary people. It is the quotidian nature of these systems and processes that gives them an aura of inevitability and also enables workers, police, and soldiers to become agents on behalf of them. Although Hogan does not use the term neoliberalism, she offers a critique of the ideological commitments to individualism and deregulated capitalism that have come to characterize it. In “The Two Lives,” Hogan recounts her experience working for an orthodontist who was an avid admirer of Ayn Rand’s Objectivist philosophy and who accused Hogan of being a “welfare leech” when she received money to go to night school (242). Rand, an associate of Ludwig von Mises and a friend and mentor to Alan Greenspan, was completely opposed to all forms of what she called “collectivism,” and celebrated the “virtues” of individualism, selfishness, and free market capitalism (see Gladstein 21-86 and Greenspan 41-53). Critical of the

orthodontist's veneration of free market principles and lack of empathy for her efforts to pursue her education, Hogan argues that one of the side effects of the fetishization of individualism is that it obscures histories of colonialism and exploitation; people "are made to believe that poverty is created by ourselves and not that it is an economic problem existing within the history of the American way of exploiting the colonized" ("Two" 237). The problem with neoliberalism's emphasis on individualism is that it elides institutional and social mechanisms of privilege and obfuscates how systems of oppression operate to marginalize Indigenous peoples.

In Hogan's fiction, colonial and corporate exploitation of the land is closely tied to the destruction of Indigenous modes of being-in-relation to the land as well as attacks on First Nations' sovereignty. Hogan's 1990 *Mean Spirit* is set in Osage territory near Watona, Oklahoma in the 1920s, and explores the greed, corruption, and violence of white settlers prompted by the discovery of oil on Osage land. Ironically, the discovery of oil is crucial to stopping the construction of a dam on the Blue River, a project that would have flooded Indigenous communities. As the narrator puts it, "The dam would not go in until all the dark wealth was removed from inside the land" (10). Alix Casteel adds that the novel illustrates how the commodification of Indigenous cultures, bodies, and traditions that accompanies the theft of territory constitutes another kind of "dark wealth" to be extracted from the land (51). Colonial resource extraction policies subsume environmental and human ecologies into a logic of market efficiency. Just as Silko explores neoliberalism's commodification of Indigenous bodies and organs,

Hogan is aware of the ways in which Indigenous bodies are constructed as simply another form of wealth to be extracted from the land, or, in the case of *Solar Storms*, as impediments to market growth to be disappeared from the land.

However, Hogan's texts also describe how greed and corruption within Indigenous communities can lead to disharmony. When a planned whale hunt in *People of the Whale* creates discord in the community of Dark River, the narrator explains that "the division was a desolate thing for a tribe, whose purpose was to be One" (89). The narrator's aspirational appeal to tribal oneness is similar to Angel's language in *Solar Storms*, but it is belied by the fact that differences of opinion about the legitimacy of the hunt persist, leading to acrimony and murder. Likewise, Angel's idealized vision of community wholeness exists in tension with her depiction of the precarious nature of resistance in the face of the perceived inevitability of the dam's construction. Though she may wish otherwise, Angel is well aware that the Indigenous people of Two-Town do not speak with a single voice. She describes how "Some of us, less strong than Auntie, thought we should sign the papers, sell the land, accept compensation (283). Similarly, after the army shows up, Angel relates how divisions emerge among the protesters:

There were now those of us who were against this protest. A few even reasoned with themselves now, thinking perhaps the dams would provide work for the Indian people. They thought maybe it wouldn't be so bad. They came forward and said they no longer wanted to hunt in order to survive, especially with the game disappearing so quickly. A few even believed they'd profit off the

project. Or maybe it was fear; maybe they knew the governments would still war against us, might even kill us. Whatever it was, this was the hardest part, not having the people united. Tulik and Auntie were heartbroken to have to go against any of their own beloved people. And our division provided ammunition for the spokesman of the dam builders. (311)

*Solar Storms* does not narrate a false sense of unity among Indigenous responses to neoliberalism. Instead, it acknowledges the different levels of support for the dam and the desire of some to profit off of it.

Angel is struck by how government and BEEVCO officials subsume the natural world to an economic rationality that dismisses and ignores Indigenous relations with the land and non-human others. After listening to them speak at a public meeting, she thinks,

their language didn't hold a thought for the life of water, or a regard for the land that sustained people from the beginning of time. They didn't remember the sacred treaties between humans and animals. Our words were powerless beside their figures, their measurements, and ledgers. For the builders it was easy and clear-cut. They saw it only on the flat, two-dimensional world of paper. (279)

The replacing of sacred treaties that accord agency to non-human beings with a discourse of figures, measurements, and ledgers reveals a wholly economic rationality at play, where any sense of non-human agency is elided. BEEVCO and

its government supporters consider nature to be something other than, and subservient to, human beings. Nature, and human-ecological relations, must be abstracted and assimilated to a neoliberal calculus of market efficiency and economic rationality. Tulik, an Indigenous leader in Two-Town who opens his home to the activists, shares Angel's critique of the economic rationality underlying the worldviews of the systems of dispossession against which they must fight and the institutions to which they must appeal for justice. Angel recounts how "Tulik called the courthouse the House of Units, Measures, and Standards, because the questions asked there were how many, how much, how often. [. . .] He knew well that the worth and weight of things was now asked in terms of numbers, dollars, grams" (343). To measure human-environmental relations or Indigenous medicines, narratives, and sovereignty in terms of numbers, dollars, and grams is to reduce complex cultural and ecological becomings to sets of discrete objects quantifiable in economic terms. It is to impose a language of economic instrumentality upon fluid and mutable relationships and landscapes.

Neoliberal attitudes towards the environment, as articulated by institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization, are characterized by a focus on industrialization and development. In these institutions, economic interests, according to Thaddeus Gulbrandsen and Dorothy Holland, are "considered 'apolitical' with an automatic right to speak while forms of environmentalism not encompassed by ecological modernization are 'political' and so must temper their positions" (132). In this sense, the WTO,

the IMF, and the World Bank operate under the assumption that a binary opposition exists between so-called economic and environmental interests, and that ecological concerns must be marginalized. As Elaine Hartwick and Richard Peet state, neoliberal institutions often profess concern for the environment, but “The basic argument propagated by GATT and the WTO is that increased trade benefits the environment” (193). Moreover, when it comes to making reports and policy recommendations regarding the potential impacts of deregulation or industrial development upon local ecosystems, “the GATT/WTO dispute system has always found in favor of trade and against environmental regulation. Consistently, the principle of freeing trade from regulations and restrictions has been found more important than restricting trade in the interests of environmental regulation” (Hartwick and Peet 202). The adoption of environmental rhetoric is often only an attempt to greenwash industrial and corporate exploitation of natural resources. At the global level, the World Bank has been heavily involved in developing economic policies addressing water and development. In the South American context, Robert Andolina, Nina Laurie, and Sarah Radcliffe report, “The bank has articulated new approaches to water use within neoliberal development models by emphasizing development through market incentives, competition, and free trade by private actors” (129). These water policies, promulgated at a global scale, are the target of *Solar Storms*’ critique.

Operating according to neoliberal frameworks outlined by these institutions, governments often ignore the concerns of Indigenous peoples with regard to sovereignty and human-ecological relations. Andolina and his co-

authors argue that state policies based “on a narrowly economic neoliberalism and a restricted sense of modernity” have “largely excluded indigenous viewpoints and participation on the grounds that indigenous people lack ‘modern’ knowledge” (125). Similarly, Angel is acutely aware of the fact that the environment and her people have been overlooked in official considerations of the social, economic, and political impacts of the dams. She describes how the builders of the dams “ignored our existence until we resisted their dams, or interrupted their economy, or spoiled their sport” (283). For the corporate elites at BEEVCO and their government enablers, the important factors in consideration of the dam are the global flows of capital, hydropower, finance, and information that will allow them to derive profit from the land. Until they disrupt the smooth functioning of the economy, the Indigenous peoples of Two-Town are not even factored into this calculus.

Angel alludes to the figure of the windigo in order to critique corporate exploitation from an Indigenous standpoint. Assessing the values of the corporate elites behind the dam construction project, Angel makes an explicit connection between neoliberal economics and cannibalism, between colonial exploitation and self-destructive consumption:

Those with the money, the investments, the city power, had no understanding of the destruction their decisions and wants and desires brought to the world. If they'd known what their decisions meant to our people, and if they continued with this building in spite of that knowing, then they were evil. They were the cannibals

who consumed human flesh, set fire to worlds the gods had loved  
and asked humans to care for. (343)

For Angel, destruction for the sake of profitable investments is best understood as a contemporary incarnation of the windigo. Ojibwe scholar Basil Johnston describes how the windigo was “born out of the conditions that men and women had to live through in winter when it was sometimes doubtful that the little food they had would carry them through until spring” (224). In the present moment, he contends, they have been “assimilated and reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals” (235). Johnston’s claim that windigos have been “assimilated” suggests that, like the Destroyers in Silko’s *Almanac*, their contemporary incarnations have Indigenous roots. For Johnston, the windigo’s primary characteristic is a devotion to self-interest. As he explains, etymologically, the term “may be derived from *ween dagoh*, which means ‘solely for self,’ or from *weenin n’d’igooh*, which means ‘fat’ or excess” (222). Absolute self-interest and excessive appetites both indicate a disregard for others and constitute dangers to community well-being. The attitude of being “solely for self” that led to cannibalism in the dead of winter is similarly manifest in neoliberalism’s valorization of individualism.

Along similar lines, Jack Forbes (Powhatan-Renapé /Lenape) diagnoses North American society as suffering from a contemporary form of “*wétiko* (cannibal) psychosis” that manifests itself in “Imperialism, colonialism, torture, enslavement, conquest, brutality, lying, cheating, secret police, greed, rape, [and] terrorism” (9–10). In addition, several other Indigenous novels have used the

figure of the windigo to comment on aspects of Western culture. In Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*, Niska, a Cree elder who is bringing her nephew home from the First World War, is an experienced windigo-killer who has executed those who have given in to extreme hunger in the middle of the winter. However, she also understands the war in Europe as a place where "windigos spring from the earth" (49). Likewise, Cree author Tomson Highway's 1998 novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen* draws an analogy between the windigo (Highway uses the term "Weetigo") and the consumerism and consumption exemplified by a Winnipeg mall (118–21). Referring to the windigo allows characters in these two texts to understand aspects of European culture by drawing comparisons to corresponding drives and desires among people within their own Cree communities.

The figure of the windigo takes on several incarnations in *Solar Storms*, revealing the different ways that colonialism and neoliberalism shape and scar bodies and landscapes, but manifests most prominently in the character of Angel's mother Hannah, whose attempts to eat her daughter have left her face scarred. Hannah's own mother, Loretta, is from the people called the Elk Islanders, who at one point became so hungry that they ate poisoned meat that settlers had put out for wolves (38). Although some claim that she is victim of bad spirits or a curse, Agnes believes that Loretta is haunted by the experience of "watching the desperate people of her own tribe die" (39). Loretta's curse is passed on to her daughter. Old Man, an elder from Adam's Rib to whom Bush goes for advice, identifies Hannah as both "*the house*" and "*the meeting place*" (101). Bush at first does not understand, but she later tells Angel, "*I saw it in time, her life going*

*backward to where time and history and genocide gather and move like a cloud above the spilled oceans of blood. That little girl's body was the place where all this met*" (101). Her description implies that Hannah has been formed and shaped by the histories of genocide, colonialism, patriarchy, and ecological destruction that have simultaneously shaped the Americas. Hannah's scarred body represents the specific traces that colonial and neoliberal policies have had on Indigenous women, who frequently bear the brunt of brutal policies of displacement.

However, Bush and Angel are unwilling to consider the possibility that Hannah simply has no empathy, no ability to relate to others. Their need to make sense of maternal abandonment by attributing it to a history of colonialism and abuse seems to elide Hannah's agency as a mother and a subject. Descriptions of her as a meeting place, as an empty vessel for the forces of history, deny her the capacity to make choices and decisions. Nevertheless, Hannah exemplifies the "solely for self" attitude of the windigo, abandoning her children in her desire to satisfy her appetites.

Angel's narrative also suggests that unregulated environmental development is a form of windigo-sickness. The construction of the BEEVCO dam will have many negative ramifications for the local environment and the sovereignty of the Beautiful People in particular. Furthermore, as Anthony Vital reminds us, "local environments exist within both global capital and planetary material and energy flows, each with its own temporality, and that these local environments have different significance for different constituencies, historically constituted" (90). International demands for the energy generated by the proposed

dam have converged to alter the landscape in ways that have unpredictable and geographically dispersed effects. Indeed, at the end of the novel, the people of Adam's Rib discover that the dam has altered the flows of water far beyond Two-Town, resulting in the flooding of several houses, as well as Bush's island.

Exploring the ways that neoliberal corporate and government policies displace and dispossess Indigenous peoples, Angel contextualizes her critique with an awareness of the impending and intensifying effects of globalization on remote Indigenous communities. Describing the introduction of electricity into Two-Town, Angel says, "Little did anyone know that this light would connect them with the world, and in what ways" (267). The arrival of electricity heralds the increased presence of the global, and brings a new way of looking at places, homes, and selves, as well as new modes of relating to others. This leads Angel to contemplate how globalization and increased interdependence have allowed the spreading of injustice and greed:

I listened to the radio and was forced to consider also the speed of certain kinds of darkness, because it was darkness that traveled toward us. It was a darkness of words and ideas, wants and desires. This darkness came in the guise of laws made up by lawless men and people who were, as they explained, and believed, only doing their jobs. Part of the fast-moving darkness was the desire of those who wanted to conquer the land, the water, the rivers that kept running away from them. It was their desire to guide the waters, narrow them down into the thin black electrical wires that traversed

the world. They wanted to control water, the rise and fall of it, the direction of its ancient life. They wanted its power. (268)

Angel's initial reaction is to equate electricity and the radio with the destruction brought by the dam. She fears that by using electricity, her people will become complicit in their own deterritorialization, predicting, "We would believe we needed it. We would turn buttons on and off, flip switches" (268). The fact that she considers words and ideas to be part of this darkness reveals the extent to which she is predisposed to reject external worldviews or perspectives. It indicates that she is not open to encounters with the other. Her association of the radio with colonization implies that she has a romanticized understanding of Indigenous cultures, preferring that the people of Two-Town remain unchanged and uncontaminated by new technologies and experiences. This belief is quite different from that espoused by characters in Silko's *Almanac*, where Zeta, for example, does not hesitate to use Awa Gee's technological expertise in the interests of Indigenous revolution.

Contrary to Angel's initial expectations, one of the first effects of the radio is to draw people together in Tulik's house to listen to the program "Indian Time" (269). The radio also allows her to tell her story to a larger audience, and makes possible the dissemination of marginalized narratives. Angel's relation to the new conditions made possible by electricity is thus a complicated one. On the one hand, it draws people together and allows her to advocate to a wider audience at a scale far beyond what she had been able to before. On the other hand, she fears that her use of hydropower is a sign of complicity in the construction of the very

dams destroying her home and her people. Although Angel's initial rejection of electricity is an example of Hogan's use of the "figure of the Ecological Indian" (Grewe-Volpp 270), it seems to me that Angel's worries about complicity, as well as the fractured and divided opinions of the Indigenous activists resisting the dams, reveal a nuanced vision of Indigenous environmental activism that makes explicit connections to Indigenous sovereignty and social justice at the same time that it advocates for ecological sustainability.

In *Solar Storms*, the presence of the soldiers at the barricades reinforces the linkages between neoliberalism and the repressive state apparatuses. Neoliberal pundits often recognize that state violence is needed to implement the economic policies they champion. In a statement that Roy describes in her 2004 collection *The Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* as "the most succinct, accurate description of the project of corporate globalization that I have read" (34–35), Thomas Friedman acknowledges that "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist" (qtd. in Roy, *Ordinary* 34). The "fist" that Friedman refers to is not at all hidden from those Others that must be disciplined in order for neoliberal economic policies to be enacted. As she describes the soldiers and police who work to enforce the will of BEEVCO and the government, Angel comments, "I am trying to say they were not bad people. They were common as sons and brothers and that made it all the more frightening" (328). Angel sees the men representing the military state apparatus as common, normal people. They are representatives of the system within which their agency and autonomy are circumscribed and delimited. Angel's characterization reveals the banality of

neoliberalism, the way that it manifests and becomes assimilated within the worldviews of ordinary people. During the blockade, Angel describes how the white workers from towns nearby would come to the blockade in order to chant “Bullshit. Bullshit” at the Indigenous protesters. As Angel puts it, “This was their song. It was a song against life, against their own futures, but they did not yet know this. They wanted their jobs. They believed they were limited and could live in only one way and they wanted us to give up our way of life for theirs” (315). These workers represent the quotidian nature of colonialism, characterized by an obscured vision of their own futures, interdependencies, and relations to the environment, land, and water that their work would destroy. The workers for the dams are quick to dismiss their own complicity in the networks of capital that mobilize their labour to dispossess Indigenous peoples. The contractor at the meeting tells Tulik, “We were hired to do this” (279), a claim that Angel interprets as a gesture of apology. However, his words reveal his unwillingness to acknowledge the scale of the misery the dam and his participation in the building of it have caused. His attitude is symptomatic of a refusal to understand the various relations within which he and the other workers are bound.

The overt military presence at the barricade provides a visible and immediate complement to the effects of “slow violence,” a term Rob Nixon uses to designate “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Hogan’s descriptions of the landscape of Two-Town and the depression and self-destructive behaviours of

many of its inhabitants bear witness to the impacts of the slow violence wrought by colonialism, dams, and military practice facilities. As Nixon explains, in cases of dispossession in the interest of “progress,” “the direct violence of physical eviction becomes coupled to an indirect bureaucratic and media violence that creates and sustains the conditions for administered invisibility” (151). As they are physically and violently removed from the paths of bulldozers, the people of Two-Town are erased from official and media accounts. Their absence from official narratives serves to legitimate their subsequent removal. It is in defiance of the slow violence of neoliberalism that Hogan’s novel asserts a vision of Indigenous sovereignty, ecology, and being-in-relation that resists invisibilization and disappearance.

### **Angel’s Ecology of Entanglement**

In the face of this neoliberal assault on Indigenous sovereignty, culture, and land, *Solar Storms* presents an articulation of Indigenous sovereignty and being-in-relation that challenges the ideologies at the root of the dam construction project. Angel’s developing ecological awareness opposes the neoliberal commodification and exploitation of local ecosystems. In addition, the novel narrates Indigenous practices of community that dispute neoliberal emphases on individualized responsibility, profit, and capitalist consumption. Instead, these practices of community offer Indigenous alternatives through a valorization of kinship relations, and a focus on the restoration of ecological and social balance to human-environmental relations.

Valorizing modes of being-in-relation that emphasize the interdependence of human and non-human beings and their environment, Hogan's novel draws explicit connections between Indigenous sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and social justice. *Solar Storms* can easily be read as an example of environmental writing, a genre that, according to Ann Fisher-Wirth, "specifically foregrounds environmental issues; regardless of whether it has an activist agenda, it overtly expresses an ecological vision of life" (54). Fisher-Wirth continues, asserting that environmental literature presumes "a view of life that perceives the human and nonhuman worlds to be interdependent and interpenetrant, constantly in the process of mutual transformation" (55). Similarly, in *Solar Storms*, Angel comes to see land and water not as bounded or fixed entities, but as fluid, interdependent, and mutable processes transforming, and being transformed by, the lives of animals and peoples. Writing late in the twentieth century, Hogan is informed by a context of growing awareness of intensifying global ecological precarity. In *The Three Ecologies*, an influential ecocritical text, Félix Guattari makes the claim that "The Earth is undergoing a period of intense technological transformations. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet's surface" (27). Addressing this incipient ecological catastrophe, he argues, "The only true response to the ecological crisis is on a global scale, provided that it brings about an authentic political, social and cultural revolution, reshaping the objectives of the production of both material and immaterial assets" (28). Guattari is careful to state that both global and local mobilizations are necessary to combat

the ecological damage wrought by a globalized neoliberal capitalism. Although Hogan's novel addresses itself to a particular local context (the construction of dams on northern North American Indigenous lands), it articulates an understanding of this struggle in the context of similar struggles elsewhere in North America and across the globe.

Many critics have drawn attention to the ways that the ecocritical strands of Hogan's works are deeply informed by an awareness of how environmental relations are gendered in hegemonic Euroamerican discourses. Dreese, for example, argues that several of Hogan's texts challenge Western constructions of the natural world with "an ecofeminist activism that brings together women and water imagery to expose male exploitation of women and nature on an aquatic terrain" (7). Grewe-Volpp concurs, asserting that within Hogan's writings, Indigenous characters often "convey a deep sense of tribal, feminist, and environmental values as well as a spirituality conspicuously absent from her white protagonists" (271). As she spends time with her grandmothers, Angel observes how corporate exploitation of the natural world has particularly violent consequences for Indigenous women.

In *Solar Storms*, the effects of neoliberal capital on the ecology and the people of Two-Town are evident in the appearance of the local landscape. Angel describes how the place where her mother lives "looked from afar like a cigarette burn on the face of the world" (247). Her observations link the appearance of Two-Town with the burns and scars on Hannah's body. According to Castor, "At a global level, this place as seen from a distance seems to represent the sum of

many lives already sacrificed for capitalist profit” (165). Castor draws attention to the way that the global scale of the destruction of the land is marked on Hannah’s body, and on the bodies of those who continue to inhabit the scarred land.

BEEVCO’s drive to exploit the land is representative of a neoliberal-driven policy approach that considers Indigenous peoples, especially women, to be surplus and expendable. However, the novel’s invitation to read Hannah’s body as a metaphor for the scarred landscape also enacts a kind of figurative violence, depriving her of agency within the text and reducing her to the status of an outcast and victim.

In contrast, Angel’s rediscovery of her family and people allows her to create and sustain relations to others and the environment that challenge neoliberal ideologies. When she first arrives at Adam’s Rib and spends time with Bush, Angel says, “I had an entangled memory, with good parts of it missing. I was returning to the watery places in order to unravel my mind and set straight what I had lost, which seemed like everything to me” (72). In this passage, Angel uses the word “entangled” to indicate a loss, to illustrate her fragmented self-identity resulting from her time in the custodial institutions of a colonial state. However, later in the novel, she uses the term “entanglement” to articulate a conception of being-in-relation to place and others that challenges Euroamerican and neoliberal conceptions of being and subjectivity. On her journey north, Angel describes how her relations to plant-life have become manifest through her dreams:

Maybe the roots of dreaming are in the soil of dailiness, or in the heart, or in another place without words, but when they come

together and grow, they are like the seeds of hydrogen and the seeds of oxygen that together create ocean, lake, and ice. In this way, the plants and I joined each other. They entangled me in their stems and vines and it was a beautiful entanglement. (171)

Angel's experience privileges the immediacy of bodily relations with place, with ecology, and with human and non-human others. Similarly, describing in her 2008 book *When Species Meet* how diverse species communicate through touch, gesture, and bodily presence, feminist scholar Donna Haraway declares, "The flow of entangled meaningful bodies in time—whether jerky and nervous or flaming and flowing, whether both partners move in harmony or painfully out of synch or something else altogether—is communication about relationship, the relationship itself, and the means of reshaping relationship and so its enactors" (26). Haraway's account of entanglement is a direct challenge to hierarchical assumptions about human constructions of and encounters with the environment, resisting ideas of human exceptionalism in favour of a vision of being-in-relation that values multiple lifeways and non-human species. As Haraway contends, "giving up human exceptionalism has consequences that require one to know more at the end of the day than at the beginning and to cast oneself with some ways of life and not others in the never settled biopolitics of entangled species" (295). For many of Hogan's characters, the consequences of recognizing the absurdity of human exceptionalism require an acknowledgement of the limited, partial, and situated nature of human knowledges, and a responsibility to challenge and resist assaults upon ecological viability.

