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Unsettling Fictions: Relationality as Decolonial Method in Native American and South African Literatures

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Abstract: This article sets out a rationale for the comparative study of Native American and South African literatures. Though there are numerous points of overlap between Native American and South African experiences of colonial subjugation and anti-colonial modes of resistance, scholars seldom consider the literatures produced in these contexts in the same frame. This article demonstrates the productive potential of more expansive frames of study, as well as the necessity of interrogating how categorizations of postcoloniality and indigeneity operate in distinct global spaces. Specifically, it thinks through the grounds on which Native American and South African texts can be read together by focusing on literary engagements with Native American and African onto-epistemologies. I emphasize relationality as a point of connection in my close readings of two novels: *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) by Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) by the late South African author K. Sello Duiker. I argue that the conceptualization of relationality between human and nonhuman others in these texts disrupts the separatist and hierarchical logic of modernity/coloniality. In undertaking this comparative work, this article contributes to a wider body of work by scholars across postcolonial and Indigenous studies who seek to understand interconnected experiences of colonialism across diverse geographic, cultural, and temporal spaces.

Keywords: Native American literature, South African literature, relationality, decolonization, Indigenous worldviews

> Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. . . . Alone, in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little[.]
>
> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 4

Native American and South African literatures have always been produced in dialogue with contemporary political realities. Since the colonial era and up to the present moment, Native Americans and South Africans have mobilized literary forms as tools for resisting conditions of subjugation. Through the mid-to-late twentieth century, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, much like the Red Power and American Indian Movements, was influenced by and inspired waves of artistic and literary output. Examining texts from across both canons reveals sustained engagements with the memories and legacies of colonialism, questions of socio-economic and environmental (in)justice, the resilience of cultural traditions, and the recovery of traditional languages, narrative forms, and epistemologies. And yet, while it is not unusual to see studies focused on the intersections between African American and South African expressions of resistance, it is rare to encounter scholarship comparing Native American and South African literatures. Though scholars more commonly discuss these bodies of work within national frameworks and different theoretical traditions, this article advocates for a more expansive comparative framework.

If we follow Donna Haraway, whose words provide an epigraph to this essay, the urgencies of an era characterized by climate change, increasing inequality, and the deepening entrenchment of neocolonial structures "demand" a kind of thinking that goes "beyond inherited categories and capacities, in homely and concrete ways" (Haraway 7). With this provocation in mind, I seek to reach across borders in order to make connections between histories, literatures, and cultures that are rarely explored in relation to one another. I understand this as a decolonial methodology, in line with Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's criticism of the Western academy for its tendency to put "things in

compartments, resulting in an incapacity to see the links that bind various categories" ("Borders and Bridges" 119). As a result of such processes of categorization, Ngũgĩ writes, "we are trained not to see connections between phenomena" (119). By unsettling the logic of categorization, this essay advances a method of reading that enables a productive comparison of contemporary fiction written by Native American and South African authors. An exciting possibility of this work is discovering the pertinence of selected theoretical frameworks to different contexts. As I demonstrate, theories from Indigenous[1] studies frequently offer valuable insight into South African contexts, just as South African frameworks allow for new ways of analysing Native American concerns. By concentrating on the benefits of these alternative analytic frameworks, I do not seek to de-emphasize the importance of an analytic approach that is informed by the locally specific contexts of textual production. However, one of the consequences of the divide between postcolonial, Indigenous, and African studies is that scholarship in these fields is, at times, quite isolated.

In this essay, then, I argue that a comparison that looks beyond inherited categories is necessary while negotiating the issues that it presents. In the first part, I highlight some of the reasons this comparison has seldom been explored, examining how categorizations of postcoloniality and indigeneity are, at times, inadequate when mobilized across distinct cultural contexts. I discuss some of the challenges of incorporating South Africa into an Indigenous studies framework, as well as the potential of moving beyond a trans-Indigenous approach. In the second, I give an example of how Native American and South African literatures can be read together. I employ the notion of relationality, informed by the worldviews of selected Native American and South African cultures, as a point of connection between *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) by Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) by the late black South African author K. Sello Duiker. Through imagining networks of solidarity that span cultures, nationalities, and even species, these novels demand this kind of dialogic approach. Unsettling, as Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang observe, is integral to the decolonial project, which must involve not

only the repatriation of land but also "the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted" (7). Silko's and Duiker's novels demonstrate how literature can do the necessary work of unsettling through recovering counter-discourses that enable different ways of being in the world. Building on scholarship from post/decolonial, Indigenous, and African studies, I argue that these novels employ relationality as a decolonial method. Accordingly, this essay advances an ethic of relationality by bringing ostensibly disparate literatures together to reveal the implicit and explicit connections between them.

In many Native American cultures, relationality emphasizes "relatedness, polymorphous kinships, human reciprocities with and of land, and the other than human" (Byrd et al. 5). This logic involves the understanding of the self as always in (changing) relation to others, human and nonhuman.[2] It is central to Dene scholar Glen Coulthard and Anishinaabe writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's concept of "grounded normativity," which theorizes relationality as integral to Indigenous survival (254). Across Africa, similar ideas are foundational to animist belief systems, which Nurit Bird-David distinguishes as fundamentally relational. For Bird-David, these belief systems oppose the fundamentally separatist epistemology of modernity:

> If the object of modernist epistemology is a totalizing scheme of separated essences, approached ideally from a separated viewpoint, the object of this animist knowledge is understanding relatedness from a related point of view, within the shifting horizons of the related viewer. . . . Against 'I think therefore I am' stands 'I relate therefore I am' and 'I know as I relate.' (qtd. in Garuba 47)

The idea of being through relating is epitomized in the concept of *ubuntu*, which was a driving ideology through the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996–98).[3] *Ubuntu* refers to the idea that we can only affirm our "humanity by recognizing the humanity in others" (Ramose qtd. in McDonald 141). While *ubuntu* is specifically framed in human terms, Cameroonian theorist Achille Mbembe

observes that an understanding of human and nonhuman relationality is intrinsic to many African cultures (181). Such notions of relationality challenge the anthropocentric and hierarchical logics that are foundational to the project of coloniality/modernity. In contrast to the self-exceptionalizing and dominating narratives that characterize settler colonial mythologies, worldviews rooted in relationality and reciprocity offer radically different ways of contemplating individual responsibilities to the land and its creatures, as well as how human societies relate to one another. An understanding of the ever-shifting relatedness of human and nonhuman environments is particularly urgent in our present moment, when capitalist globalization and anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change are producing vastly uneven scales of vulnerability.

