

THE TRUTH TO BE TOLD: TRAUMA AND HEALING IN SELECTED WRITING  
BY CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICAN INDIGENOUS WOMEN

by

Christina Ann Roberts

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Christina Roberts

entitled “The Truth to Be Told: Trauma and Healing in Select Writing by Contemporary North American Indigenous Women”

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: April 9, 2007  
Annette Kolodny

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: April 9, 2007  
Luci Tapahonso

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: April 9, 2007  
Franci Washburn

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: April 9, 2007  
Susan Penfield

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate’s submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: April 9, 2007  
Dissertation Director: Annette Kolodny

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## DEDICATION

This project is informed by the voices of my family and only exists because of the strength of my mother. It is written in honor of women like my mother, women who have overcome incredible odds and whose voices should never fade from our collective histories.

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## I. ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the manner in which contemporary Native women writers reveal the various traumas North American Indigenous individuals and communities have inherited from a colonial past. The two main chapters focus on two genres—poetry and fiction—and closely examine writings by Deborah Miranda (Esselen and Chumash), Ester Belin (Navajo), Kimberly Blaeser (Ojibwe), Eden Robinson (Haisla), and Betty Louise Bell (Cherokee). My discussion is tribally specific and takes into account the different historical and cultural influences surrounding each text. Using this approach, I develop two methods for analyzing contemporary writing by Native women of Canada and the United States. Through an analysis of Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000) and Bell's *Faces in the Moon* (1994), I propose that Native women are symbolically healing the wounds of the pasts through the narrative journeys of the protagonists. In these two books, Robinson and Bell write about intergenerational traumas, or traumas that have been inherited from the specific colonial pasts of their Native communities. These traumas originate deep within families and communities and stem directly from governmental attempts at cultural extinction, including the various Indian Acts in Canada (1868, 1876) and the Allotment Act (1887) in the United States. In developing an approach to the poetics of Native women, I examine three collections: Blaeser's *Absentee Indians* (2002), Belin's *From the Belly of My Beauty* (1999), and Miranda's *Indian Cartography* (1999). These collections reveal the consequences of both land loss and the dramatic changes that have taken place in Native communities

across North America, but they also reveal the ways Native women navigate the tragedy and beauty of their histories. Through their fiction and poetry, these writers are exposing the continued existence of colonialism within their communities and are also expressing a fresh sense of hope and healing for many Native individuals and communities dealing with similar traumas. Indigenous women of the United States and Canada are telling their own stories and the stories of their communities for the first time with honesty and a significant sense of what they have faced as Native women.

## II. AUTHOR'S PREFACE

As a woman of Gros Ventre and Assiniboine ancestry, I have often felt the weight of family trauma on my shoulders. Looking around at the tragedy within my family, I often question why my family continues to have high rates of alcoholism, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and poverty. I grew up listening to the family stories of tragedy and experiencing the pain my mother continues to struggle with as a result of that tragedy. I remember the pow-wows: what I thought was traditional food (fry bread, goulash, beef stew, buffalo, and other wild game) and feeling the drum reverberate through my body like an endless heartbeat. For a moment, I am not reminded of the pain that also ties me to my history. However, swirling around in my brain are also memories of drinking, drug abuse, and domestic violence. The tragedy of my history has been permanently inscribed on my daily existence.

My family intimately experienced the tragic changes that took place for the Native American peoples in Montana. The oral history within my family only goes back a few generations, but these few generations speak volumes about the painful consequences of government policies and Euro-American settlement still found within my family. My great-grandfather, Thomas Perry, was Assiniboine, and my great-grandmother, Maggie Blackbird, was Gros Ventre. I have no knowledge of when they met, or of how much they retained of the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre languages and the cultural practices of our people. They married sometime in the first few decades of the 1900s, and from what I understand, they received land allotments from the United States government and leased these reservation allotments sometime after my grandmother's

birth in 1935. They moved to Butte, Montana, which was a bustling city that produced a majority of the world's copper and held promises of wealth and happiness. However, Native Americans were not granted the same considerations as the other, predominantly Irish, residents of Butte. My great-grandmother gave birth to eleven children, only eight of whom survived into adulthood, and by the time her last child was born, she was already a heavy drinker. Of this generation, only three are alive today, and my grandmother is not one of them.