The notion of entanglement that Angel employs subverts neoliberal assumptions that hierarchical distinctions can be made between human beings and their environment. As she spends time with Bush on Fur Island, Angel begins to consider how the relations of water, land, and person are not merely figurative, but material and bodily. During a rainstorm, Angel observes, “There was no separation between us. I knew in a moment what water was. It was what had been snow. It had passed through old forests, now gone. It was the sweetness of milk and corn and it had journeyed through human lives. It was blood spilled on the ground. Some of it was the blood of my ancestors” (78). She conceives of her relation to water as a fully embodied one, and considers herself “part of the same equation as birds and rain” (79). Instead of subsuming her relations to water, land, and animals to a calculus of utility and market efficiency, Angel comes to envision herself as entangled within a wider set of relations, evoking a mode of being and becoming that Hogan describes as a “fluid interchange with all other lives” (qtd. in Grewe-Volpp 280). However, her ecological entanglement is not always as beautiful and harmonious as she imagines. Angel’s new understanding of plants comes too late to save Agnes, and although she presumes that she understands water, her grandmother Dora Rouge’s misunderstanding of the bargain that she makes with the rapids casts some doubt on this assumption. Agnes’s death demonstrates that Angel’s aspirational vision of oneness is not necessarily matched by lived experience.

## Expressions of Sovereignty

In addition to its articulation of Indigenous ecological standpoints in opposition to neoliberal logics of economic exploitation, *Solar Storms* delineates Indigenous practices of community that celebrate kinship networks and challenge ideologies of individual consumption and greed. The novel also offers a vision of transnational activism that reflects the experiences of Indigenous struggles over sovereignty and water and human rights. It does not matter whether the word is spread by messengers in canoes or disseminated over the radio airwaves. The Indigenous activists at Two-Town make use of all available technologies of communication in order to challenge the theft and destruction of their land.

Hogan's decision to include a fictionalized tribe (named the Fat Eaters by outsiders, but known to themselves as the Beautiful People) in *Solar Storms* raises questions about the implications of fictionalized identities for Indigenous sovereignty. Hogan's novel is by no means the only text to fictionalize tribal identities; Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* similarly focuses on characters from the fictionalized Sand Lizard people. One of the criticisms raised about novels depicting fictional Indigenous nations is that such practices lead to what Craig Womack identifies as "Indian genericism, writing that obscures concrete tribal and land relationships" (*Red* 235). Making a related point about the work of Michael Dorris, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn declares, "Because of the tribelessness of the Dorris voice, his work was often said to be eloquent but unconvincing" (*Anti-Indianism* 77). Both Womack and Cook-Lynn worry that texts that homogenize Indigenous identities, and abstract them from the historical

contexts of existing tribal nations, elide the specific political, cultural, ecological, cultural and juridical relationships that differentiate the diverse lived experiences of Indigenous peoples. Drawing upon the work of Womack and Cook-Lynn, Ernest Stromberg asks whether these works, and works by Indigenous writers that focus on communities not their own, constitute acts of “literary ‘trespass’” (100), and whether or not they “violate the respective subject people’s literary sovereignty” (100).

In an interview conducted while she was working on *Solar Storms*, Hogan, in anticipation of these criticisms, asserts, “You can’t just assume that you know another community. Right now I’m trying to work on a book that’s set in the North, but it has to be from a Chickasaw point of view because I would never pretend to presume to understand tribes up in the North, or to speak for a person of another tribe” (“Interview” 122). To avoid the dangers of usurping the voices of others, Hogan claims, “one of the things that I have been doing is fictionalizing the tribes that I’m writing about so nobody feels they’re being invaded once again” (qtd. in Cook, “Hogan’s” 43). She sees the act of fictionalizing identities as a way of being able to address historical and political circumstances without appropriating the voices of others. According to Hogan, she can create “a totally fictional community, and yet the story is really about the truth” (“Interview” 122). In other words, the truths of Indigenous resistance and survival in the face of corporate aggression are best served by not appropriating the stories of others. Whether or not Hogan is guilty of contributing to “Indian genericism” or “tribelessness,” it seems to me that *Solar Storms* is a novel that foregrounds the

lived political conditions of resistance of Indigenous peoples against neoliberal globalization.

Nevertheless, the novel's political urgency has troubled some critics. In his review of *Solar Storms*, American literature scholar Robert Berner characterizes the first part of the novel as "an extraordinary, almost mythical narrative, rich in texture, shaped by the turning of the seasons from the fall of one year through the summer of the next, and full of the life of a great variety of characters" (1007). He continues, "the story's geographic vagueness, appropriate to the mythic texture of the first sixteen chapters, is exasperating in the last five because the protest novel into which *Solar Storms* degenerates remains meaninglessly suspended in its vividly delineated mythic country" (1007). Berner consistently and approvingly refers to the narrative as "mythic" in its subject matter, privileging a reading of the novel that elides the historical and political contexts of dam construction and land expropriation. He considers the novel's apparent lack of a determinate geography suitable for mythic subject matter, but inappropriate for a protest novel.

However, it is possible to read the novel as privileging an Indigenous geography by using Indigenous place names instead of European ones. As they travel, Dora-Rouge recognizes places by name: "God Island," "Willow Creek," "the Se Nay River," "North House," "Bone Island," "the Place of Sleepers," "the Islands of Flowers," and "Ahani" (169, 173, 184, 196, 204, 205). These names are political acts, staking a claim to the primacy of the land's Indigenous geographies. Although the novel never reveals whether the women journey from Minnesota to

Manitoba or Ontario, to the territories of Treaty 3 or Treaty 9, or to northern Québec, Dora-Rouge asserts that the geography is not vague to her, and claims to speak to the water and know the stories of places. In Thomas King's oft-anthologized story "Borders," a Blackfoot mother refuses to name her relation to place and land in colonial terms, maintaining that she lives on the "Blackfoot side" of the border instead of saying the Canadian side (*One* 138). Given the fact that people on the U.S. side of the border refer to themselves as Blackfeet, the mother's choice of name still implicitly recognises the border. Nevertheless, she explicitly avoids using the names of settler-colonial states. Similarly, *Solar Storms* rejects settler-colonial place-names in favour of a geography of Indigenous presence. Angel even identifies the young men who bring news of the impending dam construction project as "not American, not Canadian" (56), rejecting the legitimacy of colonially imposed settler-state identities.

Notably, Berner sees the protest elements of the novel as a "degeneration," wishing that "with the resolution in the sixteenth chapter of everything that matters [Hogan] had been wise enough to let it go at that" (1007). Berner's choice of words implies a refusal or inability to see the political valence of Hogan's narrative style. Perhaps this is a sign that *Solar Storms* runs the risk of contributing to a sense of genericism. In her article "Writing Deeper Maps: Mapmaking, Local Indigenous Knowledges, and Literary Nationalism in Native Women's Writing," Kelli Johnson contends, "Native critics and writers negotiate an important tension between nation-specific fiction and cultural translation in their interrogation of whether or not Indigenous knowledges can be recovered,

valued, preserved, or transmitted in fiction that does not emerge out of the experiences of a particular tribe” (114–15). For *Solar Storms*, this tension appears between the adoption of a discourse that could be (mis)read as homogenizing and mythic, and thus apolitical and ahistorical, and a desire to assert First Nations sovereignty by rejecting Euroamerican cartographies and identifying places through the names and stories Indigenous characters give them.

For Angel, Indigenous sovereignty must be articulated in a context of war and slow violence perpetrated by institutions committed to neoliberal policies. This is a war with severe consequences upon ecology, women, and Indigenous peoples. Setting her novel against the backdrop of the United States’ invasion of Vietnam and the growing American Indian Movement, *Solar Storms* makes explicit the connection between imperial wars waged abroad and the militarized displacement of Indigenous communities. For Angel, this connection becomes clear after hearing Miss Nett’s account of NATO’s assault on her land: “NATO jets flew overhead in the sky of Miss Nett and her people, the Nanos, who lived at the Kawafi settlement. NATO jets had scared off what was left of the game and wildlife. In that place, too, they were using the land as a bombing practice range” (295). The expropriation of Indigenous land for bombing practice that will be exported to the conflict in Vietnam ties the dispossession of the Fat Eaters to global imperial wars and struggles over land, power, and resources. That Indigenous land is seen as empty, and suitable for bombing practice, reveals the colonial logic at work. The qualification of the bombing as ‘practice’ rhetorically effaces the way that the bombing is actually the bombing of a sovereign territory,

a sovereign set of relations between peoples and lands, a destruction of worldviews. Bush decides to document the effects of the bombing runs on the land, and her photos capture the “sharp, world-eating teeth” (308) of those responsible for the destruction. Her photos tie the militarization of Empire and neoliberalism to the figure of the windigo and the desire to devour and consume in the interests of economic growth and progress.

Against this militarized assault on Indigenous sovereignty, *Solar Storms* articulates a vision of sovereignty rooted in relations between communities, land, and place complicated by the fact that the people of Two-Town and their supporters and allies have different experiences and opportunities in terms of mobility. One of the central observations in the text is that land is fluid and dynamic. For example, to protect a small peat island inhabited by spiders, Bush keeps it tied to Fur Island with a rope. Angel explains that Bush keeps it tied because “this region, known as the Triangle, had long been in dispute between Canada, the United States, and tribal nations. Bush didn’t want the island of spiders to be part of the conflict between governments who had fought territorial battles over even smaller pieces of land” (66). Bush keeps the island tied in order that it not become subject to the arbitrary jurisdiction of either the United States or Canada. Her actions reveal how ties to land are literal and material; the island is literally tied to Bush’s home to keep it from floating away. The fact that the island often breaks its bonds, floats off, and needs to be tracked down and reattached underscores the fragility of its relation to Bush. At the end of the novel, as the rising water overwhelms Fur Island, the island of spiders is towed to the

mainland, where it will not be lost. This island exemplifies the novel's valorization of fragility and impermanence. Angel notices how "In sunlight, the webs looked like a craziness, slow and silver, one which was taken apart and rewoven nightly as if to capture whatever came close" (66). Her description of the webs as a constantly re-created craziness disputes and resists any attempts to fix the island in place, to untangle its webs, or fix them in time. Rather, this island is a constant becoming. Although it is precarious, Bush's relation to the island of spiders must also be read as an assertion of Indigenous sovereignty in a colonial context. But this sovereignty cannot be equated with absolute authority, as the island is continually reshaped outside of Bush's control.

Peggy Ackerberg observes that Hogan's writing is characterized by a "concern for breaking boundaries" (7). This boundary breaking imperative manifests itself in the way *Solar Storms* challenges the legitimacy of colonial maps and the worldviews that inform them. Just as Silko asserts that those who erect boundaries between people are the Destroyers, so too Hogan works to shatter boundaries that restrict and constrain modes of being-in-relation with others. On their journey north, Bush consults a range of maps in order to track the location and plan their route, discovering that "none of the maps were the same" (122). Like the island of spiders, in a process of constant flux, the land itself is subject to change. Cartography, of course, is a practice with a long history of colonial complicity. Melani Bleck argues that "Maps mimic the lens that shapes society's view of, and belief in, spatial relationships. Maps contain artificial boundaries, divisions, measurements, and labels that seek to bind the dynamic

relationships found in nature” (29). European maps, as Johnson explains, have often been assumed to be “transparent, scientific, objective, and universal” (104). As technologies of representation, maps function as colonial tools for controlling and disciplining landscapes and peoples, rendering static, fixed, or invisible the complex, dynamic web of relations between land, water, animals, and peoples.

Confronting colonial assumptions about mapping, Angel is well aware that the maps of the lands are “only as accurate as the minds of their makers and those had been men possessed with the spoils of this land, men who believed California was an island” (122). She is cognizant of how the assumptions of those creating the maps inevitably lead to absences, erasures, insertions and inaccuracies in the maps themselves, and approves of the land’s resistance to the visions imposed by cartographers: “What I liked was that land refused to be shaped by the makers of maps. Land had its own will. The cartographers thought if they mapped it, everything would remain the same, but it didn’t, and I respected it for that. Change was the one thing not accounted for” (123). Celebrating the environment’s ability to disrupt the desires and worldviews of cartographers, Angel gives an account of land undergoing constant shifts in its relations to water and both human and nonhuman inhabitants. Her approval of the landscape’s ability to change is a notable contrast to her attitude towards the changes brought about by the introduction of electricity to the community.

The shortcomings of the colonial maps are reinforced when Bush’s maps dissolve in her hands (173). Their physical disintegration corresponds to their inability to give an accurate account of the land and its changing landscape. As

Bleck contends, the disintegration of the maps is an example of how “Hogan illustrates nature’s ability not only to deconstruct society’s spatial boundaries through its fluidity, but also to completely erase the boundaries” (29). The disintegration of the maps also alludes to the failure of colonial and neoliberal worldviews to account for the dynamic and fluid nature of ecosystems. As Johnson observes, Hogan’s depictions of Angel’s discovery of alternative ways of knowing the land and Dora-Rouge’s intimate knowledge of her surroundings can be read as examples of “an emerging literary nationalism that emphasizes Native knowledges in place of Western understandings of place” (114). The novel’s privileging of Indigenous understandings of relations to place complements its foregrounding of Indigenous practices of community in opposition to neoliberal globalization.

### **“Like One Animal”: Expressions of Community**

An essential aspect of Indigenous resistance to neoliberal globalization in *Solar Storms* is in the commitment to modes of community and being-in-relation that challenge neoliberal ideologies of individualism and market fundamentalism. However, Angel’s descriptions of Adam’s Rib, Two-Town, and the bond she creates between herself and her grandmothers are largely aspirational and romanticized. Even so, Angel is well aware of the larger, global context of struggle that manifests in the lives of the inhabitants of Adam’s Rib and Two-Town, where an increased demand for electricity and resources across borders has

stimulated the construction of dams as well as the increased presence of mining companies and oil companies in northern communities.

The women of Adam's Rib call themselves the Abandoned Ones. According to Grewe-Volpp, the town's name illustrates "the minor importance and subsequent abuse of the women in the history of white settlement" (273). The Abandoned Ones, Angel relates, hail from an assortment of First Nations: "Some had Cree ancestors, some were Anishnabe, a few came from the Fat-Eaters farther north. Bush, the woman who floated in the canoe near Fur Island on the day I returned, was a Chickasaw from Oklahoma. Others were from the white world" (28). Angel describes how the women originally accompanied French fur trappers, but when "the land was worn out, the beaver and wolf gone, mostly dead, the men moved on to what hadn't yet been destroyed, leaving their women and children behind, as if they too were used-up animals" (28). Used up and abandoned by men in search of further resources to exploit, the women of Adam's Rib live precarious lives on the outskirts of capitalist modernity. Nevertheless, they bind themselves together through narrative and shared history.

While historical colonial practices of the abandonment and abuse of women serve to contextualize the current conditions of life for the women in the community, other inhabitants of Adam's Rib experience a similar, but different form of abandonment. LaRue, the taxidermist, is a veteran of the Vietnam War. Facing an existence similar to the homeless veterans in Silko's *Almanac*, LaRue has been abandoned by the military and government institutions that sent him to war for imperial interests. Early in the novel, his efforts at taxidermy signify his

persistent commitment to the exploitation of death for profit. Later, his redemption consists in an unlearning of these categories of thought that have sustained him. He understands what the young soldiers who are sent to confront the protesters of Two-Town have been asked to do, and that after their service to the executives of BEEVCO and their government enablers, they too will be abandoned.

Sharing a condition of abandonment, the people of Adam's Rib bind themselves together through ceremonies and practices that emphasize their shared, interdependent existence. On the occasion of Bush's feast to remember Angel, Agnes is struck by the diversity of people who attend: "*There were white-haired people, black-haired people, and the mixed-bloods—they wore such colorful clothes*" (15–16). For Agnes, it is significant that elders, as well as younger people and mixed-bloods, are included at the feast. Their presence signals both their commitment to each other and their acceptance of Bush within their midst. Agnes describes to Angel how Bush "*gave each diner present some part of her world. [. . .] She gave away your handmade blanket, T-shirt, shoes, socks—gave one here, one there. Some of the people cried. Not only for her, but for all the children lost to us, taken away*" (17). This giveaway is symbolic of the tying together of community through bonds of mutual dependence and generosity. As Katherine Pettipas explains, "Giveaway ceremonies functioned to re-affirm pre-existing kinship ties and to establish new networks among households and between diverse communities" (56). In addition, the act of giving away also circumvents and subverts the capitalist logic of accumulation. In a similar gesture

in King's *Truth and Bright Water*, Munroe Swimmer gives away all of the possessions he has accumulated in the church as a continuation of his project of erasing the legacies of colonialism from the landscape (257). Bush's giveaway, like Swimmer's, functions to emphasize the shared interdependence of the community as a whole, and to strengthen their relation to Angel's absence. As Agnes relates, "*We all had it, after that. It became our own. Some of us have since wanted to give it back to her, but once we felt it we knew it was too large for a single person. After that your absence sat at every table, occupied every room, walked through the doors of every house*" (18). It is this bond of loss that links members of the community together, the shared absence at their tables, and a shared hope for Angel's return. Agnes speculates that Bush's ceremony is an invention, a tradition that she is creating, but the presence of the guests at her house is a commitment to community-in-relation, a process of being-in-common that shares in and eases Bush's grief.

The relationship Angel develops between herself and her grandmothers comes to inform her conception of community and human and ecological interdependence. She understands her relations to her family through nature-related imagery: "*Dora-Rouge, I think now, was a root and we were like a tree family, aspens or birch, connected to one another underground, the older trees feeding the young, sending off shoots, growing*" (48). This notion of a subterranean grandparent connecting all the women in the family incorporates Angel into a landscape of family, where her grandmothers are literally the roots of her existence. During her journey, Angel begins to develop a greater sense of her

being-in-common with the women she accompanies: “The four of us became like one animal. We heard inside each other in a tribal way. I understood this at once and was easy with it. With my grandmothers there was no such thing as loneliness. Before, my life had been without all its ears, eyes, without all its knowings. Now we, the four of us, all had the same eyes” (177). Angel’s language emphasizes the embodied and material way that she experiences this connection to her grandmothers. They share eyes and ears, bodily modes of perceiving and understanding the world that envelops them. Nevertheless, Hannah’s violence towards her children undermines any notion of motherhood or kinship as an inevitably loving relation. Angel’s aspiration towards “oneness” can be read as a desire to heal from the abandonment she has experienced thus far in her life.

During the trip north, she begins to articulate an understanding of self and community that incorporates a sense of interdependence and entanglement with others and the land. Seeking to explain her new awareness of the relations between place and self, Angel observes,

Everything merged and united. There were no sharp distinctions left between darkness and light. Water and air became the same thing, as did water and land in the marshy broth of creation. Inside the clear water we passed over, rocks looked only a few inches away. Birds swam across lakes. It was all one thing. The canoes were our bodies, our skin. (177)

Angel’s reference to darkness and light here contrasts with her thoughts on the arrival of electricity to Two-Town. She sees no clear boundaries between the two

in the natural world, whereas she is apprehensive of what she considers to be the darkness of words and ideas brought by the radio. Her sense of oneness does not extend to technological changes.

Throughout the novel, Angel's mobility colours her perceptions of community and Indigenous struggles for sovereignty. Early in the text, as she reflects on her life in foster care, Angel acknowledges that "Fear was what made me run, from homes, from people. Moving made me feel as if I left that fear behind, shed it like a skin, but always, slowly, a piece at a time, it would find me again; and then I would remember things that had never quite shaped themselves whole" (26-27). As she travels with her grandmothers, though, she begins to see her mobility in a positive light, understanding herself as moving through a "storied land, land where deities walked, where people traveled, desiring to be one with infinite space" (177). It is as a travelling subject that Angel experiences a sense of belonging and community and this experience shapes how she sees these modes of being-in-common. Her mobility necessarily links her to a particular point of view and means that she has the opportunity to escape and remove herself from any situation she might find dangerous or fraught. In that sense, her position is quite privileged in that she is able to carry out her acts of resistance secure in the knowledge that she can withdraw from the situation and from any potential repercussions of her actions.

The understanding of community she develops with her grandmothers influences Angel's activism against the BEEVCO dam, and the language of entanglement and shared bodies and knowings informs and sustains her

resistance. She believes that the preservation of these relations is contingent upon the defeat of the dam project. Angel and Dora-Rouge believe that “the protest against the dams and river diversions was their only hope. Those who protested were the ones who could still believe they might survive as a people” (226).

Angel comes to realize that resistance is one way of demonstrating presence and asserting agency. However, her ability to leave Two-Town is an option which is not available to most of its residents. Not everyone is able to travel back and forth and escape from the military incursion into their land. In addition to the activists who arrive via the swamp roots, the only other people who are able to come and go are the workers and the soldiers. The implication here is that Angel’s experience of resistance against the dam construction is not necessarily shared by other inhabitants of Two-Town.

During the early days of the roadblock, Angel uses the language of entanglement to inform her resistance to BEEVCO:

In those days, we were still a tribe. Each of us had one part of the work of living. Each of us had one set of the many eyes, the many breaths, the many comings and goings of the people. Everyone had a gift, each person a specialty of one kind or another, whether it was hunting, or decocting the plants, or reading the ground for signs of hares. All of us together formed something like a single organism. (262)

In this passage, Angel again emphasizes the bodily and material connections that inform her experience of community. To her, the people are constituted by the

sharing of many eyes, many breaths, and many comings and goings. When Angel compares the community to a single organism, she appeals to an understanding of an organism as a complex system of interdependent relations. Her language is an attempt to unify without totalizing, to name a process of being a community-in-relation without diminishing the infinite variety of these relations. Moreover, Angel also describes the being-in-relation of the community as the “work of living,” emphasizing it as a shared endeavour. Smith and Fiore contend that a shared desire to resist BEEVCO’s assault on Indigenous sovereignty and the environment leads Angel and the people of Two-Town to develop “a collective voice to defend the natural world and their way of life there” (77). Nevertheless, Angel’s desire for a collective voice should not be taken to mean that the novel subscribes to a monolithic and homogenizing conception of Indigenous community and resistance.

Instead, Angel’s own acts of resistance highlight some of the tensions inherent in her own position as a temporary inhabitant of Two-Town. Caught up in the euphoria of finding a place to belong, she describes how “At times I felt so joyful that I forgot our purpose” (314). Her pleasure at participating in a shared project of resistance is juxtaposed with a capacity to forget, predicated upon the fact that ultimately, her home is not at risk of being destroyed in the same way as the homes of the residents of Two-Town. Angel aspires towards visions of unity and oneness when she conceptualizes community and resistance, but the fact that she eventually leaves Two-Town undermines her own rhetoric. She remarks, “Later I would feel guilty for leaving, but that day as we left, I was relieved. We,

at least, had somewhere to go. As outsiders, we were the ones fortune changed clothes for, the ones for whom she wore more than one dress” (330). Angel’s narrative oscillates between a romanticized vision of herself as a resistance fighter who pretends to be Wolverine by sabotaging the soldiers’ supplies, and a belated understanding of herself as an outsider relieved to be able to go somewhere else. Although the text emphasizes that the dams will have an effect on the water levels in Adam’s Rib, Angel is still shaped by different histories than those of the Beautiful People and is not bound to Two-Town in the same way that Tulik and others are.