Literature, as Cherokee writer and scholar Daniel Heath Justice argues, provides an essential platform from which authors can negotiate relationality. Justice contends:

> I'd go so far as to argue that *relationship* is the driving impetus behind the vast majority of texts by Indigenous writers—relationship to the land, to human community, to self, to the other-than-human world, to the ancestors and our descendants, to our histories and our futures, as well as to colonizers and their literal and ideological heirs—and that these literary works offer us insight and sometimes helpful pathways for maintaining, rebuilding, or even simply establishing, these meaningful connections. (xix; emphasis in original)

While speaking of Indigenous North American literatures, Justice's words, as I will show, have a profound bearing on South African literature too, much of which is animated by the impulse to make connections and imagine solidarities. For both Silko and Duiker, the novel is, in part, a tool with which to explore points of exchange, a process that is integral to their approaches to decolonization.

I. From (Post)Coloniality to Decoloniality

The lack of academic engagement thus far between Native American and South African writing can, in part, be attributed to disciplinary

boundaries that exist within the field of literary studies. The traditions of postcolonial studies and Indigenous studies evolved in different academic contexts, in dialogue with distinct political struggles. Nevertheless, while Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand) are generally incorporated into the rubric of postcolonial studies, the field has, as Eric Cheyfitz writes, "virtually ignored American Indian communities" (4).[4] More broadly, scholars have criticized postcolonial studies' omission of literature produced across the United States. Amy Kaplan observes that "the absence of the United States in the postcolonial study of culture and imperialism curiously reproduces American exceptionalism from without" (17).[5] In turn, American Indian and Indigenous studies has historically resisted postcolonial and other external branches of theory. Chickasaw scholar Jodi A. Byrd and Jewish scholar Michael Rothberg summarize the tensions between postcolonial and Indigenous studies as deriving from "indigenous people's sense of living under ongoing colonial projects—and not just colonial legacies—and from postcolonial studies' over-reliance on models of colonialism in South Asia and Africa that do not necessarily speak to the settler colonies of the Americas, Australia and New Zealand" (1). Yet Byrd has also argued for the applicability of certain strands of postcolonial theory to Native American contexts and even the necessity of incorporating Indigenous contexts into its development, asserting that "indigenous peoples must be central to any theorizations of the conditions of postcoloniality" (xiv). Though South African literature has come to be understood as part of the postcolonial canon, in the 1990s scholars similarly questioned the applicability of postcolonial theory to the South African context. Echoing parallel discussions across Indigenous studies, there were debates over whether it ought to be rejected as a "foreign, homogenising, ahistoricising, 'post-structuralist' import" or be reinvented in South African terms (Attwell ix). Nevertheless, the presence of South African literature within postcolonial studies is largely dominated by white South African authors, such as Nobel Prize winners J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer.[6] The effect of this is that specific types of South African literature are celebrated within the field of postcolonial studies, while others (i.e., those produced by people of color) are far less visible.

Though literatures by South African and Native American writers are shaped by histories of settler colonialism, then, considering them together within a postcolonial studies framework poses immediate concerns. Doing so requires that we consider the "textured postcoloniality" of both countries, to borrow David Attwell's term (1). Textured postcoloniality foregrounds the overlapping, palimpsestic histories of colonialism in both spaces—taking into account autochthonous cultures, European settler cultures, and diasporic histories of immigrants and arrivants.[7] Much like Byrd's conceptualization of "cacophony" (xiii), Attwell's term emphasizes the need to move beyond a narrow Indigenous-settler binary, mindful of the uneven and intersecting ways coloniality is experienced by different groups of people within an ostensibly singular space such as the nation-state.

A frequent critique of postcolonialism is how the concept is "used to mark the final closure of a historical epoch, as if colonialism and its effects are definitively over" (Hall 244). From this perspective, decolonial theory—as a distinct branch of postcolonial studies—offers a departure by specifically attending to the multiple ways that coloniality survives colonialism. Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano first used the term "coloniality of power" to describe the persistence of white supremacy, Eurocentrism, and the racist distribution of labour in globalized capitalism (533). He argues that what we now call "modernity" refers specifically to a mode of space/time "inaugurated by European imperialism and the concomitant institutions of the nation-state, the bourgeois family, the capitalist corporation, and . . . Eurocentric rationality" (545). Modernity, he contends, was colonial from its point of departure and continues to be so (548). Decolonial theory thus offers a productive framework through which to examine how coloniality continues to structure modernity, even in ostensibly *post*-colonial[8] spaces. Puerto Rican theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres has employed this approach to demonstrate how coloniality permeates all aspects of being, at individual and societal scales, arguing that "colonial relations of power left profound marks not only in the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge and the economy, but on the general understanding of being as well" ("On the Coloniality of Being" 242). Maldonado-Torres' words foreground

the need to consider both epistemic and ontological decolonization. This incorporates what Ngũgĩ calls "decolonising the mind" but specifically distinguishes between the need to decolonize ways of being and ways of knowing. This essay, then, employs a decolonial framework in order to understand how literature specifically can perform unsettling acts that do this work—and particularly, how literary engagements with relationality disrupt the separatist logic of modernity/coloniality.

II. Beyond a Trans-Indigenous Framework

Much like postcoloniality, indigeneity is a term that has no fixed meaning and which operates differently depending on the context to which it is applied. Described by Jace Weaver as one of "the most contentiously debated concepts in postcolonial studies" (221), indigeneity becomes increasingly fraught when considered across different global spaces. Distinctions in how indigeneity is defined transnationally—whether through claims to primacy or a determination of demographic status—result in it resonating differently across Africa, North America, and South America. While there are clear similarities in the experiences of Indigenous peoples across North America, Australia, and Aotearoa—where minority Indigenous populations were targeted by genocidal policies—settler colonialism in South Africa looks, in many respects, quite different. Correspondingly, South Africa—with its minority settler population—is rarely incorporated into an Indigenous studies framework.