I know very little about my grandmother, the woman who would send me dollars in the mail to buy french fries. I do not know the sound of her voice or the feel of her hug, but rather have to struggle with finding love for the woman who was responsible for so much of my mother's pain. I know that she had five children and the eldest was put up for adoption. I know that each child had a different father of Euro-American descent, and my grandmother never found peace in her life. Stories of her violent rages have imprinted themselves on my own memory, and I try to find ways of forgiving her. Through my mother's stories, I remember my grandmother's love of dancing, smoking Marlboro 100s, drinking coffee, and the echo of her contagious laugh. However, by the time I was born in 1978, my grandmother was already wounded by the world. Her various boyfriends and husbands left her limbs fractured, and the pain in her heart urged her to find solace in alcohol. While drinking, she would lash out violently against her children and those around her. She died when she was only 46 years old, already an old woman who was too weak to escape a burning building. My mother was only 21, and I was four.

My mother, Carol Lee, was born in 1960, the third of five children, a large, healthy baby that escaped the fetal alcohol syndrome that would affect her younger siblings. She was the only child of Colleen Perry and Eugene Moody, an Irish coal miner who retired with black lung and emphysema. Despite my grandfather's efforts, he could not rescue my grandmother or heal her wounds. She was already too wounded to have any type of stable life, and their relationship was short lived. My grandfather remarried and disappeared from my mother's life, resurfacing only a year before his own early death. I remember meeting my grandfather for the first time when I was twelve and being shocked at how much my mom resembled the small man with kindness in his eyes. Even though I was too young to understand the regrets he had about losing my mother for so long, I remember the intimacy they shared in the few hours we spent together. He smoked cigarettes until the end of his life, with only one severely diseased lung, and like my grandmother was taken too early from this world. The two individuals who should have supported my mother were gone, and she inherited devastating emotional and spiritual burdens.

I carry my mother's history within my blood, knowing that if it were not for the horrors she experienced as a child, I would not exist. To this day, she does not talk with anyone about her life before the age of 13, but as I have grown older, she has shared with me the moments that define her life. I heard about the abuse she suffered at the hands of my grandmother, which led to her migration from foster homes to Soroptimist Society homes, and her desire to be with her mother, no matter how badly she beat or neglected her.<sup>1</sup> My mother was denied the stability that all people need to form healthy

relationships and their own individual identities. I heard stories illustrating my grandmother's beauty, the potency of her love and rage, and the pain that she passed on to her children. My mother was sexually abused by close relatives and perfect strangers and was violently beaten by family members and the various men who floated in and out of her (our) life. At the age of 14, she was abandoned by her mother on the streets of downtown Seattle. It was 1974, and my mother had nowhere to live, no way of caring for herself, and no one to count on. She had already survived too much for one young life, and she fought to live despite it all. For a period of time, my mother lived in the boiler room of the Pike Place Market in downtown Seattle, each night locked safely inside by a kind janitor who saved my mother's life. She cared for herself as best she could, until falling in love with my father and his family.

Even though my parents are no longer together, my father still enjoys telling me the story of when he first saw my mother. When he recounts the story, his eyes light up, and he vividly describes the moments leading to their first meeting. He was two years older than my mom, and it was literally love at first sight for them both. He brought my mother to his house, where she found a family and a home for a short period of time. My father's siblings welcomed my mother as best they could, and my father's mother opened her heart to the new addition to the family. My mother was a vulnerable child who had to develop a survival instinct, an instinct that makes her uncomfortable with stability and success. Yet, at the same time, she had a goal: the only thing she ever wanted to be was a mother. At 16, my mother fulfilled her life's dream and became pregnant. Whenever I am overwhelmed by the loss and pain I have inherited, I remind myself that I am the

product of my parents' love. I was born in 1978, a few months before my mother's eighteenth birthday and a few months after my father's imprisonment.

While my mother was pregnant, my father was involved in a breaking and entering that turned violent. A person who claimed to be my father's friend convinced him to rob a house that was supposed to be empty. When my father arrived at the house, he discovered an elderly woman and refused to be a part of the crime. After my father left, his friend proceeded to sexually violate the woman, a crime for which my father would pay. My father was caught a short distance from the house and because he had a knife with him (and was assigned an incompetent public defender who decided to go on vacation rather than attend my father's court hearing), he was sentenced to over 30 years in prison. A little over a month after my birth, my parents married while my dad was facing a lifetime in prison. My mother wrote numerous letters to her state representatives and succeeded in getting his sentence reduced by a year. The first few years of my life are defined by visits to various prisons across Washington State, and I can still vividly remember the anticipation of waiting for my father to emerge from behind the metal bars and the lines of other inmates. My father survived eight years behind bars, and justice only succeeded in robbing another person of his life and his potential. When I was eight, my father was released and tried to care for my mother and me, but addiction claimed the life of our family by the time I was thirteen.