The privileged place that Angel accords to her sense of ecological entanglement in Hogan’s novel leads some readers to conclude that Hogan is reducing her characters to well-recognized stereotypes. Grewe-Volpp, for example, argues that Hogan’s depiction of the Beautiful People makes use of all the tropes of the figure of the Ecological Indian:<sup>5</sup> “they are depicted as noble ecologists who feel deep sympathy with all living forms and who lead

<sup>5</sup> Melissa Nelson (Chippewa) offers a useful explanation: “The Ecological Indian is one part of a binary system promulgated around the world by anthropologists, historians, writers, New Age followers, and sometimes by Indians themselves. According to this stereotyped belief, Native Americans, and often all ‘primitive’ indigenous peoples, have an innate, race-based mystical connection to nature that makes them especially attuned to when nature is in or out of balance with the rest of the world” (50). The corollary of this stereotype is what Nelson calls “the ecologically harmful savage”—a trope often deployed by non-Indigenous writers to attack Indigenous hunting or fishing rights, traditional practices, and cultural and political sovereignty (50).

responsible, caring lives, aware of their interconnection with a life system understood as a web, meaning that all elements of the system, including humans, are intricately interwoven and dependent upon each other” (275). As this description accurately conveys the attitudes of Angel, Bush, Dora-Rouge and many of the other characters, Grewe-Volpp suggests that Hogan resorts to essentialist and stereotypical discourses in order to confront prevailing Euroamerican narratives of progress and practices of erasure. Paradoxically, according to Grewe-Volpp, “Hogan’s recourse to stereotypical images does not consolidate the marginal social position of Native Americans. On the contrary, it leads to self-definition and autonomy” (281). Her argument is that Hogan’s deployment of the trope of the Ecological Indian is an exemplary case of strategic essentialism, whereby Indigenous peoples make use of colonial discourses in order to assert their sovereign presence.

Commenting on both the necessity and difficulty of resisting oppression and colonialism, Hogan writes, “It is difficult for us to gather our human forces together because our circumstances force us into divisions and anger and self-destruction” (“Two” 241). In *Solar Storms*, the divisions brought about by the presence of the dam and the apparent willingness of colonial governments to resort to military intervention against Indigenous peoples’ assertion of sovereignty are highlighted in the actions of those who grow either fearful of government violence, or hopeful for potential ways of profiting off of the dam. The lack of unity among the Beautiful People reflects the difficulties of resisting corporate development projects, and reminds readers that resistance is always a complex

and dynamic process. Castor claims that Hogan's depictions of the community's divisions "mirror the dynamics of indigenous politics in the world external to the text" (171). By problematizing Angel's acts of resistance and avoiding an essentialized depiction of characters' responses to the dam, Hogan's novel narrates the tension between respecting the expression of differences among the people of Two-Town and becoming complicit in surrendering Indigenous sovereignty. Lorde reminds us that although liberation cannot be achieved without a strong community: "community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist" (112). Hogan's novel does not maintain any illusion that differences do not exist among the Beautiful People. However, Tulik, Bush, and Angel are quite willing to act in the face of these divisions.

### **Anchoring the Future**

It is only after years of court battles that BEEVCO's dam is stopped. The people of Two-Town are ultimately successful in their struggle to have the project halted, but the struggle has taken its toll. Tulik does not live to see his court appearances pay off and the dams already in place cause the water to rise in Adam's Rib, forcing many from their homes and flooding Bush's house on Fur Island. Despite these setbacks, neither Angel nor the others who oppose the dam believe that their ongoing struggles are, as Fisher-Wirth puts it, "doomed" (63). Unlike Fisher-Wirth, Bell maintains that Hogan consistently refuses "to equate removal from the land with the loss of land and community" (5). This refusal,

argues Bell, allows for “the living and constant possible recreation of home and community” (5). At the end of *Solar Storms*, as the waters rise in Adam’s Rib, the people help each other move to higher ground, reinforcing communal bonds through a shared loss. Angel acknowledges that the victory over BEEVCO has not stopped other corporate attempts to exploit Indigenous lands, but declares, “we’d thrown an anchor into the future and followed the rope to the end of it, to where we would dream new dreams, new medicines, and one day, once again, remember the sacredness of every living thing” (344). The image of anchoring collective struggle to the future links both old and new, memory and hope. Privileging traditional ways of knowing, dreaming, and being, Angel firmly asserts her community’s presence and sovereignty into the future.

Angel’s (and Hogan’s) anchoring of the future rejects discourses that relegate Indigenous peoples to a vanished past. Similarly, Cook-Lynn proposes that Indigenous scholarship and art must follow two paths: “a corrective approach that goes beyond criticism to reconstruction, and the expression of an inevitable tribal consciousness that acts to assure a tribal-nation people of its future” (77). Hogan may fictionalize the name of the Indigenous nation opposing neoliberal exploitation, but *Solar Storms* foregrounds struggles for sovereignty in the face of neoliberal globalization. Raising a critique of state and corporate expropriation of land, the use of Indigenous lands for military exercises in service of global imperial wars, and the removal of peoples in service of market fundamentalism, Hogan’s novel proposes a conception of entangled being-in-relation in response. Invoking events that predate the hegemonic acceptance of neoliberal doctrine

among political and business elites, Hogan's text reveals and explores the links between an increasing interconnectedness of global markets and technologies, an intensifying demand for resources and energy, and the resulting impacts upon Indigenous communities. *Solar Storms* resists the invisibilization of Indigenous peoples in service of economic deregulation, colonial ideologies of development, and profit, and narrates a vision of constructing and sustaining communities of resistance among those who have been abandoned.

## Chapter 4: Narrating Resistance to Neoliberal Governmentality in

### *Indian Killer*

Responding to an interview question about the experience of writing *Indian Killer*, Sherman Alexie explains that this is the novel that “was hardest to write, that gave me the most nightmares, that still, to this day, troubles me the most because I can’t even get a grasp on it. It’s the only one I re-read. I think a book that disturbs me that much is the one I probably care the most about” (Campbell par. 15). Part of the reason for Alexie’s discomfort is the difficult and violent subject matter, including several vicious attacks and killings perpetrated by both Indigenous and white characters. In addition, the novel troubles critics and readers with its ambiguous ending, purposely leaving unknown the identity of the person the media have dubbed the Indian Killer, and depicting in its final pages a scene that many critics have read as advocating further violence. Critical reception of the novel has been varied, but much attention has been devoted to debating the politics of the representations of violence in the text. Arnold Krupat, for example, argues that *Indian Killer* establishes a violent binary opposition between Indigenous and white characters. To differentiate between what he reads as *Indian Killer*’s apparent valorization of violence and the justification of violence in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Krupat claims, “Fanon wrote in the midst of revolutionary, nationalist mass agitation in Algeria in the 1960s and of a world in violent process of decolonization” (120). His implication is that Alexie’s novel has no context of decolonization or resistance comparable to

the periods within which Fanon was writing that could justify its apparent celebration of violence. However, what I wish to demonstrate in this chapter is that *Indian Killer*'s depiction of violence is part of a sustained critique of the consequences of urban policies informed by discourses of neoliberal globalization and neocolonialism.

Alexie's work, which encompasses several novels, two screenplays, and many collections of short stories and poetry, explores a variety of themes within Indigenous communities in the United States, including poverty, alcoholism, resistance, violence, urban race relations, sexuality and gender politics, queerness, basketball, music, and humour. His 1993 collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, touches on struggles for personal and community survivance in the face of alcoholism and poverty. Stories in his 2009 work, *War Dances*, problematize Indigenous identities in the context of violence against urban black communities, and engage with Republican Party politics and homophobia.

Alexie's second novel, *Indian Killer*, published in 1998, follows several storylines, with that of the central Indigenous protagonist John Smith being the most prominent. As an infant, John is adopted by a white couple, Olivia and Daniel Smith, who are unable to conceive children of their own. As a young child, John develops a bond with a Spokane Jesuit priest named Father Duncan, who eventually disappears into the desert but whom John continues to see in his dreams. Though his parents try to expose John to a variety of Indigenous cultures, his ignorance of his origins engenders feelings of inadequacy. As an adult, these feelings are compounded by apparent symptoms of mental illness, as well as a

desire to kill a white man. John finds employment as a construction worker in Seattle, where he meets Marie Polatkin, a Spokane university student who delivers food to the homeless. Marie opposes the appropriation of Indigenous identities and representations by her white professor, Clarence Mather, and Jack Wilson, an author of mystery novels who claims to be Indigenous. Meanwhile, a series of murders of white men committed by an unknown assailant, referred to by the police and media as the Indian Killer, allows Truck Schultz, a right-wing radio host, to exploit racial tensions and incite violent acts of reprisal against Indigenous and other marginalized peoples in Seattle. At the end of the novel, John kidnaps Wilson, but instead of killing him, commits suicide.

*Indian Killer* addresses the political and historical context of the 1990s, which saw the increasing imposition of neoliberal governmentality upon urban cityscapes in North America, resulting in intensified privatization of public services, escalating gentrification, and a growing income gap between rich and poor. It is not incidental that Seattle was the site in 1999 of what is largely considered to be the first major alter-globalization protest—later termed the Battle for Seattle. According to a representative account, it was in Seattle that “various related antiglobalization movements felt themselves becoming a single movement” and those events “represent a turning point at which the forces arrayed against corporate globalization took on a new level of self-awareness and confidence” (Reed 241). Where Silko’s novel explores modes of Indigenous being-in-relation in the context of neoliberal globalization, *Indian Killer* narrates how urban Indigenous communities negotiate fluid, contradictory, and

interdependent discourses of imagination, performativity, intellectual sovereignty, nationalism, and intertribalism, while navigating conditions of poverty and structural, figurative, and physical violence.

Much of the tension and violence in *Indian Killer* is conditioned by the imposition of neoliberal policies of urbanization upon Seattle at large, and Indigenous and other marginalized communities specifically. To a large extent, neoliberalism is at the root of what Krupat has referred to as the “rage” expressed by a series of characters in the novel, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Of course, the violence represented in Alexie’s text has many roots, including ongoing colonial dispossession, racial and gender discrimination, and poverty and economic inequality. Throughout the novel, the unnamed narrator offers rationalizations for characters’ thoughts and deeds, and characters frequently have the chance to justify their actions to others. There is graphic violence, to be sure, and it is perpetrated by characters from a wide range of socio-economic classes and ethnic backgrounds. Indeed, the ambiguity at the end of the novel augments the sense that this violence is a general one, a malaise that inflects and inhabits the very conditions of social being in the urban setting. Alexie’s text, like Silko’s, investigates modes of Indigenous being with others in relation to neoliberal globalization, and how they are inflected by discourses and projects of nationalism, inter-tribalism, and alliance building. However, for many characters in *Indian Killer*, the practices of community as envisioned in *Almanac* and *Solar Storms* remain out of reach.

## Urban Neoliberalism

In Indigenous literary texts, the city has often been represented as a space of danger. In N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Abel's time in Los Angeles is marked by a downward spiral into inebriation and violence (141–62). The city in Momaday's novel functions as a space of alienation that Abel must leave in order to become whole. In *Monkey Beach* by Eden Robinson (Haisla/Heiltsuk), published in 2000, the city manifests both danger and death for Lisamarie. Turning to drugs and alcohol to anaesthetize her grief and exorcise painful memories, she is saved only when her recently deceased friend Tab appears to her and encourages her to leave (296–302). In Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the brothers Champion/Jeremiah and Ooneemeetoo/Gabriel attend school in Winnipeg after their years in residential school, evoking the relationship between the city and state-implemented colonial policies of assimilation and removal. The Winnipeg of Highway's novel is a place of conspicuous consumption and the brutal rapes and murders of Indigenous women (106–32). However, the city also offers fragile promises to both boys, as both Jeremiah and Gabriel are able to learn, excel at, and perform their music and dance. In spite of the fact that this is an admittedly cursory examination, these representative texts reveal that urban landscapes in Indigenous literature are deeply implicated in histories of colonial violence and removal, but the experiences of urban Indigenous peoples are not homogeneous and monolithic.

According to Coll Thrush, representations of Indigenous presence in Seattle and in narratives about the city are reduced to three primary figures:

“totem poles,” “Seeathl,” and “the homeless street Indian” (8). Moreover, he argues that depictions of Indigenous homelessness are “less often an indictment of the injustices of the urban political economy” than they are stories about “racial inevitability” (Thrush 8). Alexie’s *Indian Killer*, in Thrush’s estimation, provides little alternative to this trinity of images, depicting cities as “somehow places where Native people cannot belong except as half-fulfilled people or as ciphers for nature. Being a metaphor in Seattle, it would seem, is an Indian fact” (9). Thrush’s concerns are valid, but descriptions of urban Indigenous life in Alexie’s novel do take into account how neoliberalism limits economic opportunities and constitutes a challenge for constructing spaces of community.

In *Indian Killer*, the urban landscape shapes and conditions the lives of the Indigenous characters who live there, and they in turn shape and challenge the social and physical geographies of the city. Seattle’s cityscape is the site of contested relations of colonialism and neoliberalism, enacted through the passage of bylaws, ordinances, and curfews designed to police and discipline urban space by erasing the presence of surplus and disposable populations from streets and public parks in the interests of economic efficiency. Indigenous characters must also negotiate the dynamic and shifting urban demographics of Seattle’s multicultural environment, where growing populations of African, South American, Middle Eastern, Asian, and European descent often find themselves in competition for spaces and resources to create and sustain their own community organizations and identities. The narrator depicts Seattle as a place of

distinct and divided neighborhoods, and though it had a reputation for cultural diversity, there was actually a very small minority population, consisting primarily of Asian- and African-Americans. And the minority populations mostly lived, by choice and by economic circumstance, in the Central, International, and University Districts. The middle-class whites generally lived in the twin hills of Queen Anne and Magnolia, overlooking the rest of the city, while the rich white people mostly lived in Bellevue or on Mercer Island, a financial and geographical enclave that sat in the waters of Lake Washington, halfway between Bellevue and Seattle. (112)

The geographical and ethnic enclaves described by the narrator are symptomatic of what Zygmunt Bauman characterizes as a nostalgia for homogeneity that informs the planning of urban social space (183). The divided neighbourhoods indicate a systemic desire for separation, categorization, and localized uniformity. Content to encounter the Other when working, shopping, or doing business, Seattle's citizens seem less inclined to welcome difference into their residential zones. The apparent multiculturalism that John encounters as he walks along the streets is complicated by the arrangement of urban residential spaces along lines of class and ethnicity.

The novel also emphasizes how Seattle's natural environment has been enlisted by city planners to reinforce social divisions: "Where water had once been a natural boundary, it now existed as an economic barrier. And in those

places where natural boundaries between neighborhoods didn't exist, the engineers had quickly built waterways. So much water separating people" (112). *Indian Killer's* water imagery provides a contrast to Angel's romanticized perception of her own oneness with water in *Solar Storms*. In Seattle, water has been manipulated to divide city residents along lines of class and ethnicity according to settler desires for homogeneity and ethnic purity. The narrator outlines how European settlers "plowed, tunneled, clear-cut, and sculpted the land into something ethnically pleasing" (73). This colonization and reshaping of the land mirrors the reconfiguring of social and institutional arrangements within the city under neoliberalism. As Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore argue, cities are increasingly subjected to a "broad range of neoliberal policy experiments, institutional innovations, and politico-ideological projects. Under these conditions, cities have become the incubators for many of the major political and ideological strategies through which the dominance of neoliberalism is being maintained" (375–76). Just as the settlers reshaped the land to suit their interests, so the city is now shaped to suit the interests of neoliberal capital through policies aimed at erasing the presence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous poor, women, and homeless.

Alexie's text is not the first to note how the criminalization of the poor and homeless reflects the neoliberal logic of ordinances enacted to privilege the interests of capital over the needs of citizens. In *Almanac of the Dead*, the Barefoot Hopi denounces the fact that "Politicians and their banker pals empty the U.S. Treasury while police lock up the homeless and the poor who beg for food"

(734). These disciplinary state practices coincide with a neoliberal logic of criminalizing poverty and disappearing the poor into prisons or work camps. According to Pauline Lipman, neoliberal cityscapes are distinguished by the privatization of public assets such as bridges, schools, hospitals, and parking meters. Above all, it is the valorization of market efficiency that drives discourse and policies that equate the interests of private capital with the common good. Examining urban policies in Chicago, Lipman concludes that city ordinances, especially those regarding loitering and public health, have been used to police and marginalize socially and ethnically disadvantaged communities and neighbourhoods. “In short,” writes Lipman, “neoliberal urbanism has set in motion new forms of state-assisted economic, social, and spatial inequality, marginality, exclusion, and punishment” (220). Justified through appeals to the discourses of improved hygiene, cost efficiency, and crime reduction, neoliberal laws sanction the exclusion of Indigenous and other marginalized communities from public spaces.

In *Indian Killer*, the urban environment is similarly shaped by policies and ordinances informed by urban neoliberalism. Marie is angry that “The powerful white men of Seattle had created a law that made it illegal to sit on the sidewalk. That ordinance was crazier and much more evil than any homeless person” (146). This legislation, designed to both discipline and criminalize those already deemed surplus and expendable, is based upon the desire to police public space and mask the signs of the poverty created by those self-same policies. Another example of

how the urban spaces of Seattle are ordered by the forces of capital is the gentrification of Occidental Park:

The merchants had convinced the city that holding concerts in the park would attract more tourists to the downtown area, but there was a problem. Occidental Park was a gathering place for dozens of homeless people. So every Thursday morning around ten, the Seattle Police Department quietly drove the homeless out of the park. By noon, it would be filled with tourists. Around one in the afternoon, the homeless would begin filtering back in. By five, the park would once again belong to the street people. (228)

The policy of removing the poor from the park is an example of how neoliberal urbanization policies lead to the privatization of public spaces, as well as the increased marginalization of impoverished communities. In addition, the case of Occidental Park illustrates the ways that Seattle's public spaces are contested, as the homeless and marginalized daily retake the space for their own use. Public spaces are sites of constant flux, with neoliberal policies aimed at "cleaning" the spaces being continuously challenged by the presence of those considered undesirable.<sup>6</sup> The logic of removal manifested in the actions of the police sends a

<sup>6</sup> These policies of dispersal and removal can be linked to policies of Indigenous removal in American history, such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The removal of urban Indigenous peoples manifests itself in acts such as the Saskatoon Police Service's unofficial policies of giving "starlight tours" to Aboriginal citizens, resulting in the deaths of Neil Stonechild in 1990 and Lloyd Dustyhorn, Rodney Niastus, and Lawrence Wegner in 2000 (Green, "From Stonechild")

clear warning to members of other social constituencies of the consequences of poverty: to become poor, or to question or challenge prevailing power relations, is to risk being purged from public space. However, the bylaw also reveals the failure of gentrification policies, as members of these marginalized constituencies come together to assert their presence, and refuse to be hidden from the gaze of urban elites. To Marie, the neoliberal policies of erasure and removal have the effect of indigenizing the poor: “The homeless were like an Indian tribe, nomadic and powerless, just filled with more than any tribe’s share of crazy people and cripples. So, a homeless Indian belonged to two tribes, and was the lowest form of life in the city” (146). To her, the homeless, disabled, and Indigenous are bound together by shared experiences of marginalization and urban precarity (characterized by conditions of insecurity and uncertainty due to factors such as unemployment, under-employment, and homelessness) perpetuated by policies of invisibilization.

The experiences of Indigenous peoples in North American urban spaces are shaped by historical and ongoing colonial policies of dispossession and

507; Wright 1). Joyce Green argues that these colonial policies of removal are informed by “liberal ideals” of individual meritocracy wherein “the socio-economic indicators that measure appalling levels of Aboriginal suffering are assumed to be consequences of Aboriginal inadequacy, best remedied by the bracing application of measures of progress and development; and by ineffable cultural differences” (“From Stonechild” 512). In these cases, “progress” and “development” become code for urban gentrification, Indigenous removal, and ethnic cleansing.

assimilation. In his study of urban Indigenous experiences in the United States, Donald Fixico (Shawnee/Sac and Fox/Muscogee Creek/Seminole) observes that most of the movement of Indigenous populations to the city was an effect of the Relocation Program begun in the 1950s, a continuation of previous federal policies of removal and justified on the assumption that in the postwar period, “reservations and allotments became burdened by a surplus Indian population that could no longer support a viable economy” (4). Robert Warrior and Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) note that the government’s aim was “to move Indian people from reservations to cities, to assimilate them as quickly as possible, and to undermine reservation life” (6). This strategy was intimately linked to the policy of termination, and pursued in conjunction with official guidelines that “aggressively promoted the adoption of Indian children by white families” (7). Mi’kmaq scholar Bonita Lawrence’s research on the experiences of urban Indigenous peoples in Toronto documents lives often marked by violence, dispossession, and a generalized sense of homelessness, alienation, and loss. These shared experiences of urban life lead Lawrence to assert in her 2004 book *“Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, that “urban mixed-blood Native identity cannot be adequately understood except as shaped by a legacy of genocide” (xvii). John’s experience as an adoptee of white parents, however much they love and care for him, marks him as deeply implicated in these legacies of removal and loss.

The Seattle of *Indian Killer* is a space where labour and employment are uncertain, and where buildings lie vacant as people sleep under the Viaduct. John

observes a city characterized by “many vacant spaces, so many failed businesses. None of the buildings in downtown Seattle were owned by the people who had originally financed their construction” (103). The urban landscape of *Indian Killer* is in transition. The description of vacancy, failure, and emptiness highlights the absurdity of leaving buildings vacant rather than allowing them to be used for shelter. John’s belief that he works on the “last skyscraper in Seattle” (103) reveals his awareness of the precarity of his employment, as the novel alludes to the rise of new information technologies that will (he thinks) render skyscrapers, and his job, obsolete. Marie also finds herself in difficult circumstances: first, the university she attends strives to erase Indigenous presence from the campus through such acts as banning powwows; and second, her own poverty is highlighted when she is only able to offer her cousin Reggie a meal of cereal in water when he stops by unannounced for a visit. Her economic insecurity is characteristic of how Seattle is shaped by neoliberal policies that foster inequality and further marginalize those whose lives are already uncertain.

Seattle’s radio waves, which constitute the principal public discursive spaces in the novel, are dominated by reactionary ideologues. Truck, a radio broadcaster modelled on shock jocks such as Doug “The Greaseman” Tracht, Glenn Beck, and Rush Limbaugh, articulates discourses of white supremacy and patriarchy as he contributes to the fear and anxiety surrounding the ongoing violence in the city. He targets Indigenous peoples, the poor, and single mothers as examples of those who have profited excessively from social assistance programs and government largess. In one of his broadcasts, he declares,

This country is full of welfare babies giving birth to welfare babies. Citizens, we need to stop this cycle of poverty. And believe me, I've got the solution. You see, it's all about education. The smart kids aren't getting pregnant. How many honor students are getting pregnant? None. Well, citizens, I propose that we sterilize any girl whose I.Q. is below one hundred. (243)

Truck's tirade is rooted in patriarchal assumptions about women's intellectual inferiority (he does not advocate vasectomies for men or boys with low I.Q. scores) and equates poverty with ignorance and lack of education. His rhetoric valorizes individualism and promotes the fantasy that poverty is the result of personal failure and thus the sole responsibility of the poor, ignoring how economic regulations, or the lack thereof, contribute to rising inequality. Truck's proposal to sterilize poor women has a long history of being imposed upon Indigenous women, a history that he evokes as he proclaims: "Dumb girls will not give birth to dumb babies. Evil girls will not give birth to evil babies. Indian women will not give birth to Indian Killers" (243). His transition from "dumb" and "evil" to "Indian" implies a hierarchy wherein Indigenous women rank worse than evil, capable only of giving birth to "killers" rather than "babies." It is important to note that the women he considers disposable are indispensable to Truck, as they serve as the Others against which he can define himself and his audience. Truck's bigoted rhetoric serves as an object lesson and warning for those on the cusp of poverty and those who may be thinking of challenging the social relations that perpetuate inequality.