The question of indigeneity in South Africa is complicated by the legacies of apartheid's racial classification system and historic migrations that influence understandings of what constitutes a precolonial society. While many groups were present at the moment of colonization, there is an ongoing debate around whether they can—or should—be considered Indigenous. As Mark Rifkin notes, this is due to "the complex histories of relation, struggle, and dispossession among [these] communities" (35). For example, while the Khoisan are recognized internationally as having First Nations status, the so-called Bantu majority, whose ancestors migrated from West and Central Africa several thousand years ago, are not.[9] Focusing on the narrativization of this history, it is clear that colonial powers in South Africa employed a discourse

of indigeneity to delegitimize the Bantu groups and, with them, their claims to land. As Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson observe, historical records produced during the colonial era "had the effect of discrediting the 'originality' of the current indigenous population by depicting them as violent *arrivestes* who had dispossessed the 'true' indigenes. In the long run . . . they erased the claim of indigenous peoples to 'full' indigeneity and therefore their rights to land ownership and cultural priority" (364). As a strategy of repressive authenticity, this narrativization dispossessed the Bantu of their land by establishing the Khoisan as the only fully Indigenous South Africans.[10] This process resulted in the successful delegitimization and subsequent dispossession of groups who had migrated from elsewhere on the continent. Such processes of defining are characteristic of coloniality, exemplifying what Dena'ina Athabascan/Alutiiq scholar Carol Edelman Warrior calls "one of the most effective strategies of colonization": that which "fixes the object of definition and renders it . . . controllable, domitable, and, ultimately, consumable" (386). By highlighting the fraught discourse around South African indigeneity, I seek to emphasize how European settlers co-opted a narrative of primacy as a tool for delegitimization with the aim of furthering dispossession. Though the South African example demonstrates the negative power that narratives can effect—the role that narratives play in creating and sustaining structures of oppression—the novels in this study emphasize the positive potential of narratives as active, indeed animated, tools for transformation.

The concept of indigeneity is fraught with questions, including what measures are used to self-identify (or be identified by others), and the complications posed by historic, as well as modern, episodes of migration. There are also problems posed by using a single signifier to refer to heterogenous populations "whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different" (Smith 6). Nevertheless, the mobilization of indigeneity as a collective signifier has had a significant impact for Indigenous rights on a global scale. As Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, the use of "Indigenous peoples" as a term has "enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in an international arena" (7).[11] However, it is pertinent to consider what

other forms of solidarity can be envisaged beyond a potentially exclusionary definition of indigeneity.

In bringing together Native American and South African literatures, then, I am not suggesting that South African literature should be read as another Indigenous literature. Rather, I posit that interrogating and even moving beyond classifications such as Indigenous and postcolonial offers the possibility for a better understanding of the forms coloniality takes—particularly in the context of modern day colonialisms. A global Indigenous literary studies, or trans-Indigenous framework such as that proposed by Chadwick Allen, though ostensibly working to traverse borders, can in fact restrict which cultures and modes of cultural production we can place into dialogue. Allen's intervention is valuable for its assertion of the need to undertake Indigenous-centered scholarship by reading Indigenous texts in global comparative terms. But his proposed trans-Indigenous framework does not clearly interrogate the concept of indigeneity; as such, it risks excluding groups that do not typically associate with this category. Allen's study focuses on literature and other forms of cultural production of "the *global Indigenous*" (xvii; emphasis in original), a category he does not clearly define but which includes (though is "not limited to") "the designations Native North American, Māori New Zealand, Hawaiian, Indigenous Australian and *other large-scale groupings*" (xvii; emphasis added). My comparison of novels by Silko and Duiker echoes Allen's desire to decenter settler accounts by moving beyond comparisons rooted in Indigenous-settler binaries while allowing for different engagements with the concept of indigeneity. In the remaining portion of this article, I employ a more expansive approach and, in doing so, outline the benefits of a relational mode of reading.

III. Relationality in *Almanac of the Dead* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*

Having set out some of the challenges as well as possibilities of using Indigenous and postcolonial studies frameworks in South African and Native American contexts, I now turn to the novels. As I bring Silko and Duiker's works together, two questions guiding my analysis are:

How can literary expressions of decolonial resistance offer new avenues for solidarity that are not dependent on (potentially exclusionary) definitions of indigeneity and postcoloniality? And, more specifically, can reading Native American and South African literature together help to create spaces of co-resistance while affirming the differences of each context? *Almanac of the Dead* and *Quiet Violence* are challenging texts in both form and content, compelling the reader to bear witness to violent histories of colonialism and ongoing conditions of coloniality in an era of neoliberal globalization and anthropogenic climate change. As I argue, together they create a shared grammar for decolonization rooted in the recovery of non-Western epistemologies. Through foregrounding traditional worldviews, each emphasizes the need to make kin by (re)building relations with human and nonhuman others. Such moves to recover alternative epistemologies unsettle the separatist, hierarchical logic of coloniality by conceptualizing relationality as moving beyond culture, race, and even species. In this, each novel evokes an ethic of decoloniality that, in Maldonado-Torres' terms, can be understood as "giving oneself to and joining the struggles with the *damnés*, beyond recognition, to bring about community and the formation of an-other world" ("Outline of Ten Theses" 30).

Both Silko and Duiker's works envision models of decolonial community that operate at a planetary scale—a term I use to emphasize not only the novels' global scope but also the significance they accord to the planet in material terms, of connections between human and nonhuman environments. Conceiving of the planetary rather than the transnational or global surpasses some of the limitations of nationalism and capitalist globalization.[12] In this context, a planetary lens demands that we move beyond an anthropocentric understanding of decolonization and become attuned to the entwined effects of coloniality/modernity on human and nonhuman worlds. This framing follows Indigenous North American epistemologies, which understand human and nonhuman environments as always interrelated through a complex set of kinship relations. As Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear emphasizes, to fully understand genocide in the Americas "requires an understanding of the entangled genocide of humans and nonhumans

here. Indigenous peoples cohere as peoples in relation to very specific places and nonhuman communities. Their/our decimation goes hand in hand" (198). Within both Silko's and Duiker's novels, this kind of awareness of relationality emerges through a marked parallel between the histories of colonial and capitalist violence effected on human and nonhuman forms.