I am grateful to this day for the strength my mom has shown in caring for me, especially as a young and mostly single woman. She did not have a positive role model in her own mother, and despite this, provided me with the stability I needed to become a

whole person. Even though we were poor and had to accept assistance from the state government and from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, I firmly believe my mother is an inspiration and have no resentments toward her. I grew up thinking the B. I. A. was a good place, where you could go if you needed food. Little did I know that the B. I. A. was the same organization that was responsible for a great deal of my family trauma. I watched my mother clean houses and hotel rooms for a living, working her fingers to the bone, so that we could get by. In addition to hard work, my mother has also battled addictions and struggled with depression, bi-polar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The reason she wanted to be a mother was so that she could eliminate the cycles of violence within our family, and I am the product of her success. I know that my mother has provided me with the tools that I need to succeed in life. She is the reason for my academic success, and I am grateful to her every day. Even though my mother is still battling her own demons, she is a miraculous individual with a unique vivacity unmatched in women her age. My mother has helped me to believe that I can make a difference in the world, a belief that has brought me to this point.

In 2003, I petitioned for legal guardianship of my nine-year-old cousin Drew Ann, who was named after my uncle, my mother's brother, Andrew. At the time, the family had no idea how to get a hold of him, and after two years of caring for Drew, her stepmother decided that she could no longer be responsible for her. In a strange turn of events, my boyfriend and I accepted the responsibility. My life had already been turned inside out by a move away from home (Seattle, Washington) and the rigors of graduate school, but I had little hesitation in my heart about caring for Drew. After she lived with

us for a short while in Tucson, we were able to get in touch with her father, and Drew expressed her desire to live with him again. Then, in a sudden and tragic move, her father committed suicide on January 15, 2005. Only five days after my 27<sup>th</sup> birthday, our small Tucson family experienced the tragedy of his early death. He was 46 years old, the same age of my grandmother when she died, and the cycle of pain was set to continue. However, despite the tragedy of her father's death, Drew held onto her love for him and honors his memory through her success in life. She is a courageous young woman and will be starting high school next year. Even though his death was tragic, it reminded us all of the importance of family and reunited us with many loved ones.

In addition to becoming reacquainted with many family members, my uncle's death also brought more of our family history to the surface. Last year, I was honored with family photo albums that contained hundreds of photographs. For the first time, I saw a picture of my great-grandmother and great-grandfather. I glimpsed happy moments on the reservation and pictures of my elders as young children. As I scanned through the various pictures, I found a photocopied letter dated August 18, 1981 with my grandmother's name at the end. It was written to her brother, my great-uncle Aaron Perry, only a short while before her death:

Hi,

Can't undo what has been done.

Met a lady on the bus and she was on her way to Toledo, Ohio from Utah.

Anyway, I plan to get my marriage resolved because I can't and won't accept Vance's way in life. "It's up to you," if he calls to cry on your shoulder. Like

you said, “he better get his act together.” All he proved to me is, “he hasn’t grown up completely.”

Well, Aaron truthfully I’m to[o] old and tired of running from myself because actually, why should I?

“I’ve always looked up to you in life.” You’re the oldest to me.

I pray to get my act together in Colorado.

I walk beside the lord daily.

Haven’t started to church here yet, but plan and pray to someday soon.

Love Ya,

God bless you each day,

Your Sis,

Colleen

After reading the letter, I broke down and cried. I wanted to scream at the top of my lungs. I wanted to know why my grandmother was already tired at 46. I wanted to ask her questions and know this woman, to hear her voice and her secrets. The letter foreshadowed her death in Colorado, but it also expressed a spiritual strength that provided her comfort. However, even though this letter remains significant to me, the biggest surprise within the photo albums was a picture of my mother as a child. I always imagined how beautiful she would be and longed to see an image of my mother before the violent beatings, drug addictions, and loss. I look at the innocence in her eyes and the dimples that have always graced her cheek. I want to meet this young girl and rescue her from a horrid life, but I know that I cannot. I look at the faded pictures of my great-

grandparents and my grandmother's photocopied letter, and a vice grips my heart and throat. In many ways, I cannot blame them for what happened. I want to move past the trauma within my family and honor my history. I want to recognize the evidence of survival around me, a quest I share with the woman in this project.