Truck's broadcasts also articulate a narrative of white nostalgia. He mourns how, in his opinion, "This whole country cares more about the lives of young black teenage hoodlums than it does about law-abiding, God-fearing white men" (208). Describing Indigenous communities, Truck informs his audience, "Indians still live in poverty. They live in filth, folks. Broken-down cars stacked in their yards. They have the highest infant-mortality rates. They have the highest rates of alcohol and drug abuse. Indians still get rickets, for God's sake. We give them everything, and yet they cannot take care of themselves" (208–09). His depictions of Indigenous peoples perpetuate colonial tropes of poverty and victimhood, recycling the discourses of disease, cleanliness, and infantilization that are marshalled by neoliberal policy-makers to justify the disappearance and removal of unwanted or surplus peoples from public view. In another broadcast, Truck insists, "White males built this country. White males traveled here on the *Mayflower*, crossed the Great Plains on horseback, brought light to the darkness, tamed the wilderness. This country exists because of the constant vigilance and ingenuity of white males" (207). This narrative of bringing light to darkness and taming the wilderness echoes long colonial traditions of associating whiteness with purity, and brown skin with disease, contamination, and moral failing. As Bauman reminds us, qualities such as "the suspicion against others, the intolerance to difference, the resentment of strangers and demands to separate and banish them, as well as the hysterical concern with law and order, tend to reach the highest pitch in the most uniform, the most racially, ethnically and class-wise homogeneous local communities" (184). Truck mobilizes nostalgia for a social

and racial uniformity that he believes was present in some glorious past. His concern with law and order, as well as his resentment towards underprivileged women and Indigenous peoples, is based upon a perceived threat to the ongoing privilege of white masculinity. The novel suggests that Truck's broadcasts are somewhat motivated by a cynical desire for increased ratings, implying that his hysteria may indeed be performative. However, his fear of the Other, manifested in the empty parking lot when he believes he is under imminent threat, is quite real, a symptom of an inability to read the heterogeneous dynamism of urban social space as anything other than a threat.

### **Identity and the Imagination in *Indian Killer***

In "The Man Made of Words," Momaday makes the claim that "we are all made of words, that our most essential being consists in language. It is the element in which we think and dream and act, in which we live our daily lives" (162). As language is fundamentally a communicative process, Momaday's conception of identity privileges this relationality. To imagine and act is to open oneself up to the world, to exist in-relation-to others through the sharing of ideas. Building upon this premise, Momaday goes on to argue that "an Indian is an idea which a given man has of himself. And it is a moral idea, for it accounts for the way in which he reacts to other men and to the world in general" (162). Later, in the same text, Momaday makes the point that the imagination must be engaged in order to conceptualize our relationships to land, writing, "We Americans need now more than ever before—and indeed more than we know—to imagine who

and what we are with respect to the earth and sky. I am talking about an act of imagination essentially, and the concept of an American land ethic” (166). His emphasis on the role of imagining as an act of empowerment and community building anticipates Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities” (6). Both Anderson and Momaday see the creation of community identity as primarily an act of imagination. For Momaday, this is a positive act, an act engaging a notion of collective or individual distinctiveness in relationship with the ideas, geographies, bodies, and peoples around us.

In a 2013 article entitled “‘Skins in Skin Flicks: A Modest Proposal on the Most Adequate Means for ‘Telling’ the ‘Real’ Indians from the Wannabes Among the ‘Reel’ Indians in Pornography,” Cherokee/Quapaw/Chickasaw scholar Geary Hobson, drawing upon the work of anthropologist Charles Hudson, outlines four categories of Indigenous identity: genetic, cultural, social, and legal (80). Citing John Smith as an example, he argues, “It is possible, for example, to be ‘100 percent genetically Indian by blood’ and still be virtually zero percent Indian in terms of Indian culture” (80). Hobson privileges cultural identity and claims that because legal definitions are subject to continual revision, they are “the least binding and convincing” (81). Although these categories of identity, especially cultural and social, can overlap and reinforce each other, they serve as useful signposts for John’s struggle to define himself.

In many ways, *Indian Killer* is about the consequences of a failure of the imagination, or, rather, of the failure of the imaginations of certain characters. Although John Smith is certain of his genetic origins, the act of imagination is

central for him, as he is deeply implicated in imagining cultural origins for himself. Two chapters in the novel are entitled “How He Imagines His Life on the Reservation” and both depict John’s various impressions (described by an unidentified third person narrator) of what his life would have been like had he not been adopted. When John imagines his birth, in a chapter entitled “Mythology,” the narrator claims, “John’s mother is Navajo or Lakota. She is Apache or Seminole. She is Yakama or Spokane. Her dark skin contrasts sharply with the white sheets, although they are dirty” (4). The darkness of her skin marks John’s mother as physically Indigenous, but her tribal status is indeterminate. She is this or that, from here or from there. This interplay of specificity and equivocation in the narrative of John’s birth extends to the description of the birds flying around the helicopter that takes John away: “Specific birds hurl away from the flying machine. These birds are indigenous to this reservation. They do not live anywhere else. They have purple-tipped wings and tremendous eyes, or red bellies and small eyes” (6). The birds are specific, yet they are changeable and indeterminate. This narrative emphasizes that John desires the ability to claim a specific tribal origin for himself, a link to a particular reservation with its attendant wildlife. However, this desire for specificity feeds into the ambiguous and generic identity that results from this description. Because the birds are unnamed and constantly shifting in appearance, they become placeholders rather than markers of geographical or cultural origin. John consistently engages in imagining cultural origins for himself, but they have the effect of obscuring the actual material and social realities that constitute his lived experience.

The narrator explains that John perceives himself as “Indian in the most generic sense” (31). As John imagines various tribal identities for himself, his self-concept reveals a certain failure of the imagination. His sense of self is rooted in his physical appearance: “Black hair, brown skin and eyes, high cheekbones, the prominent nose. Tall and muscular, he looked like some cinematic warrior, and constantly intimidated people with his presence” (32). His body marks him as genetically Indigenous. His description bears all of the stereotypical features: dark hair, brown skin, and brown eyes. When he first sees John, Jack Wilson immediately “recognizes” him as the physical embodiment of his literary creation, Aristotle Little Hawk, and feels as if “he’d brought Little Hawk to life through some kind of magic” (268). Wilson’s desire to have John “all to himself” (269) stems from his colonial assumption that he has the authority to speak and narrate on behalf of Indigenous peoples. However, his moment of recognition attests to a failure of imagination similar to John’s. Wilson’s literary representations, instead of challenging hegemonic discourses, merely sustain and reinforce those generic stereotypes that contribute to John’s belief that he is not “real.” John finds himself constantly defining himself against and according to the expectations of others: “When asked by white people, he said that he was Sioux, because that was what they wanted him to be. When asked by Indian people, he said he was Navajo, because that was what he wanted to be” (32). Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous interlocutors wish to locate John within specific cultural identity categories. As a result, he is unable to reconcile his upbringing with hegemonic assumptions about what constitutes “real” Indigenous identity.

When he imagines his upbringing on a reservation, John emphasizes the role of stories in constituting cultural and social identity. The best part of the day for John's sixteen year old imagined self is after dinner when the "whole family sits in a circle in the living room and tells stories." They speak of the "old times," of "other relatives," and of "their travels" (48). These are stories of love, of loss, of war, of despair, of joy, and of remembrance. According to the narrator, John is a particularly good storyteller:

John tells the longest stories, with many characters and changes of location. His stories are epic. They go long into the night. He invents ancestors. He speaks the truth about grandfathers and grandmothers. He convinces his family that Shakespeare was an Indian woman. The laughter and disbelief, the rubbing of bellies and contented sighs. His family listens to every word. (48)

John's happiness in his imagined past stems from his ability to tell his own stories and be listened to. The stories he tells and the stories he learns bind him to his imagined family in a complex relation of kinship, memory, shared experience, and history that give him a sense of belonging and community that he is unable to find elsewhere. After all, he does not communicate with his own parents, finds it difficult to talk with his co-workers, and is unable to bring himself to speak to Marie. John's focus on storytelling in his imagined past indicates that his well-being and happiness is inextricably tied to a sense of sovereignty over his own power to narrate. He wants to tell his own stories and to listen to narratives that make a place for him as participant or audience member. The importance John

accords to stories in his imagination emphasizes the bonds that those stories create among his imagined family. According to Lawrence, the role of family is central to the sense of social identity for urban Indigenous peoples: “mixed-blood urban Native people are Native people for one clear reason: they come from Native families, that is, from families that carry specific histories, Native histories” (xv). John’s desire for a cultural and social identity is rooted in an acknowledgement of the importance of story and family, and the ways that these two elements strengthen a sense of belonging to a particular community. However, his lived reality is that his family is non-Indigenous—the only parents he knows are white. His experience complicates Lawrence’s account by raising questions around how to conceive of Indigeneity in the absence of available family histories.

Marie is also caught up in complex social negotiations that compel her to constantly question the authenticity of her own and others’ identities:

Marie was always careful to test people, to hear their stories, to ask about their tribes, their people, and their ties to the land from which they originated. The pretend Indians had no answers for these questions, while real Indians answered the questions easily, and had a few questions of their own for Marie. Indians were always placing one another on an identity spectrum, with the more traditional to the left and the less traditional Indians to the right. Marie knew she belonged somewhere in the middle of that spectrum and that her happiness depended on placing more Indians to her right. (38–39)

Marie is obsessed with ideas of authenticity, compulsively distinguishing between those she considers to be real Indigenous peoples and those she considers to be pretending. However, the fact that John has developed standard (fictional) answers that can satisfy these kinds of questions, and yet still feels compelled to become real, undermines Marie's assumption that her taxonomy of Indigenous identity has any validity. In her 2001 essay "Is Urban a Person or a Place? Characteristics of Urban Indian Country," anthropologist Susan Lobo argues that within Indigenous urban communities, membership is often determined informally in a dynamic and fluid way on the basis of four different categories that she identifies as "Ancestry," "Appearance," "Cultural knowledge," and "Indian community participation" (81). Although Marie's work with the homeless speaks to her commitment to social justice and community building, her drive to police Indigenous identity is represented as being motivated by her desire to defend Indigenous intellectual sovereignty and her need to feel superior to others. Her happiness, the narrator claims, is contingent upon proving herself more real and authentic than others. Complicated and contradictory, *Indian Killer* depicts the discourse of authenticity as both a strategic mode of defending culture and a tool for division and dissension.

The ties between articulation of cultural identity, imagination, and intellectual sovereignty with respect to the ability to narrate, read, critique, and limit access to Indigenous texts are also important to Marie. Marie, who is Spokane, challenges the inclusion of texts authored and edited by non-Indigenous peoples on the syllabus of Professor Mather's Introduction to Native American

Literature class. Her cousin Reggie objects to Mather's decision to collect and disseminate the recordings of Spokane elders that Mather has found. In addition, both Marie and John challenge Wilson's claim to be an Indigenous writer. Marie doubts Wilson's claim to be Shilshomish primarily because he is white. For Marie, identity is negotiated in a fluid manner according to varying degrees of physical appearance, connection to a home community, and participation in the urban Indigenous community. What she opposes are the unbalanced power relations that allow white people to stake claims to an Indigenous cultural or social identity:

White people, especially those with the most minute amount of tribal blood, thought they became Indian just by saying they were Indian. A number of those pretend Indians called themselves mixed-bloods and wrote books about the pain of living in both the Indian and white worlds. Those mixed-blood writers never admitted their pale skin was a luxury. After all, Marie couldn't dress up like a white woman when she went to job interviews. But a mixed-blood writer could put on a buckskin jacket, a few turquoise rings, braid his hair, and he'd suddenly be an Indian. Those mixed-bloods could choose to be Indian or white, depending on the social or business situation. Marie never had the opportunity to make that choice. She was a brown baby at birth, born to a brown mother and brown father. (232)

Although John's physical appearance grants him only the sense of a generic Indigenous identity, Marie considers physiognomy to be central to her sense of self, more important than factors such as participation in community events. She objects to the construction of Indigenous identity as a role to be adopted for convenience, as historical conditions have made passing an option available only to a few. Wilson's appropriation of Indigenous cultural identity is a manifestation of power relations that allow him to profit without contributing to Indigenous communities.

Marie's attitudes towards people of mixed ancestry are shared by other characters in Alexie's work. In *Reservation Blues*, Chess Blue Water, a member of the band Coyote Springs, imagines cautioning the white mother of a mixed-blood child that "He's always going to be half Indian [. . .] and that will make him half crazy. Half of him will always want to tear the other half apart. It's war" (283). She wants to tell the mother that no matter what the son does, "*Other Indians won't accept him*" and she worries that the presence of any future mixed-blood grandchildren will "*remind the real Indians how much we don't have*" (283). Chess opposes the notion of "real Indians" to mixed-blood genetic heritage and appears to associate it with poverty and lack of opportunities. The white woman's descendants will be able to get "*all the Indian jobs, all the Indian chances, because they look white. Because they're safer*" (283). Although Chess does not question why she privileges blood and appearance as a primary determinant of indigeneity over kinship ties and community relationships, she is

aware that whiteness is considered safe by those in positions of power and privilege.

However, other stories by Alexie feature characters of mixed ancestry who do not necessarily agonize over their cultural identities. For example, in “Lawyer’s League,” Richard, whose father is African American and whose mother is Spokane, works as a liaison for the governor of Washington State. He considers himself “one of the best and brightest Native Americans and one of the best and brightest African Americans” (*Ten* 55), claiming fully both identities. The narrator of “Do You Know Where I Am?,” whose mother is white, visits his grandparents on the Spokane Reservation, but prefers his upper middle class lifestyle in Seattle (*Ten* 150–51). His sense of self is bound up in his relationships to his wife and children. Neither man feels inauthentic or at war with himself, nor does either consider his identity to be an appropriation.

Alexie continues to complicate notions of performativity and passing in his later work. In his short story “Flight Patterns,” William, a Spokane man living in Seattle, confronts the dilemmas of being “ambiguously ethnic” (*Ten* 114). On his way to the airport for a business trip, he tells a taxi driver that after 9/11, a “big truck with big phallic tires and a big phallic flagpole and a big phallic flag flying, and the big phallic symbol inside leaned out of his window and yelled at me, ‘Go back to your own country!’” (*Ten* 117). William’s experience reveals how his appearance allows him to pass as a member of other ethnicities, but this ability to pass is historically and socially conditioned. Marie’s and William’s experiences emphasize the way that the performativity of identity is constructed

within relations of power where discourses of race, skin colour, immigration, white privilege, and terror constrain and determine the historically contingent limits of performativity. According to Steven Salaita, anti-Muslim hysteria allows William to enter into “a covenant that does not buttress white normativity but reinvents a multiethnic national identity predicated on non-Muslim citizenship” (29). William’s qualified approval of racial profiling in airports, along with his vehement rejection of the notion that he might be Muslim “signifies an affinity with American norms even as it relegates him to an unsavory taxonomy” (Salaita 29). His brown skin means that he will be included in racial profiling procedures, but his acquiescence to these policies indicates an acceptance of hegemonic discourses associating terrorism with Islam. Where characters such as Angelita in *Almanac of the Dead* challenge the ideological foundations of such discourses, William and Marie seem to be complicit in replicating them.

Marie’s privileging of a taxonomy of physical appearance to define Indigenous identity proceeds, contends Krupat, “according to a kind of ‘intrinsic racism’ that leads to a fairly straightforward, if rather sinister politics: Indians for Indians, Indians against whites” (116). Krupat acknowledges that these racial categories are often externally imposed upon characters against their will, but asserts that identity functions throughout the novel to maintain a separation “between Us and Them” (116). However, Marie’s challenging of Wilson’s claims of Indigenous origins also stems from a desire to exercise intellectual sovereignty over Indigenous representation and narratives. Marie objects to the violence implicit in Mather’s use of a syllabus that privileges the voices of non-Indigenous

authors and silences the voices of Indigenous writers. Postcolonial scholar Achille Mbembe asserts in his 2002 essay “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” that the syllabus can be thought of as an archive that plays a role as an “instituting imaginary” (“Power” 19), in that it gives shape and form to a particular discursive figure (in *Indian Killer*, to Mather’s preconceived notions of indigeneity) and establishes authority over it. In her 2008 article “The Violence of Collection: *Indian Killer*’s Archives,” Janet Dean argues that the novel’s presentation of the debate over the control of the syllabus “brings to the fore the ties between armchair ethnographic collection and academic practices, both, for Alexie, part of the mechanisms of subjugation” (38). Mather’s syllabus is representative of institutional mechanisms invested with authority in determining and establishing the limits of hegemonic discourses of Indigenous identity and speech. What makes Mather’s selection of texts problematic, aside from his emphasis on works authored and edited primarily by non-Indigenous writers, is that it sustains and produces a Eurocentric idea of indigeneity that “allows [Mather] to define Marie in his own terms” (Dean 39). What the syllabus reveals is that it is “designed to give him the authority to define comprehensively the Native American world” (Dean 39). Similar colonial ideologies and desires for authority and control underpin Mather’s desire to collect recordings of Spokane elders’ stories, Daniel Smith’s preoccupation with atlases, and Wilson’s constant search for information from the Indigenous customers of Big Heart’s. Each man’s actions exemplify the archival practices through which “white authority figures mark their understanding of and their authority over ‘authentic’ Native American culture by

accruing both real and imagined artifacts of indigenous existence” (Dean 30). These collections manifest the discursive and figurative violence of the colonial relationships that constitute the context out of which the physical violence in the novel emerges.

Marie’s challenges to Wilson and Mather are acts of resistance to the violence manifested in their acts of appropriation. However, they also stem from her desire to assert her own authority by defining the indigeneity of others. In part, she is compensating for her inability to pass as anything other than Indigenous by foreclosing opportunities for others to understand their own identities. Indeed, when she asks John what tribe he belongs to, she deprives him of the opportunity to open up and share the truth about his lived reality. The narrator tells us that John “could not, would not, tell her he had been adopted as a newborn by a white couple who could not have children of their own” (31). The assumptions behind Marie’s question—that he knows the First Nation to which he belongs—serve to invalidate some experiences as authentically Indigenous, and perpetuate John’s sense that he is somehow not real.

Although Marie is motivated by a desire to assert Indigenous sovereignty over literary representations of Indigenous peoples, Alexie’s work has been heavily critiqued for abdicating this responsibility. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn asserts that Alexie’s *Reservation Blues* reflects “little or no defense of treaty-protected reservation land bases as homelands to the indigenes” and does not “suggest a responsibility of art as an ethical endeavor or the artist as responsible social critic, a marked departure from the early renaissance works of such luminaries as N.

Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko” (“American” 68). Cook-Lynn’s charge is that Alexie’s novels do not concern themselves with an explicit defence of Indigenous treaty-rights or sovereignty. On the other hand, Sam McKegney warns that while a critical awareness of and commitment to the intellectual traditions and contexts from which Indigenous literatures emerge is essential to any informed critique of Indigenous texts, to demand activism from literary works risks “doing violence” to them (Fagan et al. 29). Aesthetic endeavour and political responsibility may certainly align for many Indigenous authors, but one must be careful imposing potential limits on artistic expression by conflating the two. Nevertheless, *Indian Killer*’s critique of the colonial violence that underlies Mather’s and Wilson’s actions seems to refute Cook-Lynn’s allegations. Alexie’s novel explicitly challenges the colonial logics underpinning Mather’s desire to authorize and delimit what constitutes Indigenous cultural identity as well as Wilson’s efforts to create and sell stories masquerading as Indigenous. *Indian Killer* makes clear that Mather’s hoarding of the recordings of Spokane elders and Wilson’s novels about Aristotle Little Hawk has political, economic, and cultural consequences. Wilson’s novels are killing Indigenous books, according to Marie (68). Competing economically with the work of Indigenous authors in the publishing market, his texts also perpetuate a discursive violence of (mis)representation against the peoples that they are supposed to represent.

When he is asked about Cook-Lynn’s contention that artistic projects that do not explicitly adopt political stances regarding tribal sovereignty are essentially worthless and irrelevant, Alexie responds that “the stances she has are a kind of

fundamentalism that actually drove me off my reservation. I think it's a kind of fundamentalism about Indian identity, and what 'Indian' can be and mean, that damages Indians" ("Humor" 40). Alexie's alignment of Cook-Lynn's views with fundamentalism manifests itself in "War Dances," where an unnamed narrator describes attending a lecture given at the University of Washington by a scholar who shares many of Cook-Lynn's views:

An elderly Indian woman, a Sioux writer and scholar and charlatan, had come to orate on Indian sovereignty and literature. She kept arguing for some kind of separate indigenous literary identity, which was ironic considering that she was speaking English to a room full of white professors. But I wasn't angry with the woman, or even bored. No, I felt sorry for her. I realized that she was dying of nostalgia. She had taken nostalgia as her false idol—her thin blanket—and it was murdering her. (*War Dances* 36–37)

The narrator of the story denounces this position on Indigenous literary sovereignty. Alexie sees this kind of nostalgia—the desire to preserve traditions and practices without questioning their value or relevance to contemporary Indigenous peoples and life ways—as a trap. When carried to the extreme, nostalgia damages those like John in *Indian Killer*, who suffers from believing himself incapable of being a “real Indian,” as if being a “real Indian” was something that could be achieved, rather than what Gerald Vizenor would identify as a “terminal creed” (*Earthdivers* 187). Terminal creeds, according to Vizenor's

characters, are “terminal diseases,” and frequently lead to death (*Earthdivers* 184). John’s aspirations to become a “real Indian” are rooted in his nostalgia for this terminal creed. His belief that he has not yet become a “real Indian” prevents John from making connections with others on his own terms. Unable to consider his experiences and life history as constituting a reality that will be accepted by others, John resorts to performing the social role he believes is expected of him, and becomes less and less able to articulate his own desires. *Indian Killer*’s depiction of John illustrates the dangers that performing an identity rooted in nostalgia can have on individual agency.

Alexie also contends that Indigenous sovereignty is “never about culture. It’s always economic sovereignty. Native American sovereignty is expressed in terms of casinos, cigarettes, fireworks. It’s engaged in exploitation, almost always engaged in the worst parts of capitalism” (“Humor” 41). Alexie’s point is that sovereignty itself is never neutral, or even necessarily a positive term. Any expression of sovereignty must be interrogated and critiqued based upon the specific contexts of the First Nations involved. When sovereignty is limited to the economic sphere and expressed solely through the adoption of the “worst parts of capitalism,” the effect on Indigenous peoples may well be a net loss of sovereignty over tradition, land, and cultural practices. Alexie’s warning is that a sacrifice of Indigenous modes of being-in-relation for economic gain can lead to corruption and to increasingly exploitative forms of neoliberal capital asserting influence upon First Nations communities.

*Indian Killer* reveals how discourses of identity are bound up in relations of power, community, and a defence of intellectual sovereignty. John's desire to imagine a specific tribal and cultural origin for himself underscores how his inability to recognize himself as a member of any community has inflicted a deep psychological wound. Marie's constant questioning of the identities of others is predicated upon a desire to prove herself an authentic member of the Indigenous urban community in Seattle, as well as a wish to maintain sovereignty over Indigenous narratives and intellectual heritage. Her challenges to Mather and Wilson reveal how constructions of identity are contingent upon and shaped within a context of colonial and neoliberal power relations and violence.

### **Violence and Resistance**

In the chapter entitled "Mythology," the narrator, who details John's birth and removal from his mother, informs the reader that "Suddenly this is a war" (6). Fought through bureaucracies and bylaws, through neoliberal governmentality rather than force, this neo-colonial war nevertheless effectively perpetuates violence against Indigenous peoples. It is useful to note here that, according to Thrush, Seattle's prominence as a global city is due largely to its role as a manufacturing base for battleships and warplanes during the First and Second World Wars, underscoring its economic dependence upon the military industrial complex (163). The effect of describing John's adoption as an act of war is to emphasize the fact of colonial violence that underlies the relations between the characters in the novel. In her work on urban Indigenous populations, Lawrence

observes that experiences such as John's—being adopted by a white family and removed from one's culture—result in a marked increase in “problems with alcoholism, drug addiction, depression, suicidal behaviour, and uncontrollable rages. For their families, the removal of their children added a new layer of violence and loss to the other problems that they face” (117). In other words, John's rage in *Indian Killer* is symptomatic and representative of a rage and anger shared by a wide range of Indigenous adoptees. In addition, Lawrence describes how many urban Indigenous peoples, when faced with models and images of indigeneity created by white people, feel that they have “to struggle to measure up to the images before them and to feel their identities tainted and diminished because they cannot be the ‘real Indians’ they feel they are supposed to be” (135). Lawrence draws attention to the same phrase that haunts John's conception of himself as something other than a “real Indian.” John believes that he can never achieve a sense of wholeness in part because he is not real, and cannot measure up to the images and models held up to him by non-Indigenous peoples. The war that constitutes the context of Alexie's novel, and John's experience, is waged on both figurative and material levels.