Published in 1991, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* is an "overtly and often uncomfortably political" novel (Tillet 5), concerned with the ongoing and overlapping conditions of colonial and capitalist subjugation across the Americas.[13] Described by Creek-Cherokee scholar Craig Womack as "one of the most important books" of the twentieth century (qtd. in Tillett 6), the novel was originally met with what Ann Folwell Stanford calls an "intriguing [critical] silence" (qtd. in Tillett 6)—though a substantial canon of scholarship on this work has since emerged. With no single protagonist or storyline, the novel brings together a diverse cast of characters of various ethnicities, cultures, sexualities, and genders. They are all connected in some way to a trans-continental, decolonial movement that builds in force before the novel culminates on the precipice of a revolution. Set in the near future, the novel anticipates anti-capitalist movements such as the Zapatista uprising and Occupy Wall Street as it imagines large-scale groupings of the dispossessed coming together. The resistance movement, though comprising peoples from across continents, is framed in terms of continued Indigenous resistance to colonial oppression. As the first pages of the novel proclaim: "The defiance and resistance to things European continue unabated. The Indian Wars have never ended in the Americas" (Silko 15). The revolution is led by the "Indigenous Peoples Army of the Americas," comprising a trans-Indigenous collective from across the US and Mexico, yet this group is joined by others: eco-terrorists, homeless US army veterans, animal spirits, and even the ghosts of Indigenous Americans and African slaves. Together, they call for "the return of all tribal lands" (15), the undoing of colonial borders, and an end to a "vampiric" capitalist world system that is draining the earth's resources, rendering the planet "uninhabitable" (542).

The Quiet Violence of Dreams, published in 2001, is similarly focused on the legacies of colonial violence, featuring the realities of systemic

racism and urban poverty in post-transition South Africa. Duiker's second novel, *Quiet Violence* won the 2001 Herman Charles Bosman Prize and has been celebrated for its formally innovative style, bold renderings of urban post-apartheid life, and exploration of same-sex intimacies. Yet it has received relatively little international attention.[14] Through the representation of entrenched racial divisions, anti-immigrant hostility, and homophobia, Duiker dispels the rainbow nation myth of the New South Africa.[15] Duiker's novel contests the celebration of Cape Town in popular global consciousness as an idyllic cosmopolitan tourist destination—a depiction that relies on the natural landscape and a narrative of harmonious multiculturalism while suppressing the less palatable realities of structural inequality, xenophobia, and environmental precarity. The book has a range of narrators, but the protagonist is Tshepo, a black university student suffering from mental illness following childhood trauma. As a Bildungsroman, the novel follows Tshepo on his journey to maturation and eventual recovery. After finding employment as a male escort, Tshepo discovers his queer sexuality and, ultimately, his place within a pan-African, decolonial queer movement. Like *Almanac*, *Quiet Violence* understands that the potential for decolonial futurity lies in transcultural solidarity and the recovery of alternative epistemologies. Though its scope is pan-African, this movement shares much with that in *Almanac*, as it comprises people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, all of whom contribute to the collective project of building "a new way of life" (Duiker 455). Tshepo and his allies "know that the future depends on everyone working together" (455).

While the movement in *Quiet Violence* diverges from that in *Almanac* in several ways—most clearly, its primary aim is not the return of land—both foreground the need for epistemic decolonization. The novels employ relationality as a decolonial method in two ways. Firstly, the relationality between humans evokes an awareness of how ostensibly distinct struggles are interconnected. This thinking emerges through decolonial aesthetics that foreground transcultural and transnational points of connectivity across distinct postcolonial spaces. However, reading the novels together demands being attuned to the limitations

of cross-cultural approaches. While potentially a productive and generative force, such approaches are often limited by an incomplete engagement with the specific socio-political contexts that create and sustain conditions of oppression. The second mode of relationality that I focus on is that between human and nonhuman environments. Both novels register the nonhuman as an animated and disruptive force that troubles the extractivist logic that is foundational to modernity. For Silko and Duiker, African and Indigenous worldviews are not relegated to the past but instead enable the reconceptualization of more equitable futures. By reframing African and Indigenous cultures in futurist terms, Silko and Duiker challenge the discriminatory logic of colonial management that perceives them as unmodern. Instead, these works position such cultures as central to the possibility of not only a decolonial future but also a planetary future free from environmental catastrophe.

IV. The Intersectionality of Struggles

Primarily set in Cape Town and Johannesburg, *Quiet Violence* is geographically less expansive than *Almanac*, the narrative of which traverses three continents. However, through complex multi-layered forms, with narrators of different races, genders, and sexualities, both foreground the intersecting scales of subalternity faced by those living with the legacies of colonialism on the peripheries of the capitalist world-system. The novels' heteroglossic narrative structures create an expansive map of diverse experiences that mirror the heterogeneity of the movements at the level of narrative diegesis. As such, the two books register the textured postcoloniality of Africa and the Americas both formally and thematically. In doing so, they become shared archives of "multidirectional memory": a concept that, in Michael Rothberg's understanding, creates a space for diverse memories and experiences to circulate and coexist in a non-competitive space. Multidirectional memory, he argues, "has the potential to create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice" through "productive" processes of "ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" (Rothberg 32–33). In bringing together diverse narratives and memories of colonial and capitalist violence, *Almanac* and *Quiet Violence* serve as multidirectional archives that form the basis

for productive exchange. Their dialogic forms facilitate not only a recognition of the experiences of others but also a more holistic view of the connections between these structures of violence. The novels' multidirectional narratives are, I argue, central to their decolonial aesthetics, as this formal strategy disrupts the separatist logic of coloniality and its concomitant modes of categorization.