### III. INTRODUCTION: THE TRUTH TO BE TOLD

Indigenous women writers across North America provide significant sites of healing for their communities. In the 1997 publication of *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, editors Joy Harjo (Muskogee) and Gloria Bird (Spokane) write: “To understand the direction of a society one must look toward the women who are birthing and intimately raising the next generation” (21). Each of the women in this project is birthing and influencing the next generation of Native poets and novelists. Poets Kimberly Blaeser (Anishinabe), Esther Belin (Diné), and Deborah Miranda (Esselen and Chumash) explore the consequences of displacement, while the fictional work of Eden Robinson (Haisla) and Betty Louise Bell (Cherokee) voices the need to heal wounds within Indigenous communities. These women are raising awareness of the particular issues within their communities and also illustrating the shared consequences of North American colonization for Native individuals. They are passing down collective histories and exposing tragedies, while also taking into account the future and what it holds for their families and communities. Through their writing, these women voice the urgent need to maintain connections to cultural traditions and tribal histories. Their literature provides sites of healing for themselves, their families, their communities, and other Indigenous peoples across North America.

In order to begin this discussion, I must first explain what I mean by “trauma” in the work of these writers. According to the online second edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, trauma can be defined as “[a] psychic injury, esp. one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed” (“Trauma”).

Colonization has had a lasting psychic effect on the Indigenous peoples of North America. This emotional shock has its origins in various colonizing enterprises from the reservation/reserve systems to boarding schools and relocation. In fact, these attempts at eradication or assimilation have had such profound and lasting psychic effects that the generations of today still suffer from traumas initially inflicted hundreds of years ago.

The 1995 publication of *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* by Eduardo Duran (Apache/Tewa) and Bonnie Duran (Opelousas/Coushatta) placed Indigenous traumas of North America into both a postcolonial and a psychological context. Duran and Duran introduced the term “soul wound” to discuss the lasting effect of colonization on Indigenous peoples. According to the authors, a “soul wound” can be difficult to grasp. Their explanation helps to get at the specifics of this term:

Why should Native Americans be so plagued with problems of this nature? This question arose regularly during E.D.’s work with Native people in central California. In order to gain some insight into this issue, E.D. simply posed the question to the community. Most people responded with issues of injustice, the conquest, the dishonored treaties, and so on. In this, a common thread was found that weaves across much of the pain and suffering found in the Native American community across the United States and perhaps the Western Hemisphere. The image which became most binding and meaningful to the authors and to some of the other people working in other Native American communities is the concept termed the *soul wound*. (Duran and Duran 24)

The authors suggest that while there are various reasons for the current problems that Native peoples face, each reason can be linked to the traumas that they have inherited from a colonial past.

Duran and Duran are not alone in indicating that Native peoples are still suffering from traumas inflicted during the colonization of North America. In the introduction to *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* Harjo suggests:

We are still dealing with a holocaust of outrageous proportion in these lands. Not very long ago, Native peoples were 100 percent of the population of this hemisphere. In the United States we are now one-half of one percent, and growing. All of the ills of colonization have visited us in its many forms of hatred, including self-doubt, poverty, alcoholism, depression, and violence against women, among others. (21)

Harjo affirms the sentiment expressed by Duran and Duran that the colonization of North America continues to affect Native individuals and communities. While she sees the lasting impact of colonization and the consequences of the North American “holocaust,” she also expresses hope in the “growing” population (21). By exposing the traumas within Indigenous communities, women like Harjo provide sites of healing.

This project examines manifestations of healing in literatures by Indigenous women of North America. In their writing, these women provide places to heal the soul wounds within their communities. For the purposes of this project, I would like to suggest that healing be conceptualized in four parts: 1) the acknowledgement of traumas; 2) reconnection to the past; 3) reconnection to traditional values, if possible; and 4) the

expression of healing. In *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992), Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee/Irish) suggests that “the novel represents a process of reconstruction, of self-discovery and cultural recovery” (5). He also references the work of Paula Gunn Allen (*Laguna*) to highlight her use of “*re-membering* or putting together of identity” (5). Owens suggested that the theme of re-membering was a marker of the American Indian novel, a powerful insight into the effects of colonization on Indigenous literatures of North America. Re-membering is an important part of the healing process. Duran and Duran also provided a perspective on healing soul wounds:

Another client, after some extended sobriety, came in one day wondering why a movie that depicted a massacre scene had left him so angry and hurt. E.D. and the client discussed the intergenerational grief, and with this awareness of intergenerational trauma the client began the resolution of the grief. Some medicine people have equated the treatment process as one in which we not only treat the client but are also treating our ancestors, since it is only in this plane of existence that we get to accomplish resolution of life events. If we do not work out a resolution for our ancestors, we are then only ensuring that our children will be left to continue struggling with the problem. (154)

Journeys of healing often require individuals to resolve the grief within themselves and within their communities. The resolution of grief for Indigenous peoples also involves healing the soul wounds they have inherited from their ancestors. Duran and Duran highlight an important intergenerational element of trauma, and one that will be discussed at

greater length in chapter one. Native women's voices are an essential part of the healing process and are now receiving the attention they deserve.