The violence in *Indian Killer* arises within a context shaped by colonial and neoliberal ideologies that condition the urban surroundings and economic circumstances of the characters. In an interview, responding to a question about how he understands one's responsibilities towards others, Alexie claims,

Every problem in the Indian world can be directly related to poverty. Every problem we have is a variation of the same problem

poor people all over the United States have, and we can suggest all these cultural solutions: somebody powwows more, they're gonna be better; they dance more, they drum, they're gonna be better.

And that could very well be the case for that individual, but as a group of people, it really is about economic advancement. We live in a capitalistic society, and that's not going away. ("Humor" 42)

Alexie identifies poverty as the root of social problems, and suggests that cultural solutions can only offer limited relief while the economic roots of the problems lie unaddressed. Expressions of sovereignty in *Indian Killer* take on multiple forms: the homeless community's desire to occupy space, Indigenous sovereignty over the right to tell, conceal, or destroy stories, and economic sovereignty. Neoliberal expressions of Indigenous economic sovereignty are potentially harmful, but Alexie insists that poverty and a lack of economic sovereignty are at the root of Indigenous social and cultural problems. In his estimation, cultural practices such as powwows might offer relief and healing to a few, but fundamental shifts in economic policy are needed to address overall community well-being. Violence, then, can be traced to the systemic policies implemented at all levels of government that serve to simultaneously perpetuate and criminalize poverty. In Alexie's story "Can I Get a Witness?" from his 2004 collection *Ten Little Indians*, the protagonist is forced to confront "the uncomfortable truth that violence is most often banal, not spectacular, and that all humans are in some way complicit in its existence" (Salaita 30). As Salaita asserts, Alexie explores how people are

complicit in everyday systems of violence that they either refuse or are unable to recognize.

The contexts of war, poverty, and neoliberal policies that create and aggravate poverty are crucial to understanding the violence represented in *Indian Killer*. However, they seem under-examined by critics such as Krupat, who describes Alexie's text as "the first Native American novel I know to take a very particular sort of Indian rage, *murderous* rage, as its central subject and, it would seem, to encourage its expression" (103). Krupat contends that *Indian Killer* maintains "that the continued violence directed by whites against Indians will be productive of anger, rage, and the desire for murderous revenge that must be expressed, not repressed or channeled into other possible action, and this, I think, is indeed something new, and also something frightening" (103). To be fair, Krupat acknowledges the conditions of the underlying colonial violence depicted in the text, but his assumption that the text advocates that Indigenous violence "must be expressed" is largely off the mark. His word, "rage," is imputed to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters, in addition to characterizing what he calls "black rage" expressed, according to him, in African American literature in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s (103). Krupat locates the effects and causes for violence firmly in the affective realm, obscuring the role that social, political, and economic factors might play. His focus on affect also conceals how violence operates structurally, through laws and institutional policies. The removal of the homeless from Occidental Park is not motivated by rage; it is a violence predicated upon business calculations. Krupat grants that violence is "continued"

by whites, many of whom are also motivated by anger and revenge, but this attempt to establish an equivalence between the violence perpetrated by white and Indigenous characters seems to ignore the social and political power imbalances between them. Given a neoliberal, neo-colonial, and patriarchal context where Indigenous people and women are consistently depicted in the public sphere as intellectually inferior and worthy of being sterilized, reductively equating violence with rage elides the specific historical and social conditions that make such violence possible.

Even though there is an element of randomness to the killer's selection of victims, there is certainly a pattern wherein the victims, in addition to being white men, are explicitly described as occupying positions of wealth and privilege. Admittedly, the first time readers encounter the killer, he or she is electing to follow white men "at random" (51). However, a reading of the passage describing the killer's methodology reveals that his or her victims are chosen based upon what the killer assumes is a shared participation in a capitalist system itself predicated upon systemic violence:

The killer simply picked any one of the men in gray suits and followed him from office building to cash machine, from lunchtime restaurant back to office building. Those gray suits were not happy, yet showed their unhappiness only during moments of weakness. Punching the buttons of a cash machine that refused to work. Yelling at a taxi that had come too close. Insulting the homeless people who begged for spare change. But the killer also

saw the more subtle signs of unhappiness. A slight limp in uncomfortable shoes. Eyes closed, head thrown back while waiting for the traffic signal. The slight hesitation before opening a door. The men in gray suits wanted to escape, but their hatred and anger trapped them. (51)

The men in grey suits become personifications of all the suits represent—wealth, unhappiness, lack of compassion, and corporate greed. The killer is aware that many of these grey suits are not happy, but instead are full of hatred and anger. The fact that they are in suits indicates that the killer is selecting victims representative of a wealthy capitalist elite class. The boy that the killer chooses to kidnap, Mark Jones, is in the Park with his “young white nanny” (152), Sarah. This description indicates that Mark is the child of an upper-class family. His mother, Erin, is a bank manager. Many critics have focused exclusively on the need of the killer to attack a white child and white men, but much less attention has been given to the fact that his victims are associated with wealth, business, and capital. Edward, the second murdered victim of the killer, is identified in the text as “a businessman” (325). The killer’s anger towards the wealthy and privileged is an important aspect of the novel, as it is an element that runs throughout the narrative. It is not, after all, homeless white men whom the killer targets. Even Spud and Lyle, the only two murderers identified in the text, partially justify shooting David Rogers by (mistakenly) identifying him as “a rich kid” (384). John shares some of the killer’s anger and suspicion towards white men, characterizing the talk of the “rich white men at his father’s parties and from

the working white men at the construction site” as “poison and anger” (131). This kind of characterization emphasizes the differences in class between the two kinds of white men, establishing that class is a category important in John’s worldview, and that the privileges accorded to race and class are interdependent and linked.

Leading lives that are by no means exemplary—Edward has a predilection for watching pornography—the killer’s victims are nevertheless innocent of any overt crime against Indigenous peoples. Regardless, the killer reads them, and all that their suits represent, as personifications of the systemic violence of colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and neoliberal capital. The victims represent, for the killer, the mundane nature of neoliberalism, the complicity of these white businessmen in suits in the perpetuation of a system that enacts violence through the exclusion and erasure of Indigenous peoples, women, the poor, and others deemed surplus and disposable. These men embody the violence of neoliberal urbanization and the violence of colonial and economic systems that exclude and dehumanize their colonial others. The killer’s logic is (most infamously perhaps) shared by Ward Churchill’s labelling of those who worked at the twin towers “little Eichmanns” or “a cadre of faceless bureaucrats and technical experts who had willingly (and profitably) harnessed themselves to the task of making America’s genocidal world order come with maximal efficiency” (19). The point for the killer is that these businessmen are perceived to be complicit in a system that rewards them, and perpetuates a violence that they can disavow, because it is distanced and disappeared from their awareness. The killer’s choice of victims, then, is a direct challenge to the systemic violence of neoliberalism and

colonialism that are perpetrated anonymously, and in which each of the victims is complicit.

The novel, though, does not celebrate the violent deaths these characters suffer. Indeed, what is most disconcerting about Krupat's reading of Alexie's text is his claim that it advocates and valorizes violence and rage as modes of expression and resistance. On the contrary, most of its violent episodes can be read as failures in terms of their effectiveness in resisting systemic violence. Neither John, Aaron, Reggie, nor the killer profits from acts of violence. In other words, *Indian Killer* is about the failure of violence. Lydia Cooper, in her comparison of the representations of violence in David Treuer's *The Hiawatha* and Alexie's text, maintains that "public performances of violence in the novels comprehensively fail to mitigate the tension in the men or in their respective cities, Minneapolis and Seattle" (44). John's belief that killing a white man will solve his problems is borne out to be false and painfully inadequate. David's brother Aaron, who embarks on a series of revenge beatings of homeless Indigenous people with two of his friends is similarly rejected by his accomplice and roommate Sean because the violence is not helping David (349). Aaron's father begs him to stop the violence because he fears that his son will be caught or hurt (283). Even David's killers fail to profit from their murder, and are themselves killed. Strictly speaking, none of the so-called murderous violence is to the benefit of its perpetrators.

Reggie's violence against the white hitchhiker makes him a pariah to his friends Ty and Harley, who agree with each other that he has gone too far.

Reggie's failure is emphasized at the end when, running along the highway, he gets picked up by an elderly white man. When the man asks Reggie where he is going, Reggie "pointed up the highway, pointed north or south, east or west, pointed toward a new city, though he knew every city was a city of white men" (409). His acts of violence have not served any real purpose. He has been forced to leave his friends and family, and every new city he goes to is going to be "a city of white men." This sense of failure runs through the whole of the novel; while anger is real, present, and easily pushed to violence, this violence is a manifestation and symptom of impotence.

The killer's violence leaves him or her, according to the narrator, "feeling depleted but unfulfilled" (328). The murders have failed to satisfy whatever need the killer had. Cooper argues that *Indian Killer* suggests "the necessity of a general reorientation away from symbols and rhetoric that venerate bloodshed" (55). Where Krupat maintains that its politics are "Anarchistic, individualistic, and terrorist" and "more *counter*-revolutionary than revolutionary" (114), the novel is actually disparaging of violence, and emphasizes the emptiness its perpetrators are left with. John's rescue from Aaron and his accomplices is the only instance where violence leads to a positive outcome. This episode is narrated as follows:

Boo opened the back door of the sandwich van and three Indian men and three Indian women stormed out. They were a ragtag bunch of homeless warriors in soiled clothes and useless shoes. But when John looked up from the ground, he saw those half-warriors

attack the white boys. The Indians were weak from malnutrition and various diseases, but they kicked, scratched, and slapped with a collective rage. John wondered how those Indians could still fight after all they had been through. He had seen Indians like that before, sleeping in doorways, on heating vents outside city hall, in cardboard condominiums. He did not understand their courage, how they could keep fighting when all he wanted to do was close his eyes and fade into the pavement. The fight was quick and brutal. Two Indian men, clutching their stomachs, had fallen to the pavement. One Indian woman with a bloody mouth leaned against a car. (374–75)

After this brief but intense fight, the homeless warriors get back into the van and celebrate their victory: “The men were loudly celebrating, exchanging high fives and hugs. Boo, Indian-for-a-day, screamed triumphantly and pumped his fists into imaginary enemies, shadowboxing with his whole life” (375). Boo, the homeless and disabled white veteran who helps Marie deliver sandwiches, is characterized as “Indian-for-a-day,” an ally in a fight against racism and colonial violence. This description reinforces John’s awareness that those defending him are all victims of neoliberal governmentality and violence, all subject to bylaws that perpetuate and criminalize their poverty. They have been exiled to the margins of the city, to doorways and heating vents, excluded from having a presence within city hall. The passage emphasizes that the violence inflicted upon Indigenous bodies by neoliberal policies is no different from the violence of Aaron’s racist attacks. Both

kinds of violence mark their bodies and shape how they navigate the city. Their defence of John from Aaron is also a challenge to those governmental structures that seek to remove their bodies, and the violence committed upon them, from the public sphere.

Even after this brief and fragile victory, Marie feels a strong sense of remorse: “She wanted to cry. She was shocked by her anger, and how much she had wanted to hurt those white boys. Nearly blind with her own rage, she had wanted to tear out their blue eyes and blind them” (375). Marie’s shock at the realization of the rage and anger she had felt signals her general discomfort with the violence. She is suspicious of her own emotions, and is most comfortable in situations where she can challenge figures such as Mather on intellectual grounds, on the terrain of intellectual sovereignty as opposed to confronting those motivated by right-wing, racist populism in the streets.

### **Being-in-Common in Seattle**

The mechanisms of neoliberal governance that police, discipline, and privatize Seattle’s cityscape are part of the reason for much of the violence imposed upon Indigenous and other marginalized social constituencies in the text, but the city is also a space of potential in both this novel and other works by Alexie. *Indian Killer*’s urban setting provides a location for the creation of alliances and shared political projects of resistance. As Antonio Negri remarks, “The Seattle movement, for example, would never have started had it not started precisely in Seattle, that is, in one of the world capitals of information technology

and communication industry” (Negri and Casarino 76). The city’s place in the networks of global capital and information technology makes it a space of local resistance to global mechanisms of power. Many of Alexie’s short stories revisit Seattle and the issues of intellectual sovereignty, neoliberal governmentality, globalization, and performativity in relation to urban Indigenous identities and communities that are raised in *Indian Killer*. Jennifer Ladino, for instance, acknowledges that “Alexie’s Seattle, with its incessant motion, fleeting interactions, and excessive individualism, can be alienating and cold; it can render its inhabitants invisible or subject them to merciless stereotypes” (38). However, his narratives complicate the notion that Seattle is a city that is purely a space of danger and alienation. Instead, as Ladino argues, in Alexie’s work “the city is a space in which empathetic boundary crossing and community building take place” (38). Alexie’s Seattle is in constant flux, as identities, relationships, and communities are continuously negotiated, contested, shared, dissolved, and (re)created. The cityscape becomes a space of boundary crossing, where ideas and identities cannot be easily contained, and where attempts to police them are challenged.

Alexie’s story “Search Engine,” from his collection *Ten Little Indians*, suggestively revisits and revises several of the characters and episodes from *Indian Killer*. In many ways, Corliss, the protagonist of “Search Engine,” is a reworking of the character of Marie; Corliss is a Spokane woman attending college who has an interest in Indigenous literature. The Spokane poet who writes under the alias of Harlan Atwater affords Alexie the opportunity to readdress

issues of performativity, cultural appropriation, and Indigenous intellectual sovereignty explored through both John and Wilson in *Indian Killer*. The narrator informs the reader that Corliss is “[e]ver the rugged individual” (*Ten* 5), that she had “always dreamed of solitude” (10), and that she lives alone because she does not want to live with either an Indigenous or a white roommate. She is suspicious of what she labels tribalism: “Indians were used to sharing and called it tribalism, but Corliss suspected it was yet another failed form of communism” (10). To a large extent, Corliss has bought into the individualism that characterizes neoliberal governmentality. However, she is aware that she attends the college as a result of a shared dependence upon others, including several non-Indigenous teachers who helped her with school, and relatives who send her money in the mail, leading her to reflect that “maybe she was a selfish bitch for questioning the usefulness of tribalism” (16). Corliss’s subject position reveals a constant negotiation of relationships with those around her in the urban landscape of Seattle, as well as her home community. Her openness to being-in-common with others, to a sense of shared humanity, grounds her encounters and relationships with relatives and strangers.

As she searches for Harlan, Corliss encounters a homeless white man who claims to have been an economics professor and she offers to buy him lunch at McDonald’s in exchange for directions. During their meal, he allows her to ask him a “human question” (30) in lieu of a personal question, when she inquires about his life. Corliss takes the homeless man’s emphasis on the shared humanness of their experience and applies it in her conversation with Harlan

Atwater, the man she has come to find. In this narrative, the city provides a space for Corliss to encounter others in their humanness, to share presence, conversation, food, and ultimately, a respect for the dignity of the common experience of being/becoming human. Ladino remarks that Corliss's encounters in the story demonstrate the ways that the cityscape provides spaces where "encountering difference provokes compassionate human connections" (43). Even as Corliss doubts whether she can trust the homeless man's story, she is unable to doubt his humanity, their shared humanity, and the shared experience of being-in-relation. As Salaita puts it, Alexie's characters "gravitate toward one another because of a common need for an escape from the anxieties of an individualistic American modernity" (26).

Corliss's openness to a shared sense of humanity is, in an urban context shaped by neoliberal globalization, a small and compassionate act of resistance. For Emma LaRocque (Métis), "the very fact and essence of resistance is our humanity. We resist dehumanization because we are human" (158). Her contention that the core of resistance is an acknowledgement of shared humanity that is open to a wide and full spectrum of modes of being-in-relation. LaRocque's hope for Indigenous literatures is that through narratives, "we may more freely explore our humanity in its fuller spectrum than has been possible under the constraints of certain categorizations or academic disciplines, theories, or oppositional politics" (155–56). LaRocque's call for a reading of Indigenous literatures through the lens of shared humanity challenges the consistently

dehumanizing elements of colonial and neoliberal discourses and state-sanctioned policies against Indigenous peoples.

“Search Engine” generally offers a much more positive vision of Indigenous being-in-common in resistance to neoliberal governmentality, but Seattle also affords the characters of *Indian Killer* opportunities for collective resistance. As Ladino argues, the city of Seattle, with all of its attendant problems, still “provides a common space for shared humanity to materialize” (39). More specifically, she contends that although Alexie’s narratives challenge “any automatic acceptance of a romanticized multicultural community in Seattle” his texts often present “models for building polycultural alliances that offer hope for justice through generosity, empathy, community, and a recognition of our shared humanity” (39). Alexie’s narratives of urban Indigenous experiences are about the work of and the need for community and alliance building across cultures and classes.

Many of John’s problems can be traced to his lack of knowledge of his tribal community, but he also suffers from his failure to find, build, or become part of any community. His failure to belong is surely a result of many factors, including his adoption by white parents, his lack of knowledge of his biological parents and community, and his deteriorating psychological well-being. Early in the novel, we learn that John has psychological troubles, has refused to take his medication, and that his parents and the two Pauls at the coffee shop worry about him. John’s character could be read as an allegory of the impossibility of constructing a cultural identity without knowledge of one’s specific tribal

heritage. However, I argue instead that John's instability is also due to his inability to participate in any of the communities he encounters in the novel. His belief that he ought to belong only to one particular tribal community (reinforced by Marie's and others' assumptions about him) limits the possibilities open to him in the forms of other potential modes of being-in-relation to others. His failure to communicate, ultimately, drives him apart from others. When Marie arrives with her sandwich van at the Viaduct, John "struggled to speak. He wanted to tell Marie everything. He wanted to tell her about Father Duncan. He opened his mouth, closed it again, and then turned to run" (145). John's inability to speak, his confusion, his desire for acceptance, and his fear of being rejected compel him to run away from a chance at making a connection. That John is aware that his inability to share his story lies at the root of his isolation is apparent when he pleads with Wilson to "Let me, let us have our own pain" (411). In a sense, the narratives that Wilson tells are killing John's chances to articulate his own story. The power to narrate plays a key role in providing John with peace and happiness in his imagined upbringing, but narratives like Wilson's have constructed an idea of indigeneity that John feels compelled to actualize, a feat that he is incapable of doing. The confusion and loneliness of his actual lived experience is erased by Wilson in favour of generalized descriptions of Indigenous men being "emotionally distant and troubled" (162). John's final plea to Wilson is an attempt to recover his own voice.

One of the spaces where John seems to find some sense of peace, if not belonging, is among the Indigenous homeless who congregate at the Viaduct. But, even here, he is isolated:

John sat by himself, apart from a group of Indians who were singing and telling jokes. More laughter. John watched those Indians, in dirty clothes and thirdhand shoes, miles and years from their reservations, estranged from their families and tribes, yet still able to laugh, to sing. John wondered where they found the strength to do such things. (144)

He sits apart and cannot bring himself to participate in the group. Significantly, John only sees estrangement when he watches the homeless laugh and sing. He is unable to see the singing and laughter as signs of relations being formed and strengthened, as evidence of a community of being-in-relation under these specific conditions of shared Indigeneity and shared humanity. His belief that he is not “real” keeps him from considering the people in front of him a community to which he could belong. John also has trouble around crowds; walking down the street on a Monday night amidst many pedestrians, he becomes dizzy due to the sheer volume of people (41). The fact that so many of the other pedestrians are white contributes to his uneasiness, but he is also unsure of himself in Crazy Heart’s bar and ends up being assaulted by Reggie and his friends. John’s death is a mark not simply of his ignorance of his tribal origins, but is also a result of his inability and failure to open himself to alternative modes of being-in-relation to others.

The final image of the novel is of the killer dancing with dozens, then hundreds of other Indigenous people. This dance is one that portends violence. However, the significance of the killer's archive of violence—the knife and collection of scalps—is to throw doubt on the notion that the text is celebrating this premonition of violence. According to Janet Dean, “It is fitting that the killer is never identified in the text, never, indeed, even described in any detail, because his identity derives from his collection of murderous artifacts alone. He cannot be more or less than ‘the killer’” (49). The archive defines the killer's identity in a way that completely erases any sense of individual agency or subjectivity. He or she is only, and can only be, the killer, and the archive that creates and sustains his/her sense of self also limits it. This collection of artifacts reduces his/her being to a relation of violence, and denies any chance of constituting relations otherwise. Additionally, the uncertainty and ambiguity of the killer's identity draws attention to how the reader's (possible) desire to concretize identity is itself an act of violence upon the characters in the novel. It reveals a (possible) desire on the part of readers and reviewers to soothe themselves with a certainty that cannot be found in the text, nor in the characters' lives, as John's urge to discover his own cultural identity leads to his increasing alienation.

Although *Indian Killer* depicts brief moments of human connection—Paul Too's willingness to accommodate John's fear of poison by tasting his donuts and coffee for him; the willingness of the small group of homeless Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women to defend each other and reclaim the space of the park; the offer of the sandwich to John from Boo after his rescue; and Marie's

distribution of sandwiches to the homeless—Alexie’s text is ultimately a narrative of failure in the face of urban neoliberal governmentality. John’s inability to imagine a narrative for himself outside of the narrow limits prescribed by Wilson’s and Marie’s expectations and assumptions leads to his death. Similarly, even though Marie defends Indigenous literary sovereignty and devotes herself to helping the homeless, her obsession with establishing the authenticity of others’ Indigenous identity forecloses opportunities for creating modes of being-in-relation inclusive of a wider range of Indigenous lived experiences. *Indian Killer* condemns the effects of policies shaped by neoliberal governmentality, but simultaneously foregrounds the failure of particular modes of Indigenous belonging and community to offer sanctuary to those who are vulnerable to neoliberalism’s violence.

## Chapter 5: “Pointing inward, but facing outward”: Narratives of Solidarity in *Whispering in Shadows*

In Jeannette Armstrong’s *Whispering in Shadows*, the protagonist, Penny, remembers a formative childhood experience that models rooted engagement with the world. Two of her grandmothers place fir-boughs in a circle while Penny, still a child, looks on:

Each little bough’s tip was facing toward them and Tupa was speaking in the language saying, “That’s how they are laid in the lodge. In a full circle, always pointing inward, but facing outward.” And the other not looking down, but looking farther into the valley and saying, “And when this one is our age, will she remember which way they point?” Her voice was mixed with the moaning of the long swaying pines towering above them and the sorrowful trilling of robins calling for rain. (27)

The double trajectory of the boughs parallels Penny’s journey throughout the novel, and informs how she understands her relationship with the rest of the world as being grounded in her Okanagan home. Nevertheless, her grandmother’s fear that the young girl may not remember what they are teaching her is symptomatic of the specter of loss and uncertainty that haunts the novel.

Published in 2000, *Whispering in Shadows* is set within the context of international Indigenous activism in the Americas. Penny, an Okanagan woman, is fascinated from an early age with the interplay of colours and light, and spends

much of her time with her grandmother Susapeen, whom she calls Tupa. After separating from her partner Francis, with whom she has three children, and becoming disillusioned with jobs picking apples and stamping crates, she decides to enrol in a Fine Arts and Political Science degree at university. There she meets Julie, who becomes a lifelong friend, and begins to develop a critique of the exploitative practices of neoliberal economics. She participates in environmental protests and attends conferences focused on building international Indigenous solidarity and asserting Indigenous political agency at the global level with her new partner David. Infusing her art with her politics, Penny develops a complicated relationship with the economic realities of the art market. Years after moving back home to allow herself and her children a chance to reconnect with their extended family, Penny discovers she has developed cancer from the pesticides used on the apples she harvested as a young woman. Much of the novel consists of conversations between characters, a dialogic mode of storytelling that emphasizes and models engagement with others through negotiation and consensus-building. Interspersed throughout the novel are excerpts—poems, prose fragments, questions, meditations, and stories—from Penny’s journals, as well as letters she has written to her sister Lena and her friends. *Whispering in Shadows* is similar in subject matter to *Slash*, Armstrong’s first novel. *Slash* explores Indigenous activism in the 1960s and 1970s through the eyes of Tommy Kelasket, also known as Slash, who travels across Canada and the United States visiting different communities and participating in various activist events, such as the Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan and subsequent occupation of the Bureau of

Indian Affairs building in Washington. Whereas *Slash* depicts many of the watershed moments for Indigenous politics in Canada and the United States, *Whispering in Shadows* describes Indigenous activism in the 1980s and 1990s across the Americas.