By connecting Indigenous narratives with the experiences of other dispossessed and marginalised groups, Silko moves beyond narrow racial, cultural, or class-based modes of identification. In particular, she emphasizes the generative potential of African American and Native American solidarities. *Almanac* invokes this from the beginning in its assertion that "[s]ixty million Native Americans died between 1500 and 1600" (15)—a statement that recalls Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, published four years earlier in 1987.[16] The figure employed by Silko echoes Morrison's dedication to the "[s]ixty Million and more" Africans that are estimated to have died during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.[17] This intertextual reference exemplifies multidirectional memory, as Silko places the memory of African American suffering into dialogue with Native American genocide. The impulse of this reference is developed through the Indigenous and African American solidarities Silko imagines in the novel, which are rooted in a recognition of shared experiences of subjugation through the past (and present) of American imperialism. Accordingly, this recognition of shared experiences invokes the potential for solidarity. Yet Silko also recovers the neglected history of Cherokee slaveholders and their mixed-race descendants, exploring the fraught intersections of these histories. The inclusion of Clinton, a character that is African American with Cherokee heritage, is notable in the context of the erasure that black Native Americans experience in dominant cultural narratives (even those produced by Indigenous writers). In this way, Silko's novel also represents some of the more problematic elements of Indigenous history, invoking episodes of colonial violence in which Indigenous nations were implicated.[18]

Not only does *Almanac* highlight the interconnected experiences of modernity/coloniality between different groups in the same geopolitical space but it also foregrounds the globally interconnected nature of

coloniality by showing the mirrored conditions of precarity across Africa and the Americas. As Clinton observes, "[t]he ordinary people, the citizens in Africa, had the same problems with government politicians as the people had in the United States. The people worked day and night to pay taxes, but still found themselves hungry and homeless" (Silko 411). Accordingly, the novel suggests the need for parallel resistance movements that do not challenge such structures in isolation but work together in a dialogic resistance—the global scope of which disavows nationalist political paradigms. As Shari M. Huhndorf writes, *Almanac* "departs from nationalist novels by positioning transnational alliances as the most powerful of anticolonial endeavours" (171). This is a relational ethic, situated within the historic context of what Lakota historian Nick Estes calls "radical Indigenous internationalism"—a tradition through which Indigenous peoples in the Americas have historically sought "to make relatives . . . with those they saw as different, imagining themselves as part of Third World struggles and ideologies, and entirely renouncing the imperialism and exceptionalism of the First World (while still living in it)" (204).

The final section of the novel, "One World, Many Tribes," sees the Indigenous People's Army forming allegiances with other dispossessed peoples, such as those in South Africa. Notably, the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement directly inspires—and materially supports—the Indigenous revolution across the Americas: "After five hundred years of colonialism, and the terrible bloodbath in South Africa, the African tribal people had retaken Africa. Now the Hopi had received not only encouragement but financial aid from African nations sympathetic to the Hopi's cause" (Silko 616). However, while *Almanac* frames this transnational alliance as fundamental to the success of the decolonial struggle, its impact outside of the narrative is undermined due to the novel's flattening of differences. The inclusion of Africa, as Huhndorf notes, is problematic for its homogeneity: "astonishingly, Africa is here represented as a singular entity" (159). In addition to homogenizing different cultures and struggles, the novel's depiction of Africa as an exemplary *post*-colonial continent fails to account for the ongoing legacies of coloniality that continue to structure many African states.

Reading *Almanac* alongside *Quiet Violence* complicates Silko's depiction of Africa, as Duiker's novel reveals the legacies of apartheid in South Africa and the failures of formal decolonization. *Quiet Violence*, written a decade later, can be imagined as "writing back" to Silko's novel, which was published on the cusp of South African liberation. *Quiet Violence* troubles an overly simplistic notion of postcoloniality, even as its vision of cosmopolitan, pan-African solidarity evokes a similar ethic of cross-cultural relationality. In Tshepo's world, though apartheid has formally ended, the need for decolonial revolution still exists. Though the success of the Anti-Apartheid Movement led to the nation's first democratic election in 1994, resulting in a new constitution that enshrined civil liberties into law, the African National Congress (ANC) largely failed to attend to the material forms of inequality that were legacies of apartheid. Consequently, over twenty years after white-minority rule ended, "South Africans continue to inhabit manifestly unequal and segregated material worlds" (Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation* 11).[19] Duiker, writing almost a decade after the end of apartheid, attests to the socio-spatial and metaphysical structures of coloniality that the Anti-Apartheid Movement failed to eradicate and how they have shifted in the decade since independence.

The novel registers the violence of coloniality on an ever-shifting continuum that transcends a racial logic, as black South Africans target other black Africans who have migrated to Cape Town and Johannesburg. *Quiet Violence* disavows a politics of primacy, depicting how an emphasis on origins can quickly become xenophobic. Tshepo observes the discursive violence of a South African nationalist ideology that has, post-apartheid, mutated to take the form of lethal anti-immigrant hostility. This is primarily targeted at other Africans: those who "black South Africans call makwere-kwere with derogatory and defiant arrogance" (Duiker 454).[20] As Meg Samuelson remarks, this "uncanny reiteration of the Dutch naming of their Khoikhoi hosts as 'Hottentots' (mimicking what the Dutch perceived as their animalistic gibberish)" classifies "African immigrants and migrants in South Africa today . . . as ones who have no language, and thus no presence within the networks of human sociality" ("The City beyond the Border" 252).

The novel's reproach of nationalism echoes Frantz Fanon, who suggests that national consciousness should not be the endpoint of anti-colonial mobilization. While nationalism may have been necessary to the success of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, as an ideology it is entangled with coloniality. As Quijano notes: "the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race" is "one of the fundamental axes" of coloniality (533). This formulation includes the racialization of categories such as nationalities that previously "indicated only geographic origin or country of origin" (533). Accordingly, the novel suggests that South Africans must look beyond nation to planet in order to move forward with the decolonial process.

Quiet Violence thus espouses the need to foster solidarity beyond national, cultural or racial borders. Just as Clinton in *Almanac* sees those "screaming 'Black only! Africa only!'" as "fanatics or extremists" (Silko 742), Tshepo rejects those modes of solidarity that are rooted in a narrow nationalism or ethnocentrism. The novel troubles the notion of racial solidarity through Tshepo's difficult encounter with Arthur, an African American client. While Arthur laments his lack of connection to Africa, he fails to register his relative privilege as an African American moving through South Africa. Tshepo finds it difficult to relate to Arthur's experiences of transgenerational trauma, instead having more empathy for Native American dispossession under settler colonialism. Responding to Arthur's complaint that he feels like a "guest" in the US, Tshepo retorts: "the same can be said about Native Americans and if anyone should lay claim to America it's them. But they are also in the minority. What about their pain?" (318). In this exchange, Tshepo rejects a competitive model of traumatic memory, instead privileging an awareness of shared forms of suffering under colonialism. This crucially moves beyond an understanding of solidarity that is rooted in a solely racial paradigm.

In the final pages of the novel, Tshepo envisages a future that exceeds such modes of categorization toward global scales of connection. Imagining something that embodies the "formation of an-other world" that Maldonado-Torres invokes, Tshepo muses: "Perhaps the future of mankind lies in each other, not in separate continents with separate people" (456). Tshepo sees the "differences" between people of differ-

ent continents "merging" and disavows strict definitions by anticipating networks of relationality that are not structured by violent processes of categorization (456). By invoking a future that moves beyond racial, cultural, and national borders, *Quiet Violence* disavows the colonial logic that defines and divides through processes of categorization. Instead, the novel proposes a politics of relationality as Tshepo envisions the formation of a global community that transcends colonial borders.

V. Planetary Decolonization beyond Species

Having focused my analysis so far on how *Almanac* and *Quiet Violence* engage with the intersectionality of human struggles, I now turn to the critical function of the nonhuman. I argue that in both novels the nonhuman unsettles some of the foundational logics of coloniality/modernity. While a detailed analysis of the nonhuman within these novels is not possible within the scope of this essay, I foreground its significance to show how the texts are animated by a relational ethic that transcends species. Both works suggest that the human and nonhuman are entwined in a dynamic web of relationality. These relationships are anti-hierarchical—neither the human nor nonhuman is superior or, crucially, more or less animate. They are also dynamic, changing based on shifting needs and responsibilities. Crucial to this idea is the recognition of nonhuman animacy, a term that Mel Y. Chen uses to describe a quality of "agency, awareness, mobility and liveness" that is less commonly ascribed to the nonhuman in Western systems of thought (2). Refusing the animacy of the nonhuman (and of selected human populations) is foundational to coloniality/modernity, as this refusal reduces everything to a "resource to be utilized in whatever way [is] necessary for profit and 'progress'" (Adamson 144).[21] This logic, of course, counters many African and Native American worldviews, which frequently register the animacy of different nonhuman forms. *Almanac*'s and *Quiet Violence*'s recognition of nonhuman animacy, developed in dialogue with non-Western epistemologies, is crucial to their unsettling capacity.

Silko depicts a world in which the nonhuman is both animate and agentic. While the primary characters are all human, the nonhuman occupies a central position in driving the narrative via the revolution.

Those who march from the South in defiance of colonial borders are guided by two blue macaws, possessed by spirits that "had come with a message for humans" (Silko 476). The novel prophesies that the planet itself will enact parallel disruptive acts in response to centuries of extraction, as "oceans and mountains" will reclaim "the riches ripped from the heart of the earth" (734). Furthermore, the emergence of a giant stone snake from the earth is an act of physical disruption that is the catalyst for the revolution. Prophesied to herald the end of the colonial "epoch of the Death-Eye Dog," the snake manifests in a symbolic space: a uranium mine that is close to the Laguna Place of Emergence (251).[22] As Silko has written elsewhere, Laguna stories tell that the ancient Pueblo emerged from the earth itself, from a site slightly north of Paguate, New Mexico. Accordingly, they did not view themselves as separate from the landscape but as part of it, "as offspring of Mother Earth" (Silko, "Landscape" 36). This is a belief that inherently disrupts the notion of a human and nonhuman binary. The snake's emergence at this site marks a resurgence of Pueblo worldviews and a refusal of the expropriative and extractive relationship that the settler colonizers have with the land, signified by the uranium mine.

Stone is significant in the novel for conveying Indigenous understandings of nonhuman animacy and the importance of kinship relations with nonhuman forms. Throughout *Almanac*'s narratives that focus on the Laguna Pueblo, stone is noteworthy: in the character Sterling's affinity with and care for stone in his work as a gardener, in the significance of the stone snake's appearance, and through the story of the lost stone idols which the Laguna mourn. Silko's focus on the different ways that stone is kin to the Laguna underlines the fatal, far-reaching consequences of a Western conception of stone as an inanimate, extractable resource. In particular, Sterling's account of the stolen idols demonstrates the forms of epistemological violence that are reproduced through the settler colonial process. Though made of stone, these figures are not "lithic" objects as the curator in Santa Fe describes them (35). Instead, they are relatives of the Laguna people—"not merely carved stones, these were *beings* formed by the hands of the kachina spirits" (31; emphasis in original). As the narrator explains,

> [t]he theft of the stone figures years ago had caused great anguish. Dark gray basalt the size and shape of an ear of corn, the stone figures had been given to the people by the kachina spirits at the beginning of the Fifth World, present time. "Little Grandmother" and "Little Grandfather" lived in buckskin bundles gray and brittle with age. Although faceless and without limbs, the "little grandparents" had each worn a necklace of tiny white shell and turquoise beads. Old as the earth herself, the small stone figures had accompanied the people on their vast journey from the North. (31)

These ancient figures provide a material, mnemonic connection for the Laguna to their creation narrative. Until they were stolen, the protection of the "esteemed and beloved ancestors" had been taken on by "[g]eneration after generation" (31). Through these processes of care, the Laguna demonstrate an active kinship relation with stone. The rupture of this relationship, through the theft of the figures and their display in a museum, is representative of the many kinship relations that were irrevocably disrupted through the colonial process. As such, the original theft—and the curator's refusal to return the figures decades later—is an act of epistemic violence that denies the existence of human-nonhuman kinship. One consequence of this wider epistemic rupture is the extraction of uranium from the sacred site during the Second World War, the remains of which continue to pollute the air and waterways of the reservation in the narrative present.