This chapter examines how Penny represents her Okanagan home as the site of spiritual, emotional, theoretical, and intellectual formation that empowers activist and artistic modes of resistance to the processes of neoliberalism. Although Penny is committed to intellectual, spiritual, and political sovereignty of her people and critiques the exploitation wrought by neoliberal globalization, her articulation of her Okanagan world view is inflected with a romanticized conception of indigeneity. Armstrong's novel explores the complicated and ambiguous relationship between artistic and literary works and Indigenous activism. Penny's aesthetic practice is coloured by her fear that art is ultimately inadequate as a catalyst for social change. She worries that her artistic endeavours are dependent upon and complicit in the same system of capitalist exploitation that she wishes to critique. While the narrative is didactic and unapologetically activist, *Whispering in Shadows* is also haunted by Penny's fear of failure and loss.

### **Grounding Global Activism**

Referring to the work of Joy Harjo, Craig Womack makes the point that her texts demonstrate "that connection to one's tribal nation vitalizes one's writing. For Harjo's artistry to be effective, Creekness is essential, even though

this writer is pan-tribal in her concerns, lives away from Oklahoma, moves in many urban landscapes, and is influenced by feminism and other philosophies” (*Red* 224). Womack suggests that centering one’s work in one’s particular national and cultural context can generate the potential for a thorough critique of the processes of neoliberal globalization. This grounding also serves as the foundation for a cosmopolitanism (or “pan-tribal vision”) productive of solidarities across cultural, regional, linguistic and national differences.

Likewise, Armstrong’s novel presents images of culturally grounded critique and engagement. For example, Penny’s memory of her grandmothers plays a significant role in shaping her sense of self-identity. Reflecting on their deliberate placing of the fir boughs, Penny dreams about “A quiet tree filled valley filling her. A small green firbough there in her dreams, always. Over and over it is slowly being turned around. There is always something she doesn’t remember. Something lost. All that lingers is the smell of pine sap and green fir” (35). Her memory sustains her, and yet she experiences a sense of loss as her relationship to home changes. For Penny, this sense of loss manifests as a kind of nostalgia for the past, for things she believes that she has forgotten. Her attitude towards loss is quite different from Silko’s claim that things are forgotten because they are no longer meaningful to the lived experience of Indigenous peoples. Similarly, in *Indian Killer*, Marie’s cousin Reggie advocates in favour of certain kinds of loss, telling Mather that “Stories die because they’re supposed to die” (137). As these examples demonstrate, not all losses are necessarily to be

mourned, as the narratives and traditions forgotten might not serve contemporary needs of Indigenous communities.

In contrast, Penny's relationship to land and place is complicated by her belief that her knowledge of her home is limited and partial. Nevertheless, the valley's presence in her dreams reminds her of her origins: "This place is known to her somewhere deep inside. A coming home. She feels each colour. They are inside her. The colours of warmth, of light. They are a soft voice whispering into the wind. A giving of thanks. Being held close" (36). For Penny, this valley is synonymous with home on multiple registers—geographical, cultural, familial, and spiritual. The passage also plays on the word "being." Penny is being held close to and by this valley, and it gives her "Being." Her own being originates and is sustained here. Penny's art is rooted in a home that lingers in her dreams and in the colours of the valley that stay within.

Penny's activism and her artistic expression, like Armstrong's, are largely predicated upon her perception of her relationship to her Okanagan home. In an article entitled "Sharing One Skin," Armstrong expresses the fear that North Americans have become "'people without hearts'—people who have lost the capacity to experience the deep generational bond to other humans and to their surroundings [. . . ,] narrowly focused on their individual sense of well-being without regard to the well-being of others in the collective" (16). For her, one of the perils of late capitalism is the splintering and fracturing of human communities, the loss of connections to place, family, and the land. She believes that excessive individualism and a lack of relations with others are conditions that

make it “possible to violate and destroy others and their property without remorse” (16). In the face of neoliberalism’s assault on collectivity, building and sustaining practices of community are underlying threads in Armstrong’s novels, poetry, and non-fiction, as well as her work at the En’owkin Centre, an Okanagan post-secondary institution in British Columbia that emphasizes language and creative arts. Armstrong describes healthy communities as ones where people “move together emotionally to respond to crisis or celebration. They ‘commune’ in the everyday act of living. Being a part of such a communing is to be fully alive, fully human” (“Sharing” 16). Drawing attention to the importance of affective connections to her understanding of community, Armstrong argues that to lose shared emotional bonds with others is to lose what it is to be human. Community, as she characterizes it, consists in everyday encounters with others. Her emphasis on the notion of moving together indicates an understanding of community not as a static, monolithic totality, but rather as a process whereby people become and commune together.

Armstrong also privileges the role of kinship relations in the practice of Okanagan community, explaining, “The Okanagan word we have for ‘extended family’ is translated as ‘sharing one skin’. The concept refers to blood ties within community and the instinct to protect our individual selves extended to all who share the same skin” (“Sharing” 17). The idea of shared skin evokes a notion of a shared embodiment, where an ethic of care and responsibility must be expanded beyond the self. Armstrong broadens this imagery into the international context and argues that the solidarity “of peoples bound together by land, blood and love”

constitutes “the largest threat to those interests wanting to secure control of lands and resources that have been passed on in a healthy condition from generation to generation of families” (“Sharing” 17). It is in the daily lived experiences of people communing together with each other and their environment that Armstrong sees the roots of the kind of solidarity that threatens neoliberalism and serves as a model for building relations among Indigenous nations.

Armstrong’s commitment to Indigenous sovereignty over land, resources, and cultural and political practices, influences her opposition to environmental degradation, neoliberal capitalism, and ongoing corporate and state imperialism. She asserts, “being Okanagan helps me have the capacity to bond with everything and every person I encounter. I do not stand silently by. I stand with you against the disorder” (“Sharing” 17). Armstrong is careful to deny that she is a spokesperson for Okanagan peoples, but argues that being rooted in the specificity of Okanagan land and nation enables her to engage in issues of global justice and solidarity with more critical and affective understanding. Privileging the role her Okanagan heritage plays in her ability to empathize with others, Armstrong appeals to a somewhat romanticized discourse of indigeneity to mobilize solidarity with other non-Indigenous activists.

However, Armstrong avoids such discourses when she advocates for Indigenous sovereignty. She is also quite aware of the political implications of the terms “nations,” “peoples,” or “populations.” In another article entitled “Global Trade Targets Indigenous Gene Lines,” she writes that one of the reasons Indigenous peoples have not secured meaningful international recognition as

distinct peoples is because in UN documents, “they are defined as ‘populations’ of nation-states rather than ‘peoples or nations.’ This categorization allows those in control of the economic power structures to maintain control over indigenous land and resources” (12). Her observation suggests that although international institutions such as the UN might offer opportunities for asserting Indigenous sovereignty, they also have the potential to reinforce hegemonic colonial discourses.

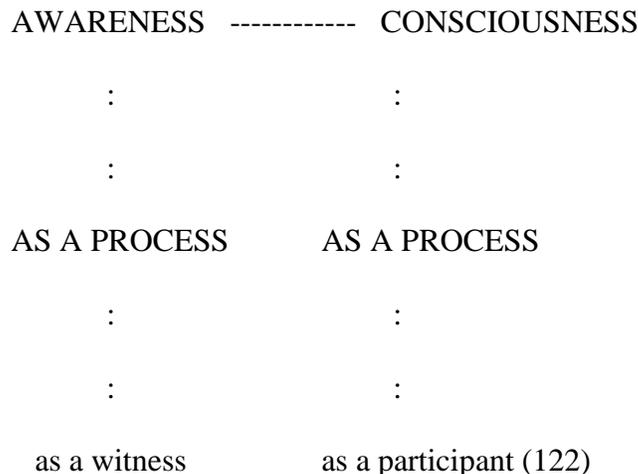
In an essay entitled “Land Speaking,” Armstrong outlines some of the philosophical principles that underlie her understandings of language, subjectivity, land, and community. “Through my language,” she writes, “I understand I am being spoken to, I’m not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language’s stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns” (181). Armstrong’s description of her creative process casts her role as a vehicle through which the stories of her land, language, and people can be expressed. Although her claim can be read as authorizing her to speak collectively and on behalf of others, a rhetorical strategy that runs the risk of marginalizing conflicting voices, her reference to the “many tongues and mouths” of her people indicates an openness to the many and different ways that these stories have been told and will be retold. Moreover, it is also an acknowledgement that language speaks us, insofar as it contributes to shaping our conceptions of place, self, and belonging.

In Armstrong's opinion, the Okanagan language encompasses the speaker in a world quite different from that of English: "In Okanagan, [. . .] language is a constant replay of tiny selected pieces of movement and action that solicit a larger active movement somehow connected to you by the context you arrange for it" ("Land" 190). She describes how the Okanagan language structures the speaker's experience of reality in such a way that it "becomes very potent with animation and life. It is experienced as an always malleable reality within which you are like an attendant at a vast symphony surrounding you, a symphony in which, at times, you are the conductor" ("Land" 191). Armstrong believes that the ontological framework through which Okanagan speakers engage with the world does not privilege fixed and discrete identities that can be separated easily from relations to others and social, cultural, political, and ecological contexts. Rather, she emphasizes the notions of movement, malleability, interchangeability, and the transformative potential of reality. Armstrong contends that the Okanagan language requires identities to be articulated in terms of relationships, noting, "[w]e have to identify *how* we relate to that person before we can talk about that person. [. . .] A person is always connected or related to something and we must always refer to that connection or that relationship" (Williamson 118). Her understanding of human beings as always already entangled in changing relationships to other individuals, communities, places, and events shapes how relationships are depicted in her fiction.

Armstrong's poem "We Are Alpha and Omega" posits subjectivity and identity as fluid and constructed. Alluding to the story of human creation in

Genesis, the speaker in the poem invites her interlocutor to help her “fashion a network of feeling / an assemblage of experiences” (*Breath Tracks* 95), articulating a notion of human existence that is rooted in relations to others. Designating “feeling” and “experiences” as the constitutive elements of what it is to be human, the speaker highlights the mutability of individual and collective identities. Moreover, with its description of human beings as “walking pile[s] of blood and bone” (95), the poem insists on a conception of *embodied* human subjectivity (co-)constituted in relation to others, to affect, and to experiences.

Similarly, in *Whispering in Shadows*, Penny draws attention to two different modes of being-in-relation to communities: those of the witness and the participant. In her diary, she creates the following diagram:



Her diary entries reveal an ongoing search for connection as Penny strives to articulate an interrelatedness that transcends the isolated and monadic existence constructed by neoliberal capital. She believes that the terms “witness” and “participant” designate modes of being-in-relation with those in the multiple communities to which she belongs. Although the notion of witnessing may

connote a sense of distance or removal, Penny conceives of it as a particular kind of relationship to community and justice. The witness shapes and is shaped by what she sees. For Penny, one is always becoming-witness, becoming-participant, becoming-human. She foregrounds the notions of witnessing and participating as crucial for the task of articulating a place for herself in relation to her Okanagan community and to the global struggles of Indigenous peoples and others marginalized by global capitalism. However, John's experience in *Indian Killer* suggests that Penny's assumptions about witnessing and participating are not necessarily applicable to everyone. John frequently sees himself as an outsider, as a witness. When he goes to an Indigenous basketball tournament with his adoptive father, John finds that being a witness in the stands does not automatically allow him to feel like he is part of the community. Likewise, he attends and participates in the powwow at the university, but these actions do not translate into a feeling that he belongs. His experience challenges Penny's valorization of witnessing as a mode of being-in-relation that enables a sense of belonging.

### **Artist and Activist**

*Whispering in Shadows* considers the roles of Indigenous artists within the field of cultural production and narrates Penny's desire to clear a space for herself that has not been predetermined by neocolonial discourses of identity and power. However, Penny's struggle to reconcile her aesthetic project with her activism complicates her understanding of her art's relationship to her culture and to issues of social justice. On the one hand, the novel suggests that Penny's fascination

with colour is deeply rooted in the valley where her grandmothers took her as a child. On the other hand, she becomes offended when a guest at her show, who happens to be an agent from another gallery, questions her choice to work in a “purely contemporary format,” elaborating, “it seems that most Native American artists incorporate or reconstruct symbolism from their heritage in their works” (126). The agent then remarks, “The depth you present could only have come from a deeply ecological view. It is very Native American, free of cliché” (127). The guest’s praise, not meant to offend, nonetheless inscribes Penny’s work into colonial discourses of “ecological” indigeneity and resorts to the very clichés the woman believes she is avoiding. The assumptions underlying her questions indicate a conception of Indigenous art that remains beholden to Eurocentric discourses that relegate Indigenous peoples to a pre-modern and exoticized past and ignore their contemporary concerns and lived realities. After the woman leaves, Penny expresses her anger at the fact that the agent “*just lumped me in, without realizing*” (127). She remains frustrated with interpretations of her work as always already functioning according to a predetermined and externally imposed set of assumptions about what constitutes First Nations art, as if it were an homogeneous category.

Making a similar point about Indigenous literatures, Armstrong insists upon an appreciation of the “many different cultures producing different kinds of literatures, and particularly different kinds of literatures as a result of contact with different kinds of peoples from Europe and other parts of the world” (Isernhagen 135–36). Armstrong’s acknowledgement of the hybrid cultural

influences on Indigenous literary works complicates her argument in “Land Speaking.” She claims to be telling the “same” stories the land has offered, but in addition, those narratives also take into account the land’s and the people’s relations with settlers of multiple cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Penny is likewise resistant to the notion that her cultural heritage somehow dictates how her artistic process works, rejecting the idea that her art is the predictable result of a combination of reconstructed Okanagan symbols and figures. She concedes that her “positioning of warm nature against hard science comes from [her] Indigenous world-view,” but maintains that her primary concern, “has been in the way colour moves [. . . and] speaks” (126). Recognising that her epistemological and ontological assumptions about the world have certainly been influenced by her Okanagan heritage, she maintains that her culture does not predetermine her aesthetic endeavours.

Nevertheless, Penny’s relation to her own art changes throughout the novel as she becomes more invested in the activist potential of aesthetic endeavours. When a curator wonders whether or not some of her pieces will sell, Penny responds that she wants to show them in order to “shock some sense into people” (203). The curator, however, asks her if she has thought of the desires of potential collectors: “They want something that can hang well. Just a teensy titillating and thought provoking” (203). As he makes clear, Penny cannot control her audience’s response to her work. Sold within the market for luxury goods, her compositions serve only to satisfy the desires of elites for a stimulating, exotic, yet provocative object of appreciation. The economic conditions underlying the

purchases of her works serves to safely regulate what she intended to be transgressive.

When Penny objects to this definition of the function of her art, the curator complicates his analysis of the relations between artist, art, and the market, explaining that the wealthy “set the parameters of what is defined as art, by what they are willing to pay a good price for. You can’t be so naive as to think otherwise. Art is a class statement. If it fetches a handsome price, it’s art. If it doesn’t, it may as well be graffiti” (204). The curator believes fundamentally that market prices determine what constitutes art. Penny’s pieces might provoke audiences, but if they will not sell, galleries and agents will have no financial incentive to show them. The curator reveals that Penny is caught within the same relations of power and dominance that she critiques, dependent upon the financial capital of the wealthy in order to have the space to create and display her works. Penny responds, “*He’s right! What the hell am I doing anyway? Riding on the backs of the suffering?*” (205). Penny fears that she is a hypocrite, profiting from the misery of others. Her conversation challenges her belief that there can be a direct relation between art and activism, and reveals how her agency as artist is regulated by economic and social relations. However, as Pierre Bourdieu points out, the power relations in the realm of artistic production also constitute “a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces” (30). The curator’s assertions force Penny to consider how to transform her conditions of artistic production when her position as a successful painter seems dependent upon those forces with an interest in maintaining the status quo. Penny’s

subsequent attempts to destroy her paintings by ripping and smashing them suggest that she has come to consider artistic endeavour a failure in terms of contributing to social change.

*Almanac of the Dead* also foregrounds the ambiguity of art's relation to activism and social justice. For example, Beaufrey and his associates use art as a way of capitalizing on the pain and suffering of others. After Seese's friend Eric commits suicide, David, the father of Seese's child and Beaufrey's lover, photographs the aftermath of his death, producing a series of pictures for public consumption. Private collectors are worried about potential lawsuits, but the critical response is positive. The consensus is that David "has found a subject to fit his style of clinical detachment and relentless exposure of what lies hidden in the flesh" (108). As *Almanac* reveals, there is nothing inevitable about the relation between art and justice. Beaufrey also markets videos of sex change operations, female circumcisions, and torture. Some of his movies depict actors, but others feature real victims. The trade in images of violence reveals the dehumanizing effects of commodifying bodies and the brutality inflicted upon them. The market for these videos involves the insertion of human bodies into a calculus of profit and pain, wherein human suffering generates substantial capital.

Penny's anger at her own complicity with neoliberal capital is symptomatic of the fraught position occupied by Indigenous cultural workers. Womack lists in detail the contradictory demands that face any Indigenous poet who

finds himself or herself writing stuff read by non-Indians yet trying to write for his or her tribe, having to engage in the business of selling books through agents and publishers yet striving for cultural integrity, often living away from home yet retaining one's primary landscape in imagination and memory and transforming it into art, preserving one's culture for future generations yet trying not to give away anything one's community believes should not be shared[.] (*Red* 245)

These conflicting pressures force Indigenous writers to negotiate issues of identity and community in relation to the requirements of institutions that often have vested interests in marketing them according to colonial tropes of indigeneity. Armstrong adds that the field of cultural production has historically been occupied by non-Indigenous writers and artists whose works have sustained the stereotypes and colonial discourses imposed upon Indigenous peoples. Acknowledging the damage that cultural appropriation and misrepresentation have caused, Armstrong refrains from categorically forbidding non-Indigenous writers from writing about Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, she says, "every time a space is taken up in the publishing world and the reading community, it means that a Native person isn't being heard and that has great impact" (Williamson 126). For Armstrong, changing the relations of power that structure the field of cultural production requires creating spaces from which Indigenous artists and critics can publish and speak.

Armstrong's relationship to art and writing is heavily invested in the political. As she explains, "Our task as Native writers is twofold. To examine the past and culturally affirm toward a new vision for all our people in the future" ("Disempowerment" 244). However, even as it narrates a vision of international Indigenous activism, *Whispering in Shadows* problematizes the assumption that art is a useful tool for social justice, as well as the effectiveness of art motivated solely, or principally, by activism. Penny's doubts suggest an authorial uncertainty about the capacity for novels to construct and imagine alternative visions. Notwithstanding Penny's sense that she has sanctioned the very suffering that her work has critiqued, the narrative emphasizes that Indigenous artists cannot escape the responsibilities entailed by their insertion into global market economies. Penny may not have chosen the economic conditions of possibility for her paintings, but she considers herself obligated to make the attempt to change them. Nonetheless, as it mounts its critique of neoliberal globalization, the novel worries at the effectiveness of that critique.

Her newfound appreciation for the tensions inherent in activist art provokes Penny to search for ways of strengthening the agency of Indigenous and other marginalized peoples internationally. As she travels to communities and conferences in Mexico and the United States, the novel foregrounds how her understanding of intellectual, economic, political, and cultural sovereignty changes as she encounters different ways of imagining inter-tribal modes of being and acting in common. Drawing upon the work of John Joseph Mathews, Warrior argues, "the process of sovereignty, whether in the political or in the intellectual

sphere, is not a matter of removing ourselves and our communities from the influences of the world in which we live.” He continues, “Western Christian culture and society is built upon the delusion that human beings as individuals and in social groupings can somehow overcome the influence of the nonhuman world and of decisions made by other humans” (114). For Warrior, the process of sovereignty demands acknowledgement of the fact that human communities and individuals do not exist or act in isolation, but rather are materially, culturally, and ecologically interdependent. Cherokee scholar Sean Teuton, writing about the “epistemological challenge” of “organizing disparate groups into a unified force of resistance,” asserts that attempts to impose and enforce uniformity have “drawn critique among scholars who question not only the exclusions required to streamline such a social movement but, more important, the unavoidable error in interpreting experience across different local communities” (203). Referring to the accomplishments and missteps of Third World decolonial movements, Teuton points out that attempts at expressing a common vision often (and perhaps inevitably) suppress the voices and desires of women and political dissidents, and discount the diverse aspirations of the many groups joined together. The key difficulty, as Teuton sees it, is to find ways of articulating common goals without erasing the culturally, historically, and environmentally contingent realities of distinct constituencies.

In Armstrong’s novel, Penny articulates, participates in, and bears witness to different visions of transnational Indigenous interdependencies while remaining rooted in Okanagan geographical, aesthetic, spiritual, and political space. Early in

the text, Penny is present when Manual Antonio Vitaro, an Aymara activist from Bolivia, speaks to a gathering at a Friendship Centre. One of his first acts is to add medicine from his land to the smudge: “As the man from Bolivia stands and then kneels to place his medicine on the top to the glowing sweetgrass, everyone in the circle stands at once. The sweet scented smoke rising suddenly has another muskier quality to it” (31). The act of combining the medicines indicates an ethic of hospitality and openness to others.<sup>7</sup> As a guest, Manual and his traditions are accorded a place among those of the local people. An urban space welcoming of people from different tribal backgrounds, the Friendship Centre is an example of what Fixico describes as “urban Indian organizations that fostered a form of pan-Indianism” (6) as well as an increasingly politicized awareness. The novel describes how, after the smudge, Wayne, a man who works at the Friendship Centre, “begins the prayer in his language. His voice is hardly audible. Others around the room also murmur in their language or in English” (31). The multiplicity of languages spoken speaks to a mode of being-in-common and praying-in-common that has no need of homogeneity. In his talk to the group, Manual emphasizes that they are joining “as Indigenous People in the *espiritual* traditions” (32), privileging spirituality as a foundation for sovereignty, identity, and solidarity among Indigenous peoples.

<sup>7</sup> The several Spanish misspellings (or typos) in the text—Manual instead of Manuel, Columbia instead of Colombia—might suggest that there are certain limitations to this reciprocity.

Manual identifies the contemporary period as a time of great spiritual unity, and bears witness to the fact that Indigenous peoples are working to make change:

Brothers and sisters from the North and the South are greet each other and talk. Small groups like now and big *encuentros*, is same, no? We have one agenda, no? *Pache Mama*. We are hers like the flowers. We are only healthy if *Pache Mama* is. This is what our political and economic agendas strive for. It is *Pache Mama* yearning to see all her flowers bloom healthy. (33)

His reference to *encuentros* evokes the Zapatista's first Encuentro, which, according to Subcomandante Marcos, was to be continued "on every continent, in every country, in every countryside and city, in every house, school, or workplace where human beings live who want a better world" (117–18). According to Manual, Indigenous peoples are linked by common relationships with the land. He challenges neoliberalism's drive to privatize lands, Indigenous knowledges, and forms of life, asserting that people belong to the earth and not vice versa. His metaphor of many flowers on one Earth is an attempt at imagining how being-in-common need not erase difference. However, it also evokes a naturalized and romanticized vision of Indigenous identity.

Later in the novel, Penny and David attend an international conference on Indigenous peoples. As Penny listens to the different presentations, the narrator describes how "The stories mesh and overlap as one story. Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, El Salvador, Columbia [sic], Mexico. Millions of brown people, despised,

abused, hungry, landless, reduced to slave-like labour. Disease and death” (148). Penny sees the shared experience of colonialism as a focal point of solidarity. However, this common history does not mean that the particular narratives of the speakers congeal into uniformity. Rather, the narrator’s use of the words “mesh” and “overlap” represents modes of combination that do not require the absence, loss, or erasure of any specific account. These are individual stories, community stories, international stories, and they are one story. After listening to the speakers, Penny comments, “When it’s all put together like that, it gives you a different perspective” (146). The juxtaposition of different accounts allows her to see the systemic relations that dispossess and oppress Indigenous peoples globally. She observes that the shared testimonies of other peoples’ experiences disputes the representation of instances of resistance as being “isolated events” in the media and highlight the ways that colonialism persists (146). As David points out, “Our peoples are still going through it. Think about it. Every road block and militant action is about stopping a dam, a clearcut, a pipeline, a mine, and so on. We’re still confronted with the same thing” (146–47). In other words, contemporary practices of neoliberalism reinforce neocolonial acts of dispossession and removal of Indigenous lands, cultures, and bodies. As she continues to attend presentations, Penny sees a common understanding of Indigenous peoples as belonging to “communities which are still connected to land in a healthy way as an opposing force to that system” (147). The speakers at the conference reinforce the necessity of relationships to land that reject an

understanding of ecological systems as subject to privatization and exploitation, and assert the idea that human and nonhuman beings belong to the Earth.

Through Penny, the novel raises questions about the links between the political and the aesthetic, and about the role of the Indigenous artist/activist in the global fields of power and of cultural production. In an early review of the novel, Suzanne Methot (Cree) criticizes what she sees as Armstrong's "tendency to lecture" and describes Penny as "an explain-it-all narrative device rather than a nuanced character." Nevertheless, Methot acknowledges that Armstrong "captures the necessary but excruciating aloneness of the artist" (35). Jeanne Perreault, whose review of the novel is more positive, mourns the fact that "[u]nfortunately, much of the political information comes to us as polemic," and claims that the balance between aesthetics and politics "falters only when someone rails about how immigration works for global capital, or what effect tourism has on local economies, or why mass industrialism paralyzes creativity" (108). Similarly, Louisa Sorflaten comments that *Whispering in Shadows* "is most definitely a vehicle for Armstrong's own political agenda, which sometimes results in rather didactic passages that read more like political tract and sociological analysis than prose" (387). This critical reception suggests that the novel's politics diminishes the aesthetic value of the text. To Methot, for example, Penny is little more than a literary dummy through whom Armstrong ventriloquizes. The fact that much of the dialogue in the novel takes the form of extended exchanges between characters certainly has the effect of making conversations seem more like speeches.

Given its didacticism, the claim can be made that *Whispering in Shadows* lacks the aesthetic sophistication of texts such as *Almanac* and *Indian Killer*. As well, Armstrong's text has received by far the least amount of scholarly attention among the texts that this project explores. In those terms, assuming that aesthetic value and importance are conferred by critical, scholarly attention and readership, Armstrong's novel has not had the success that Silko's, Hogan's and Alexie's texts have. The fact that her latest work, *Dancing with the Cranes*, is a children's book suggests that the activist aesthetics of texts such as *Slash* and *Whispering in Shadows* have not had the effect that Armstrong hoped for.

However, these criticisms of Armstrong's novel appear to presuppose that politics and art can and ought to be separated. Bourdieu's notion of the field of cultural production—"the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer" (42)—is helpful for unpacking the assumptions behind these critiques. Bourdieu identifies three general positions occupied by 19th century French literature: "'social art', 'art for art's sake', and bourgeois art,'" and explains that "social art" occupies a devalued position within the realm of cultural production, "at the intersection of the literary field with the political field" (166). He suggests that the marginalization of this kind of art is due as much to political and economic factors as to aesthetic and intellectual ones. With regard to Armstrong's novel, Methot, Perreault, and Sorflaten appear to imply that these three positions, 'social art,' 'art for art's sake,' and 'bourgeois art,' are the ones that structure the field of Indigenous literary production, and that texts that are "excessively" activist are therefore of lesser value. The charge that

the text's political content attenuates its aesthetic achievement presumes that the two categories are and ought to be separate. Moreover, making assumptions (rooted in Euroamerican literary traditions) about the proper relationship between politics and art can lead one to misread and silence Indigenous creative expression.

Armstrong's notion of oratory is a much more promising category through which to engage the interplay between activism and aesthetics in her novel. Armstrong opposes the idea of Indigenous oratory to Eurocentric categories of literary critical analysis: "In oratory, poetry happens in a prose situation. You have to draw on poetic tools when you're trying to tell a history or a political or social reality. Some of the most beautiful writing falls into this category but is often discarded as invalid because it is 'political' or 'sociological'" (Williamson 124–25). For Armstrong, oratory reveals as arbitrarily constructed the distinction between poetry and prose. Using poetic tools (cultural archetypes, metaphors, symbols) is therefore necessary for narrating a political reality. Aware of how Indigenous texts are judged by standards that are often externally imposed, Armstrong's point is that we ought to critique them according to how well they satisfy, expand, enrich, and play with the conventions of Indigenous literary forms.

*Whispering in Shadows*, then, can be read as a sustained experiment in oratory. The novel contains a blend of poetry and prose, and Armstrong's foregrounding of the conversation as a mode of storytelling roots the novel in the tradition of oratory. Many of the conversations in the novel may indeed be

didactic, but they also often draw attention to the characters' fundamental lack of confidence about their own positions or about solutions to different social and political problems. Conversations often end with the characters posing questions or admitting to being unsure about a given course of action. For example, Penny will tell her interlocutors, "I don't know" (110), "I don't know what to do with it" (189), and "This is something I don't understand" (259). Similarly, David acknowledges, "I don't have any answers" (188) when talking about how to deal with problems of poverty, ongoing colonialism, and Indigenous sovereignty. These sorts of phrases, as well as the generous use by different characters of "maybe" and "seems" in their arguments, comprise a pattern of reluctance on the part of the novel itself to provide any solutions to the problems it diagnoses, or to hold up any character as having a monopoly on wisdom or knowledge. Instead, this mode of dialogue acknowledges uncertainty, remains open to questioning, and constitutes a mode of becoming what James Youngblood Henderson calls (in the context of discussions amongst Indigenous peoples at Geneva on developing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) "people of a shared persuasion" (48).

To read *Whispering in Shadows* as an experiment in using elements of oratory is also to be aware of the pedagogical function of Indigenous "storywork," a term Jo-ann Archibald (Stó:lō) uses to explain the educational function of stories in Stó:lō and Coast Salish cultural contexts (3). For Archibald, storywork privileges the principles of "respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy," (33) and emphasizes making meaning from

narratives in an educational framework. Armstrong's first novel, *Slash*, originated as a Grade 11 curriculum project (Williamson 123). At many points throughout the text, the narrator, Tommy, describes how marches, roadblocks, and protests are primarily meant to educate the public "as to the real situation regarding Indian grievances" (*Slash* 142). Manina Jones argues that the critical discomfort in the attitudes of several critics towards that novel is produced by "points of friction between the perceived legitimacy of the political content of the novel, a personalized account of the origins and growth of anti-colonial Native activism since the 1960s, and its formal novelistic strategies" (par. 4). She maintains that "[t]he pedagogical pedigree of *Slash* is an element of the novel conspicuously neglected by academic critics, as if acknowledging its didactic purpose, or its status as juvenile (rather than "naive") fiction, or its intentional address to non-native audiences through the curriculum project, would be the most embarrassing recognitions of all" (par. 17). *Whispering in Shadows* also undertakes a form of storywork, engaging in a literary exploration of the social and political. To use Jones's term, the novel's "activist aesthetic" (par. 18) stems from its adherence to the principles of oratory.

### **Narrating Globalization**

In addition to imagining forms of solidarity among Indigenous peoples at the international level, *Whispering in Shadows* depicts Penny as caught up in the multiple and contradictory processes of globalization. Sorflaten and Heike Härting read Armstrong's novel through the lens of Arif Dirlik's notion of

“critical localism.” Sorflaten argues that this concept “can help to conceptualize the Aboriginal local as a complex site which has the potential to acknowledge and articulate the history of colonialism and to offer an alternative means of governance” (386). For Dirlik, the local is “a site both of promise and predicament” (85)—the promise of alternative practices of community, and the predicament of the local as a “site not of liberation but of manipulation” (96) by the forces of global capital. Using an argument similar to Warrior’s, Dirlik explains that any “preoccupation with the local that leaves the global outside its line of vision is vulnerable to manipulation at the hands of global capital which of necessity commands a more comprehensive vision of a global totality” (96).

*Whispering in Shadows* draws attention to this dilemma when Penny and other characters worry that the resources of Okanagan culture and knowledge alone might not be enough to overcome the global systems of consumption and power within which they are already enmeshed.

In the opening stanza of her poem “Globalization,” Penny refers vaguely to “something about breathing / in the dirty / buzz words” (151). The first lines emphasize the way that globalized relations of power are obscured by popular narratives that reduce their complexity to simplistic observations about the Disneyfication of the world. In addition, these lines highlight the way that global systems influence human bodies, as “buzz words” are described as fouling the air we inhale. Penny’s poem refers to “a global design / of conjure and conquer” (151). She links notions of conjuring and conquering, where particular (Eurocentric) articulations of global community are invoked through discourses of

global capitalism, and reified as practices of (continued) domination and subjugation. Penny's use of the word 'conjure' reveals the arbitrary and contingent nature of contemporary forms of economic, cultural, and political global relations, challenging the rhetoric of inevitability attached to the dominant narrative. Her poem concludes with an assessment of how dominant relations of power structure global and personal spaces:

the question of globe plotting  
 plot-izing the globe  
 marking into plots  
 person by person  
 as in story plots  
 as in house plots  
 as in evil plots  
 as in grave plots (152)

Penny conceives of globalization as consisting of marking, naming, knowing, and thereby claiming ownership over different territories, identities, and communities. These acts of division are characteristic of a neoliberal valorization of privatization and conceptualization of the world as divisible into atomized units that can be itemized and inserted into an economic calculus of efficiency and profit. The poem associates the isolation of narratives and individuals with evil and death, as the relations that bind peoples, narratives, and places together have been extinguished. According to Harting, Penny uses the term "globe plotting" to address "the dispossession of indigenous land through transnational corporations

and the NAFTA” and examine “the ecological and social ramifications of the restructuring of indigenous land under the guise of development and progress” (262). Härting draws attention to the international economic contexts within which the characters operate. The notion of globe plotting, as Härting reads it, addresses the material consequences of global capitalism and neoliberal practices of offshoring, deregulation, and financialization—focusing on the local, material, and embodied effects of what is often conceptually nebulous.

Like *Almanac of the Dead*, *Whispering in Shadows* links neoliberalism with the predatory consumption of Indigenous bodies. When Penny travels to Chiapas, she meets Emilio and Gerald, both of whom participate in the Indigenous working group in Geneva. Speaking of the detrimental effects of NAFTA, they identify the loss of protection for lands held in common by villages as one of the major concerns for the Mayan communities (169). Gerald explicitly refers to Americans as “vampires,” mentioning reports of the disappearing and kidnapping of the poor and Indigenous for the purposes of organ harvesting (166). The vampire metaphor becomes extended during Penny’s time in the market in Chiapas. She watches as tourists search for bargains amidst the poverty of the Mayan people and asks, “*What the goddamn hell kind of a world is this anyhow? Vultures on a cheap vacation, flocking here looking for a deal. It’s criminal. Is this what the American dream is about? To be able to do that? Be a tourist, peering with curiosity at the suffering?*” (169). Penny draws attention to how forms of tourism predicated on the consumption of goods, lands, bodies, and spectacles of suffering perpetuate the violence of poverty. The questions she

raises are specifically about the material consequences of a corporate drive for profit, and underscore her uncertainty about her own position as an artist representing poverty, oppression, and suffering in her works. Later in the novel, Penny compares her cancer with “the flesh-eating monsters” she remembers from Coyote stories she had been told (247). The notions of monstrosity and vampirism draw explicit reference to the destructive material effects that capital has on the bodies of Indigenous peoples.

As she critiques the mobility that enables tourists to regard suffering as a spectacle for their own consumption, Penny is aware of her own position of relative privilege. After all, as an activist, she is invested with a mobility that enables her to enter and to leave spaces that others cannot. David tells her that the only way to act ethically in such a position is to be a witness: “You witness it. You tell about it. You do what you can. If you can” (170). The poverty she sees in Chiapas anticipates the poverty she encounters in Los Angeles, which assaults her senses:

People move around them trance-like. They jostle and shuffle past. Eyes vacant with misery or crazy with pent up rage. Homeless people, some standing absently begging, others wrapped in a dirty blanket or simply sprawled against the buildings take up every space available on the sides of the street. Two blonde, stringy children walk among the homeless, aimlessly turning over every promising looking piece of litter. The stench of piss and rotting garbage is overwhelming. Cars going past blare their horns angrily

in the slow crawl of choked traffic. The sharp smell of exhaust fumes overrides the faint traces of ocean salt in the air. (197)

The sights, smells, and sounds underline the disposability of unwanted populations. People on these streets have been discarded and reduced to sprawled, stringy bodies that take up space amidst the refuse of late capitalism. In contrast to the homeless in *Indian Killer*, who have created a community for themselves, the “vacant” eyes that Penny encounters suggest an absence of social relations. Overwhelmed, Penny tells David that the poor have been condemned to a “living death” (198), anticipating Achille Mbembe’s use of the term “death-worlds.” Mbembe describes these spaces as “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (“Necropolitics” 40). For him, the creation of such sites is the result of a form of sovereignty whose project is “*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*” (14). Mbembe examines primarily the plantation, the camp, and the colony to theorize the notion of death-worlds, but Penny draws attention to the ways in which neoliberal economic processes create places of living death in both the Global North and South. The instrumentalization of human subjects takes different forms depending on local, geographical and historical contingencies, constituting, according to Mbembe, “the *nomos* of the political space in which we still live” (14). In other words, spaces such as ghettos, refugee camps, prisons, and the sites of environmental disasters are not exceptional, but rather evidence of the successful functioning of the system itself.

Penny interprets these appalling conditions as a form of sacrifice to the wealthy: “Sacrifice as surely as though each child, woman and man is being lead to a bloody alter” (199). Those bodies that she witnesses among the garbage, consumed and disposed of in the same manner as used and worn commodities, constitute a sacrifice required by capital in order to sustain and expand profit margins. As Härting points out, Penny’s observations reveal how “globalization erodes the classical division between economic centres and peripheries” and “no longer polarizes along the lines of colonially established geographies” (270). These moments where the text focuses on Chiapas and Los Angeles draw attention to the ways that the effects of neoliberal globalization disrupt and challenge distinctions between First and Third Worlds. The sacrifices required by global capital need to be enacted at “home” as well as abroad.

For Penny, the systemic violence manifested by poverty and environmental degradation caused by industrial toxins constitutes a form of war. As she discusses her own cancer with her friend Tannis, she explains, “death is death. From cancer or from guns. We should have the basic right and freedom to live without that kind of threat hovering over us. People have to stand up and fight it like a war. We are at war” (246). By conceptualizing the deaths wrought by cancer as a mode of warfare, Penny again exposes the underlying violence of neoliberal deregulation. The imagery of war is a common thread running throughout the texts in this project: *Almanac* ends with Angelita’s army preparing to march north; in *Indian Killer*, John’s removal from his birth mother is narrated as an act of war; and in *Solar Storms*, the army is called in to protect corporate

interests. In Armstrong's novel, pollution and poverty are depicted as acts of war that contribute to the creation of zones of death, where the slow violence of ecological degradation and exploitation culminates in disease and the forced removal of Indigenous peoples.

### **Community as Practice**

As it mounts a sustained critique of the violence of economic globalization, and of the consequences of corporate deregulation and environmental degradation, *Whispering in Shadows* also narrates modes of Indigenous sovereignty, resistance, and community-building predicated upon the increased opportunities for networking offered by globalized transportation networks and information technologies. The work carried out by David and other diplomats at the Working Group on Indigenous Populations is predicated on a globalized system of transportation, as well as the international dissemination of information through world-wide and local communication networks. With respect to Chiapas, the novel imagines and represents Indigenous alternatives in terms of economic and trade arrangements that respect sovereign Indigenous lands, cultures, bodies, and spiritualities. Emilio proposes a fair trade agreement that would see the export and resale of coffee and textiles from Indigenous groups in Mexico to Indigenous groups in the United States for shared profit. Similarly, later in the novel Penny mentions that David is heavily involved in setting up Indigenous fair trade networks with several different communities (279). Emilio characterizes this kind of sovereign fair trade agreement as “an association based

on a spiritual work of mutual fair benefit. A unity of trust and assistance” (183). Linking the spiritual to the economic, his proposal transforms existing global technologies and systems of trade into what Sorflaten calls “potentially liberating channels of Indigenous self-governance and trade” (395). Nonetheless, as Silko’s *Almanac* makes clear, such fair trade agreements also have the potential to be co-opted by neoliberal capital.

Sorflaten argues that Penny realizes that “the potential for Indigenous recovery and mediation is not about linking global solutions to local problems, but rather in linking local solutions to global problems” (394). Penny recognizes that solutions must come from Indigenous communities and subjects who are in relation to specific places, and cannot be imposed uniformly from above. As she participates in these international exchanges, Penny highlights how globalized networking can be carried out in a liberatory way towards ends that do not necessarily perpetuate the exploitation, consumption, and instrumentalization of Indigenous lands, cultures, spiritualities and bodies but that instead open and maintain what Sorflaten describes as “transethnic” networks for Indigenous solidarity, networks that include Indigenous peoples and other cultural and ethnic constituencies.

Throughout the novel, characters use images such as the adding of different medicines to the same smudge, overlapping stories, and many flowers on the same earth to envision possibilities for transnational Indigenous solidarity and activism. Likewise, David strives to elaborate his sense of human relationships in the face of neoliberalism. According to David, “Somehow, together as human

beings, we have become a force. A large movement of change. Maybe change which is now inevitable” (188). His language is humanist but anticipatory; it is a humanism that refuses to name, and thereby totalize, recognizing that this movement together is a process continuously taking place. He goes on to say, “We are the ones who resist the insane destruction. More and more non-native people stand with us and resist, too. Together, we are millions strong, world-wide. A mystical force, if we maintain the focus” (188). David echoes Manual’s and Emilio’s emphasis on spirituality as a foundation for sovereignty and solidarity, suggesting that political, economic, cultural, spiritual, and ecological spheres are not discrete and separate entities. Instead, they are entangled, interrelated and interdependent.

Just as David conceptualizes human togetherness as a praxis that can be a force for resistance and change, he also ascribes agency to the world, saying, “The world has to transform itself. It never stops doing that” (239). This comment should be read in the context of Penny’s conception of the human “as ‘natural environment’” (84), and her claim that “Our own bodies are part of the natural world. It’s part of what we have conjured on the earth” (247). Penny’s cancer is a clear reminder of the embodied and embedded relationship humans have with their environment, as the toxins in the plant life around her become a part of her as well. The world transforming itself, then, is doing so in a continual relation with the human bodies belonging to it. However, David’s observation evokes a sense of passivity similar to that advocated by Angelita and the Barefoot Hopi in *Almanac*. Although he considers human agency to be an integral part of the

world's self-transformation, his words also have the potential to enable and justify inaction.

Notwithstanding David's hopefulness, Penny's death and her doubts about her own efficacy as an artist working toward social justice haunt the novel with the specter of loss and failure. In her final letter to her friend Gard, which is titled "LETTER NEVER SENT," Penny expresses regret about giving up her painting, writing "*I knew that putting images out there changes the world, yet I feared the shadows. I know now that one should not fear them. The story must be told to be understood and changed*" (292). At the end of her life, Penny appears to have regained a faith in the power of art to effect changes in the real world. However, the fact that the letter in which she expresses this faith remains unsent indicates that she still harbors doubts. Her oscillation between hope and fear stays unresolved at the novel's end.

Just as Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* privileges networked and relational modes of being-in-common, so does *Whispering in Shadows* valorize networks and alliances. In a prose poem, Penny writes, "this is the time in our history of the Americas as we walk from all directions to encircle this sacred fire creating the network of grandmother spider" (288). Penny uses the language of kinship to designate the web of relations among Indigenous nations across the Americas, referring to others as "grandchildren," "brothers and sisters," "relatives," and "ancestors." She anticipates the continuation of a shared movement upon and commitment to "warm lands which our blood together claims that which our cell memories celebrate each time we dance to this rhythm we all know so well and

the gateway to the new world is ahead” (288–89). Through her appeals to “blood” and “cell memories,” Penny emphasizes an embodied connection to a land that reciprocates human actions and to which bodies return; her poem evokes her notion of human beings as part of the environment. The poem’s emphasis on walking, mixing, moving, and dancing underscores the ongoing nature of the negotiation of solidarity and extended kinship. Similar to Armstrong’s use of the notion of “sharing one skin,” Penny extends the notion of family to ground her conception of transnational Indigenous community.

In her keynote address “The Aesthetic Qualities of Aboriginal Writing,” Armstrong articulates what she sees as the responsibilities of Indigenous writers: “we have a place in our community, as ones who bring the pieces together, whatever those pieces may be, to make a picture that others can then see, creating new pictures of the pieces left to us of all cultures, the place of one who is healer, historian, medicine maker, and prophet” (30). Armstrong’s focus on creating “new pictures” by using pieces from “all cultures,” as well as her emphasis on the “construction of ourselves within the contemporary” (30), are elements that weave their way through *Whispering in Shadows*. This is a novel that is emphatically about the construction of Indigenous identities, communities, solidarities, and practices within the contemporary. Additionally, it foregrounds artistic and activist efforts for Indigenous cultural, political, economic, and environmental sovereignty at the turn of the twenty-first century. Although it casts doubt upon the relationship between art and social justice, the novel gives us a vision of the potential of international solidarity movements among Indigenous peoples.

## Conclusion

The texts I have examined throughout this study emerged from within the political and social contexts of the 1980s and 1990s, and are influenced by earlier events in the history of international Indigenous activism. Referring to the Canadian context, Onondaga scholar David Newhouse considers the 1969 White Paper to be a key catalyst for profound change in Indigenous politics. The White Paper was a proposal by then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien, to abolish the Indian Act and eliminate legal “Indian” status. The opposition from Indigenous peoples across Canada was swift and vocal. As Newhouse argues, “The post-1969 period was a critical and profound one in aboriginal history, during which we can begin to see the marshalling of Aboriginal political energy into a strong force for change” (289). In particular, Cree leader Harold Cardinal, who was instrumental in forming the National Indian Brotherhood in 1967, which became the Assembly of First Nations in 1982, critiqued the White Paper in his 1969 book *The Unjust Society*, writing that it amounted to little more than “cultural genocide” (1). The White Paper was formally retracted in 1971, but it remains, in Newhouse’s words “a potent political symbol within Aboriginal politics” (291). The year 1969 was a significant moment in the United States as well. On November 20, a group calling itself the Indians of All Tribes launched an occupation of Alcatraz, which would last for nineteen months and help catalyze the Red Power movement. That same year also saw the publication of Vine Deloria Jr.’s landmark *Custer Died for Your*

*Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, wherein he denounced the colonial legacy of government policies and relations with Indigenous nations.

The formation of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) in 1975 is another key moment in the development of contemporary international Indigenous activism. The previous year, the International Indian Treaty Council was formed and issued a document entitled “Declaration of Continuing Independence,” which, claims Chadwick Allen in his 2002 monograph *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts*, “situates the plight of contemporary American Indian nations within a history of international and ongoing colonialism” (*Blood* 193). Allen contends that the formation of the WCIP the following year constitutes “a useful marker, although not an exact marker, of a shift that occurred in the tenor of indigenous activism and writing in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and the United States” (*Blood* 195). The Council’s articulation of the shared relationships between Indigenous peoples internationally was, according Allen, “a genuinely new step” in the conceptualization of global indigeneity (*Blood* 196).