Sterling's return to the uranium mine and to the stone snake at the end of the novel marks the recovery of a Laguna worldview. Though the snake is ostensibly inanimate, Silko imbues the "spirit being" with vitality—its "head raised . . . dramatically" and its "jaws open wide" (761). Present in the ancient notebooks and prophesied to return, the stone snake that erupts from the site of Laguna emergence holds specific cultural significance. Yet it is also a conduit for connectivity across cultures. Sterling's encounter with the snake is framed in relation to parallel encounters in Africa: in the same way that the "giant snakes" in Africa "talked to the people again, Sterling is eventually able to understand the

snake's purpose" (762). The novel, however, suggests that this mode of communication is possible only following epistemic decolonization. In this sense, the nonhuman acts within *Almanac* as a conduit for relationality—between not only human and nonhuman worlds but also different cultures, as Silko registers points of connection between African and Indigenous worldviews.

Quiet Violence echoes this notion that the nonhuman facilitates a relational mode of thinking. Though Duiker's novel does not explicitly name the threat of climate change, we can understand the looming destruction that haunts Tshepo as a cipher for environmental crisis. As in *Almanac*, the nonhuman in Duiker's novel is cognizant of the violence done to it and the destruction that is to come: "Whales and other wise creatures of the sea are changing migration patterns, settling in different places and warning other creatures" (Duiker 436). However, unlike Silko's vision of multispecies alliances, Tshepo envisages the nonhuman attacking the species responsible for destroying the earth. Imbued with vitality, Tshepo fears the nonhuman, on microbial to planetary scales, is working against humanity: "Diseases far deadlier than Aids [sic], more insidious, are germinating, waiting for ideal conditions to wreak havoc and death. The ocean and the sky are plotting against us" (433). Duiker employs a poetic style to evoke the animacy of the nonhuman: pollution is rendered as "a language . . . that spreads across the township" (433–34).

This moment in *Quiet Violence* marks a rupture at the height of the novel's climax, as Tshepo wanders through Nyanga ostensibly experiencing a psychotic breakdown. Nyanga is one of the oldest townships in Cape Town, established in 1948 to facilitate labour exploitation; in the contemporary moment it is known for extreme unemployment and high levels of HIV/AIDS. The poverty of those living in the township is inherently connected to environmental degradation, a burden that disproportionately affects the poor black population: "the filth is inescapable. Every wire mesh fence I see is plastered with plastic bags. Buy and dump, that is the message" (433–34). Duiker renders Tshepo's mental state through a manic first-person narration, characterized by short, frenzied sentences. Tshepo is attuned to the consciousness of all that is

around him when his sense of self is most fragmented, which allows him an understanding of the relatedness between human and nonhuman worlds. He is able to reconceptualize not only his place in the world but also other ways of being in the world. Crucially, this is dependent on Tshepo's comprehension of different temporal scales. As Tshepo becomes attuned to the slow scale of planetary time, his awareness of his own being in relation to time shifts. As a result, he is able to "hear the quiet work of trees growing" (59). In the final pages of the novel, Tshepo recovers from his psychosis. Formally, the narrative style is calmer—no longer marked by frantic, chaotic sentences. Yet Tshepo remains attuned to the presence of the nonhuman and cognizant of different temporal scales. Acting as an interlocutor, Tshepo renders violence against the nonhuman speakable[23]: "I went on a journey and found that trees had more stories to tell than animals, that they remembered more" (457). Mediating between the earth and the reader, Tshepo invokes a responsibility for reciprocal relations with the earth that has been forgotten: "The air remembers too much. It longs for someone to listen" (435).

The figure of the nonhuman returns us to the question of coloniality. By framing the nonhuman as animate, Duiker and Silko directly disrupt the ideological hierarchies that capitalism and coloniality depend on. As Sharae Deckard argues, capitalism "denies nature's agency even as it simultaneously appropriates nature's work and energy" (7). In contrast, both texts evoke the relationality between human and nonhuman worlds. The novels' acts of embodied and material rupture—Tshepo's mental breakdown, the emergence of the stone snake from the earth—manifest the violent disruption wrought by coloniality. Colonialism, as Indigenous scholars observe, disrupts longstanding kinship relations between human and nonhuman environments. On an onto-epistemological level, coloniality is the "symbolic, material, and bodily violence of [the] audacious separation [of] Humanity and Nature" that Jason Moore attributes to capitalism (1). Significantly, these textual disruptions occur at sites of colonial violence and resource extraction—the uranium mine on the Laguna reservation and the Nyanga township. However, the disruptions are also critical moments in which key characters—Sterling and Tshepo—are reawakened to the relationality of

human and nonhuman worlds. Silko and Duiker thus suggest that such processes of rupture are necessary in order to repair relations, to begin to undo the epistemological violence of coloniality. As Warrior tells us, an "awareness of interrelationality [can] help us melt the fixing effects of instruments of definition" (369). If the strategy of defining is an integral aspect of coloniality, literature that subverts such processes of categorization has decolonial potential through evoking an understanding of animacy that is not exclusive to humans—as well as an affective connectedness between different human and nonhuman life forms.

VI. Conclusion

In this essay, I have begun to trace some key points of entry and emergence for a comparative study of Native American and South African literatures. There are undoubtedly many more. But by bringing these novels together I demonstrate why a more expansive framework, while attending to the specificities of each text, has the potential for generative analysis. This type of reading brings to the fore shared textual decolonial impulses and strategies, written in response to specific geopolitical conditions of colonial and capitalist exploitation. While the particular local conditions of oppression are always distinct, Silko and Duiker register a shared struggle against a global system that is rooted in a logic of coloniality—the survival of which is dependent on the continued exploitation of humans and nonhuman forms. In distinct ways, *Almanac* and *Quiet Violence* both recognize that relational modes of living are necessary for future planetary survival—interventions that are rooted in the recovery of non-Western epistemologies. In each text, there is a shared desire to unsettle the colonial logic that categorizes and de-animates certain bodies and forms. Integral to this process of unsettling is how the writing process *re*animates bodies and objects that a Western worldview commonly renders inanimate (or less animate).

Decolonization, of course, is always irreducibly specific and will not—indeed, cannot—mean the same thing in different geographic or cultural spaces. As scholars such as Byrd, Tuck and Yang note, local experiences of coloniality and conceptualizations of decolonization that can have conflicting aims frequently complicate solidarities. Yet, while

such differences must be considered, they should not prevent us from conceptualizing the points of connection across struggles. Reading South African and Native American literatures together can potentially create spaces of co-resistance while foregrounding the specificity of each context. Through their attempts to reveal and disrupt the logic of coloniality, Silko and Duiker ask us to look beyond narrow categorizations and processes of exclusion and to instead look for relationality. They both emphasize that the hope for decolonial futurity lies in moving beyond such borders: through forming "unexpected collaborations and combinations" (Haraway 7) through remaking kin.

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Notes

1 Following dominant conventions in Indigenous studies, I capitalize the word Indigenous when referring to specific populations or groups of people to mark the word as a proper noun.

2 By the nonhuman, I refer to the other forms of life on the planet, including animals, plants, and trees, as well as non-organisms including water, minerals, and soil.

3 *Ubuntu* is an Nguni word that can be roughly translated into "humanness." For further reading on the role of *ubuntu* during the South African TRC, see Murithi.

4 Postcolonial studies emerged largely in the context of the Commonwealth and in response to the Asian, African, and Caribbean anticolonial movements of the mid-twentieth century. American Indian studies, before expanding into Indigenous studies, originally developed separately in North America following the activism of the American Indian Movement in the late 1960s and 1970s and inspired by the literature that came to form the Native American Renaissance.

5 The ideology of American exceptionalism stems from the idea that the US has a unique historical and political formation rooted in ideologies of democracy, republicanism, and liberty, which renders it incomparable to other nations. The ideology of American exceptionalism encourages the US to conceive of its occupation of Indigenous lands as Manifest Destiny rather than imperialism.

6 It is worth noting that "whiteness" here does not function in the same way for both: Coetzee comes from Afrikaner parentage, while Gordimer has Jewish heritage.

7 This term, preferred by Byrd, draws attention to the power dynamics at work in the histories of migration by distinguishing the agency of "settlers" from that of slaves who were forcibly transported into settler-colonial spaces.

8 Here I use the hyphenated post-colonial to refer specifically to the time period after colonialism formally ended.

9 The minority Khoi and San peoples are historically grouped under the portmanteau "Khoisan." This umbrella term serves to distinguish the Khoi and San peoples from the so-called Bantu majority of South Africa. The Khoi and San are minority groups with distinct cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences and are recognized by the United Nations as having First Nations status, having resided in Southern Africa for between 150,000–250,000 years. The Khoisan predated Bantu-speaking groups, who are estimated to have migrated from West and Central Africa two to three thousand years ago.

10 As defined by Wolfe, repressive authenticity is a frequent settler colonial strategy that renders inauthentic anyone who does not embody the settler-colonial definition of Indigenous. This ultimately enables increased settler access to territory, which is, according to Wolfe, "settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (402).

11 A prime example of this impact is the implementation of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982, which led to the adoption of the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). Despite its failings, UNDRIP marks a vital milestone in its recognition of Indigenous rights on a global scale. For a discussion of these failings, see Cheyfitz's 2015 essay, "Native American Literature and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." In it, Cheyfitz argues that the Declaration as a document is ultimately contradictory—explicitly anticolonial while at the same time affirming the sovereignty of settler colonial nation-states.

12 I am thinking of Spivak's theorization of "planetarity," which argues for "the planet to overwrite the globe" for this reason (72).

13 *Almanac of the Dead* is Silko's second novel following the widely celebrated *Ceremony*, published in 1977. Silko received the MacArthur Foundation fellowship in 1981, which enabled her to complete the manuscript. In contrast to her debut, however, *Almanac* was met with mixed reviews, many of which focused on its vast scope, complex structure, and disturbing content, as well as what was perceived as a vengeful tone.

14 Duiker was hailed as a poster boy of the post-apartheid generation of writers but died in January 2005 at age thirty, having published three novels.

15 The term "rainbow nation" has become ubiquitous with the South African transition, stemming from the African National Congress' nation-building project,

which emphasized racial and cultural inclusivity. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is commonly credited with coining the phrase.

16 There were an estimated 56 million Indigenous deaths between the time of European arrival in 1492 and 1600.

17 It has been suggested that Morrison's dedication itself evokes the "six million" of the Holocaust, which adds a third dimension to the collection of recalled memories.

18 Selected Native American tribal nations owned African slaves before the US civil war (1861–65). This was particularly common amongst the nations known as the Five Civilized Tribes, which included the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Creek (Muscogee).

19 This inequality manifests with particular clarity with regard to land ownership. Bloomberg reported in March 2018 that, while ninety-seven percent of the nation's area comprises farms and agricultural holdings, seventy-two percent of this is owned by whites. The amount of land owned by non-whites has increased by only thirteen percent since apartheid ended in 1994. For further reading, see Gumede and Mbatha's "Why Land Seizure Is Back in News in South Africa."

20 The word *makwere-kwere* is a derogatory slang word used to refer to foreigners in South Africa, particularly black Africans.

21 Chen's work observes how certain bodies have been "de-animated" in Western discourse, paying particular attention to those who are racialized and/or queer.

22 Silko writes that the epoch of the Death-Eye Dog refers to the time of colonialism, during which "human beings, especially the alien invaders, would become obsessed with hungers and impulses commonly seen in wild dogs" (251).

23 In using the term "speakable," I am drawing on the work of Butler, who argues that certain forms of violence are rendered unspeakable in the public sphere. While Butler's work primarily pertains to violence against certain (racialized) human bodies, it is pertinent in relation to how mainstream discourse frequently renders forms of environmental violence unspeakable, though a full discussion of this is beyond the scope of this article.

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