The driving force behind the WCIP was George Manuel, a Shuswap leader who in 1970 had been elected the president of the National Indian Brotherhood in Canada. At the end of the first conference, which took place in Port Alberni, British Columbia in October 1975, the WCIP issued a “Solemn Declaration” which articulates common Indigenous experiences, worldviews, and goals without foregrounding any particular cultural identity. The document reads in part:

Now, we come from the four corners of the earth,

we protest before the concert of nations that,  
“we are Indigenous peoples, we who have a  
consciousness of culture and peoplehood on the  
edge of each country’s borders and marginal to  
each country’s citizenship.” (Qtd. in Allen, *Blood* 208)

In this statement, the delegates develop a narrative definition of Indigenous peoples based upon a shared “consciousness of culture and peoplehood.” Their statement also foregrounds the fact that their audience is composed of international states—the “concert of nations.” Allen also draws attention to how the declaration’s negotiation of a shared Indigenous heritage has the effect of eliding markers of local specificity, which makes it easier, he claims, “for settler governments, multicultural or Third World coalitions, and other entities either to ignore the Solemn Declaration’s narrative definition or to absorb it into their own agendas” (*Blood* 216).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, which had its inaugural meeting in August 1982, played a more prominent role in facilitating Indigenous international activism. The 1980s also saw several key pieces of legislation passed in the United States and Canada. In June 1985, the Canadian Parliament passed Bill C-31, an *Act to Amend the Indian Act*, which eliminated several discriminatory provisions of the Indian. In 1988, the United States Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which established a regulatory and jurisdictional framework to govern gaming on Indigenous lands. In 1990, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)

was passed, which requires federal agencies and institutions to return Indigenous cultural items, such as human remains and sacred objects, to their communities of origin. NAGPRA also makes it an offense to traffic in Indigenous human remains.

Gerald Vizenor's 1991 novel *The Heirs of Columbus* in particular is influenced by these legislative changes in the United States. *Heirs* follows the activities of Columbus's descendants as they reveal Columbus's Mayan ancestry, run a casino in "simulated caravels" (*Heirs* 6), seek to repatriate the remains of their ancestors, create genetic therapies based upon "the genetic code of tribal survivance and radiance, that native signature of seventeen mitochondrial genes that could reverse human mutations, nurture shamanic resurrection, heal wounded children, and incite parthenogenesis in separatist women" (132), and establish a sovereign Indigenous nation at Point Assinika, between Washington State and Vancouver Island. Vizenor's novel is a direct challenge to the hegemonic narrative of Columbus's arrival and civilization of the Americas. By rewriting Columbus as a person of Mayan descent who is actually returning home rather than exploring new lands, Vizenor subverts the conventional discovery narrative.

*Heirs of Columbus* also responds to and challenges neoliberal entrepreneurial subjectivity and the commodification of indigenous cultural traditions and artifacts. Initially, the heirs seem to be ideal neoliberal subjects, with Stone Columbus making an enormous profit off of his casinos:

The *Santa María Casino* paid high stakes to hundreds of winners and earned millions besides, and the tax free market caravel was a second gold mine. Stone earned more than a million dollars a season,

and there were four summers in the name of the great explorer. Even the restaurant caravel turned a profit on pretentious bad taste, a commodities menu of fry bread, oatmeal, macaroni, and glorified wild rice. (*Heirs* 11)

As he sets up his casino, Stone Columbus is acutely aware of the economic potential of free markets and instrumentalization of Indigenous culture. He is participating in forms of sovereignty and agency that are highly valued in Western culture. Although it appears that Columbus is participating fully in neoliberal institutions, when he goes on the radio to discuss his lineage and ancestry, his non-Indigenous interlocutors are unable to understand him. In his conversation with Admiral Luckie White on the *Santa María*, Stone is consistently interrupted by commercial breaks from the “wise companies that buy our time and make the truth possible in the dark” (*Heirs* 10). These interruptions highlight how neoliberalism structures and manages the forums within which Indigenous peoples can speak.

After four summers of operation, a thunderstorm destroys the casino, sinking the *Santa María* on a granite reef. After the casino is destroyed, the heirs begin to engage in actions that challenge the neoliberal commodification of culture. Stone’s lover, Felipa Flowers, meets with Doric Michéd, a member of the Brotherhood of American Explorers, who “pretended to be tribal when his timeworn crossblood heirs served his economic and political interests” (*Heirs* 47). Felipa wishes to discuss the return of medicine pouches that had been stolen by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. According to Felipa, “The medicine pouches are tribal

stories, not capital assets” (*Heirs* 46). She challenges the notion that tribal artifacts can be commodified and owned. On the other hand, Doric represents the worst impulses of neoliberalism. His worldview is influenced by the motto of the Brotherhood to which he belongs: “Explore new worlds, discover with impunities, represent with manners, but never retreat from the ownership of land and language” (*Heirs* 50). The Brotherhood’s emphasis on the individual ownership of land and culture inhibits the construction of relationships of interdependence and mutual responsibility. The fact that Doric has Indigenous heritage illustrates that just because one is Indigenous does not mean that one cannot be co-opted by neoliberalism.

The creation of an independent and sovereign Indigenous nation at Point Assinika is a direct challenge to the United States and Canada as well as other tribal communities. As Chaine Riel, a private investigator who is hired by a tribal government to spy on the new nation discovers, Stone decides to issue tribal identity cards for tribal artists “based on the recognition of peers, rather than the choice of tribal politicians.” Riel reports that Stone’s position is that ““if it’s so easy to fake blood then why bother with the measures?” His point is to make the world tribal, a universal identity, and return to other values as measures of human worth, such as the dedication to heal rather than steal tribal cultures” (*Heirs* 162). Stone’s decision challenges the privileging of genetic heritage as a marker of indigeneity, and presents cultural and social affiliations as more desirable. His idea of cultivating a universal tribal identity can be read as an attempt to build

cross-cultural and international solidarity for the purposes of healing the effects of a colonial legacy.

At the same time, universalizing articulations of Indigenous identity can serve to disempower particular communities. In an essay published in 2007 entitled “‘If I Close My Mouth I Will Die’: Writing, Resisting, Centring,” Māori scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville argues, “One crucial form of resistance to neoliberal globalisation is our continued insistence on specificity, which both asserts and represents a clear challenge to neoliberalism’s insistence on the infinite substitutability of one person (or neoliberal subject) for another” (86). Although Stone Columbus is challenging colonially imposed racial classification schemes based upon blood quantum by distributing identity cards to those who claim cultural and/or social affiliative bonds, his appeal to the notion of a universal identity runs the risk of homogenizing cultural distinctiveness and difference.

As this project has demonstrated, throughout the 1990s, Indigenous writers engaged in imagining ways to articulate global solidarities without excluding, exploiting, or disenfranchising others. In a prose piece published in 1997 entitled “Choctalking on Other Realities,” and included in her 2005 collection *Evidence of Red*, LeAnne Howe describes an unnamed narrator’s experience as an academic tourist in Israel. While there, she has a conversation with a Jewish shopkeeper who claims that her great-grandmother was a Cherokee, and she shares with her the story of Choctaw removal to Oklahoma. She also speaks with Palestinian women from the Gaza Strip who show the American academics teargas canisters

with “MADE IN USA” written on them. Some of the tourists offer the women bags of used clothes and shoes also marked “MADE IN USA” (55). The speaker’s first encounter is marked by the exchange of stories and histories that establish a relationship between her and the Jewish woman. Her second encounter makes prominent her sense of complicity in an ongoing colonial relation where the consumer items offered as charity are produced by the same country whose arms exports sustain the poverty and occupation experienced by the Palestinians in the first place. A few days later, the narrator witnesses a group of Palestinian women staging a protest that is broken up by Israeli soldiers, a sight that evokes childhood memories of her experience attending kindergarten at a church school. In the ensuing chaos, an Arab member of the Knesset arrives and attempts to calm the crowd and the soldiers. Although she does not hear him, the speaker imagines he might have offered this prayer:

“Save her. She is the Jewish women shot to death by the Germans at Babi Yar.

“Save her. She is the Palestinian women shot to death by the Jews at Deir Yassin.

“Save her. She is the Vietnamese women shot to death by the Americans at Mi Lai.

“Save her. She is the Mayan women shot to death by the Mexicans in Chiapas.”

“Save her. She is the Black women shot to death by the Ku Klux Klan in Alabama.”

“Save her. She is The People, our grandmothers, our mothers, our sisters, our ancestors, ourselves.

“Save us.” (57)

Echoing the evocation of solidarities in Subcomandante Marcos’s response to the Mexican government, in this imagined prayer, Howe narrates a vision of fellowship between women the world over confronted by war, racism, colonialism, and neoliberalism. The passage exemplifies a continuing trend in Indigenous literatures and politics towards the articulation of convergences and interdependencies that challenge the multiple oppressions and incarnations of neoliberal globalization. It is also a call to action, a series of imperative commands to save those in need, who, at the end of the passage, become “us.” Howe’s concept of Chocktalking is both an assertion of sovereignty and an announcement of presence on the world stage; it is a mode of address that subverts and resists hegemonic Euroamerican assumptions and presuppositions about the world, affirming Chocktaw experience and epistemology as relevant and apposite to contemporary global realities.

Throughout this study I have argued that it is crucial to explore how Indigenous texts have imagined and critiqued modes of being-in-relation in opposition to neoliberalism in the 1990s. One of the key differences in terms of Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* and Jeanette Armstrong’s *Whispering in Shadows* is the way in which international activism is portrayed. *Almanac of the Dead* privileges tribal internationalism as a mode of what Silko calls “being with other beings” that maintains a commitment to land and Indigenous sovereignty while

building relationships with peoples across the planet who confront the destructive and predatory practices of the Destroyers. For example, the meeting room 1212 at the International Holistic Healers Convention at the end of the novel is clearly taking place outside of the accepted institutional bodies such as the UN that are sanctioned by colonial states and recognized as legitimate internationally. The meeting in *Almanac* is an example of Indigenous leaders, activists, and other marginalized peoples asserting agency for themselves and bypassing the accepted forums for dissent managed by colonial states.

On the other hand, in *Whispering in Shadows*, Penny and David's activism involves participating in organizations such as the United Nations. Their activism, therefore, takes place within a context where the rules for engagement and participation, which regulate who can speak, for how long, where, and when, are determined by the same colonial states that continue to oppress Indigenous peoples. In light of critiques about the efficacy of international institutions as avenues whereby Indigenous peoples can challenge colonial structures, it is worth examining how viable global alliances are when they are enacted within and mediated by these institutional structures.

In 1972 and 1973, when the events in *Solar Storms* take place, the only international convention regarding the treatment of Indigenous peoples was the International Labour Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention No.107 of 1957, which was later revised in 1989. Although this convention offered some protection to Indigenous populations, Article 12 allowed for the removal of Indigenous populations from their land in cases where required

by “national laws, national security issues, national economic development, or for the health of the indigenous populations” (International Labour Organization). When the people of Two-Town confront the BEEVCO corporation, they do so outside of explicitly sanctioned modes of resistance. In response, the police and the army are brought in, and the protesters are subjected to coercive state violence. At the same time, the activists also utilize state-sanctioned modes of dispute resolution such as the courts. Although the legal process takes much longer and some characters do not live to see its successful resolution, the court decision is what ultimately gives the people of Two-Town an injunction against BEEVCO, preventing it from continuing to construct dams in Indigenous territory. However, because many dams are already constructed, at the end of the novel the waters to rise and force people to leave their homes at Adam’s Rib. Throughout *Solar Storms*, Angel’s activism is rooted in her experience of being entangled in multiple relationships with the people and the landscape around her. For her, being-in-relation means expressing solidarity based upon a shared kinship and commitment to the land. At the same time, the internal struggles among the activists and differences of opinion about how best to oppose the dam construction demonstrate that being-in-relation not the same as being homogenous.

*Indian Killer* stands apart from the other texts in terms of its conceptualization of community and being-in-relation. Alexie’s novel narrates the violence imposed upon urban Indigenous communities through neoliberal policies and ordinances. In the face of intensified gentrification, unemployment, and

policies of urban removal, the text's characters strive to strengthen bonds of kinship and belonging through the reclaiming of space for powwows and cultural sovereignty. However, John's death at the end foregrounds how even these modes of community can exclude. John is clearly unable to conceptualize community and belonging outside of genetically-based categories. His genetic heritage is the only sure thing in his conception of the world, but it fails to allow him to connect with others. His participation in powwows and cultural events is always at a distance, and he dismisses his adoptive kinship ties and his social identity. He cannot connect with his parents, and he cannot bring himself to talk (although he wants to) with Marie or anyone else that he meets whether it be his coworkers or the Indigenous homeless.

One of the key elements of all four novels I have engaged with in this project is the theme of neoliberal violence. Each of these narratives reveals how violence underlies the heart of neoliberal desires to reduce cultural institutions and traditions to a calculus of economic rationality. To reduce cultural and spiritual traditions and relationships with the land to the status of commodities is to inflict a great violence upon Indigenous communities. These texts seek to reveal and critique that violence. In *Almanac*, neoliberal violence manifests itself in the practices of the Destroyers, who are engaged in trafficking weapons, drugs, and bodies, and dispossessing Indigenous peoples on their land. Silko's novel offers a vision of armies of Indigenous peoples moving North from South America and groups of homeless veterans seeking to reclaim the land from colonial powers and restore it to Indigenous peoples. The imagery of war is also present in the opening

pages of *Indian Killer*, when John imagines how as a baby he was taken from his mother. John's identification of his removal as an act of war illustrates how his self-concept is rooted in this originary act of violence. The war imagery that infuses these novels is rooted in the background violence of neoliberal policies that seek to disempower, dispossess, and disappear Indigenous peoples from their lands and cultural heritage, which are manifestations of a kind of slow war that persistently afflicts the characters in these texts. In *Solar Storms*, the state violence imposed upon Indigenous peoples is evidence of how neoliberal policies are imposed upon populations that resist corporate expansion and exploitation. One of the consequences of neoliberalism's equating of values of freedom, human rights, and progress with economic development is that relationships with the environment are articulated in terms of potential economic profit, which does not always correspond to the Indigenous understandings of their relation with the land.

By focusing on how Indigenous texts engage with issues of globalization and neoliberalism, I have sought to explore how issues of Indigenous sovereignty and community were narrated in the 1990s. It is my hope that this research will complement other theoretical approaches by providing insight into how Indigenous writers have narrated resistance to neoliberalism and also how they have depicted the complex ways in which Indigenous stories construct modes of being-in-relation and conceptualize social justice. The texts this study has engaged share a faith in the power of literary and aesthetic representation to influence political discourse. The almanac in Silko's novel, for example, plays a

central role in the preservation of peoplehood and in offering assistance in combatting the Gunadeeyah. In *Whispering in Shadows*, Penny questions, but ultimately affirms the power of art to bear witness to the destructive policies imposed upon Indigenous peoples. Of course, there is a wide gap between the ability of narratives to bear witness or truth-tell, and subsequent transformative action in the political sphere, and these texts problematize the notion that narrative is adequate to inciting social change. Nevertheless, despite this acknowledgment, these novels continue to attest to how narrative depictions of injustice and resistance are necessary for imagining other ways of being, constituting examples of how, to use Spivak's phrase, literature "figures the impossible" (112). I take Spivak's words as indicative of how literary representations offer a way of transcending and challenging hegemonic discourses of identity and community. By investigating how Indigenous texts narrate forms of collectivity that do not hesitate to address and problematize considerations of exploitation, sovereignty, and injustice while exploring the formation of international and inter-tribal alliances, this project attempts to develop a nuanced view of how Indigenous writers narrate identities and relationships.

It is noteworthy that although most of these works retain a certain faith in the power of narrative to effect social change, a thread of failure and uncertainty haunts them. A relevant question to pose at this juncture is thus how successful have these texts been at highlighting the role of Indigenous resistance to neoliberalism within the context of other movements? Two recent popular movements—Occupy Wall Street and Idle No More—shed some light on the

relevance of these texts for the present moment. Occupy Wall Street, described by Jodi Dean as “the most exciting event on the US political left since 1968” (“Claiming”), and inspired by popular revolutions in the Middle East, as well as the Indignados movement in Spain, began in the United States when protesters occupied Zucotti Park in New York in September 2011. Wendy Brown also links its origins to “the colossal failure of the Obama presidency to place even a light rein on neoliberal de-regulation or install a modest interval of separation between Wall Street and Washington” (“Occupy”). Quickly capturing the imagination of activists across the United States and internationally, Occupy sites began to spring up in many cities. The central grievance of the movement, as expressed in the phrase “We are the 99%,” is economic injustice. Dean argues that “the slogan asserts a collectivity. It does not unify this collectivity under a substantial identity—race, ethnicity, religion, nationality. Rather it asserts it as the “we” of a divided people, the people divided between expropriators and expropriated” (“Claiming”). As she explains, one of the strengths of the movement is its appeal to a collectivity grounded in common experiences of economic injustice.

Brown delineates some of the paradoxical effects of three decades of neoliberal policies, as evidenced by the emergence of Occupy Wall Street:

If neoliberal *economic* policies eliminating state benefits and public goods while plumping the nests of the rich have paradoxically joined the fates of heretofore diverse and often divided generations, job sectors, races and classes, neoliberal *political* policies aimed at

breaking social solidarities have similarly paved the road for broad-based democratic uprising. (“Occupy”)

Each of the texts examined in this project highlights the challenges neoliberal policies pose to Indigenous communities and the expressions of social solidarity that emerge in response. In Alexie’s *Indian Killer*, the violence of urban governmentality plays a large role in limiting the opportunities for someone like John Smith to conceive of himself as belonging to any of the various communities he encounters. However, Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* and Armstrong’s *Whispering in Shadows* both privilege the ways in which broad coalitions can join together in opposition to colonial and economic injustice.

Although the Occupy movement has played a key role in turning public attention to issues of economic inequality, corporate exploitation, and the common good, the politics of the word “occupy” often go unexamined in mainstream and activist discourses. The strategy of occupation is directed toward targets such as banks and corporations, but in the context of ongoing colonialism in North America and the military invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the word “occupy” has different resonances for Indigenous peoples. Instead of signifying a new mode of resistance against neoliberal policies, occupation is also the constitutive fact of ongoing colonial relations in North America. For this reason, JohnPaul Montano, an Ojibwe activist generally grateful for and supportive of the aims of Occupy Wall Street, nevertheless argues in an open letter, “there are millions of us indigenous people who have been excluded from the Occupy Wall Street protest. Please know that I suspect that it was an unintentional exclusion on

your part. That is why I'm writing to you. I believe that you can make this right" ("Open Letter"). Similarly, Harsha Walia claims that using the term "Occupy" "erases the brutal history of occupation and genocide of Indigenous peoples that settler societies have been built on. This is not simply a rhetorical or fringe point; it is a profound and indisputable matter of fact that this land is in fact already occupied" ("Letter"). Although the word "occupy" was deployed to assert the agency of the public over the power of the banks, the politics of constructing occupation as a liberatory act speaks to a widespread lack of awareness on the part of activists of the presence of Indigenous peoples in North America and the context of ongoing colonial occupation. This ignorance suggests that narratives of Indigenous resistance to neoliberalism and colonialism are still marginalized in mainstream activist circles.

In light of the relative absence of Indigenous perspectives in mainstream discussions of the politics of Occupy Wall Street, it is possible to read the texts I have examined throughout this project as failures, on the grounds that although they brought attention to the complex and multiple ways Indigenous peoples are influenced by global flows of power, finance, exchange, capital, and culture, the erasure of Indigenous presence from the discourse of Occupy Wall Street, an ostensibly revolutionary and radical movement, signals a lack of success in terms of building broad-based awareness. On the other hand, groups within the movement, such as Decolonize Occupy Wall Street, demonstrate that there is a growing awareness that Occupy's critique of economic injustice must be

complicated by critiques of patriarchy, colonialism, racism, ableism, and environmental injustice.

In contrast, the spread of the Idle No More movement, which has been led largely by women and youth leaders, and has been gaining international attention and support, has been a demonstration of the power of Indigenous peoples who are connected globally. The movement originated in Canada in December 2012 in opposition to several pieces of legislation proposed by the Canadian government, including omnibus Bill C-45, the Jobs and Growth Act, which, among other things, makes changes to the Indian Act, the Navigation Protection Act, and the Environmental Assessment Act. Incorporating teach-ins, flash-mob round dances, marches, and hunger strikes, and organizing through social media, Idle No More foregrounds demands for Indigenous sovereignty. According to Mi'kmaq lawyer Pamela Palmater, Idle No More

is a peoples' movement that empowers Indigenous peoples to stand up for their Nations, lands, treaties and sovereignty. This movement is unique because it is purposefully distanced from political and corporate influence. There is no elected leader, no paid Executive Director, and no bureaucracy or hierarchy which determines what any person or First Nation can and can't do. There are no colonial-based lines imposed on who joins the movement and thus issues around on & off-reserve, status and non-status, treaty and non-treaty, man or woman, elder or youth, chief or

citizen does not [sic] come into play. This movement is inclusive of all our peoples. (“Idle No More”)

Palmater emphasizes the inclusivity of the movement, privileging a politics of alliance-building that rejects colonially imposed definitions of what constitutes indigeneity. She draws a distinction between previous social movements, stating, “Unlike the Occupy movement, this movement involves peoples with a shared histories [sic], experiences, goals and aspirations” (“Idle No More”). Idle No More has the potential to re-assert Indigenous presence and resistance in common with activists fighting for social, environmental, and political justice in the face of ongoing state assaults on treaty rights, Indigenous sovereignty, women’s rights, and the environment.

Glen Coulthard (Dene) contends, with respect to the Canadian context, that although Idle No More is related to the activism of Indigenous peoples in the 1980s and 1990s, there are important differences with regard to contemporary historical and political conditions. Specifically, absent from the contemporary context are “the perceived threat of political violence that was present in the years leading to the resistance at Kanesatake” and “widespread economic disruption unleashed by Indigenous direct action” (“#IdleNoMore”). Coulthard argues that it remains to be seen whether Idle No More adopts these strategies, but maintains that challenges to economic activity have historically generated political change.

The emergence of Idle No More speaks to the continuing relevance of works such as *Almanac of the Dead*, *Solar Storms*, *Indian Killer*, and *Whispering in Shadows*. Although these novels are specific to their historical contexts, their

representations of Indigenous modes of activism and being-in-relation are still relevant. The shared political activism across borders in North America is a sign of potential for building and strengthening processes of decolonization.

Throughout this project I have deliberately focused on texts that emphasize modes of resistance to neoliberal ideologies, but I am not arguing that all Indigenous writers are, or ought to be, explicitly addressing any or all of these issues in their creative works. Nor does this project put forth a totalizing theory of how Indigenous writers address and represent globalization. Instead, it examines the multiple and complex ways that Indigenous writers navigate issues of community, sovereignty, and solidarity in an era of globalization through fiction.

Ultimately it is my hope that this project opens up new avenues for investigating representations of community in relationship, of Indigenous sovereignty, and of opposition to neoliberal incarnations of an ongoing colonial project in North America. Future studies could examine more specific and contemporary Indigenous literary engagements with neoliberal globalization, both in how they imagine alliance-building and solidarity and how they represent transnational communities in relationship that tie together diverse peoples in common goals. Further analyses of transnational histories, alliances, and global mobility in early Indigenous texts could also shed light on the genealogical roots of current depictions of globalized Indigenous subjects. Future projects might also consider how such historical articulations of tribal internationalism, to borrow Silko's phrase, inform contemporary iterations of Indigenous community and belonging. As the emergence of social movements like Idle No More suggests,

there is much work to be done exploring how literature informs, troubles, and contributes to Indigenous activism globally. Literary interventions that investigate modes of being-in-common have much to offer in terms of elucidating the complex and entangled issues of sovereignty, social justice, and sustainability. The present moment is one that is fraught with global and local crises—war, pollution, environmental catastrophe, debt—that neoliberalism augments and engenders. However, the present moment is also one of possibility, where Indigenous writers are confronting these issues in their communities and imagining answers to Harjo’s question: “What are we becoming together?”

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