One of the primary reasons that Native women are now able to honestly express the traumas within their communities is due to significant changes in the publishing industry. Until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, publishing was dominated by male editors who saw little value in the literary work of Native women. Native women who wrote in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often had to compromise their voices in order to please editors and the reading public. In an infamous example, when Mourning Dove's novel *Cogewea: The Half-Blood* was published in 1927, she wrote the following to her editor Lucullus McWhorter:

I have just got through going over the book *Cogewea*, and am surprised at the changes that you made. I think they are fine, and you made a tasty dressing like a cook would do with a fine meal. I sure was interested in the book, and hubby read it over and also all the rest of the family neglected their housework till they read it cover to cover. I felt like it was some one else's book and not mine at all.

In fact the finishing touches are put there by you, and I have never seen it. (xv)

Without her permission, McWhorter rewrote large portions of Mourning Dove's novel, one of the first novels written by a Native woman.<sup>2</sup> While the added material mostly dealt with the federal government's policies toward Native peoples, the fact remains that her work was changed so dramatically that she was unable to recognize what was once her own story.<sup>3</sup> When she states that her editor made "tasty dressing like a cook would do with a fine meal," she affirms that the changes were made to make the book more

palatable for readers (xv). Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. Many Indigenous women writers experienced similar rewrites, when their work was edited and censored to please the non-Native reading public.<sup>4</sup>

While changes within the publishing industry have enabled more Indigenous women to publish their writings, they must still struggle with having their words edited and accepted by a dominant majority. For example, in *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, Gloria Bird, enrolled member of the Spokane Tribe and author, wrote that “For native women writers in particular, to write and to be published, we work within a system that mimics a larger publication industry where our words are edited and legitimized still by an overwhelmingly male majority who are perceived as the authorities” (Harjo and Bird 22). Native women writers have been and continue to be silenced and edited, but at the same time, the publishing system is beginning to change. For the first time, Indigenous women writers of North America are writing materials of their own choosing and are not writing *only* for the dominant cultures of North America. They are also collectively expressing resistance and an awareness of their positions as Native women. The authors discussed in this project are writing poems and novels that express not only the horrors within their communities, but also hope for the future. These writers are just a small representation of Native women authors who are writing about past traumas as part of a healing process.<sup>5</sup>

In order to effectively discuss trauma and healing in the work of these women, I want to begin by addressing a current concern by those who study Indigenous women's

literatures. In her introduction to *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* (2003), Choctaw scholar Devon Mihesuah notes,

Because many authors write from a patriarchal or white feminist perspective, the value of Native women is vastly underrated. Despite overwhelming oppression at the hands of whites, Natives have persevered, but men have not been the only catalysts for survival, adaptation, and development. Women have been just as crucial to the economic, social, religious, and political survival of the tribes. (xix)

In this passage, Mihesuah notes how Native women are overlooked due to continued oppression that marginalizes their voices and perspectives. The contributions of Native women are “underrated,” because few people understand the significance of their voices (xix). Mihesuah also points out that many feminist writers in the past have not considered the importance of women’s roles within their communities. As a result of these dominant perspectives, Indigenous women writers must continue to negotiate their positions as writers, women, and members of their tribal communities.

In addition to noting the unique position of these writers, Mihesuah carefully points out that “it is not possible for any one feminist theory or thought to summarize Native women. Native women do share historic oppression, but the cultural, racial, and economic variations among Native women render any sort of national coalition virtually impossible” (xx). While I firmly agree that there is significant variation between Native women across the North America, I also believe that this project will remain valuable to scholars of Indigenous literatures, because it pays careful attention to tribal and historical specificity. Part of the difficulty with a comparative approach to these literatures, as

Mihesuah points out, revolves around the danger of generalizing distinct cultures and experiences that arise from vastly different Native communities and cultures. While it is important to note that comparative analyses of Native women's literatures require a careful approach, these analyses can reveal notable similarities *and* differences between the ways in which these authors have dealt with, and continue to deal with, the attempted decimation of the cultural integrity within tribal communities.

While there are numerous ways in which Native women can express healing, writing is a tangible method and one that allows for a study of the various healing processes within tribal communities. In *Indigenous American Women*, Devon A. Mihesuah suggests that writing can be empowering for Indigenous women. "Writing is a way to empower us, to state that we are not victims and that we are attempting to find answers and to solve problems" (23). The women discussed within this project use writing to express various forms of healing and survival.

Any understanding of the Indigenous literatures of North America requires a thorough understanding of the oral traditions, histories, and cultural traditions of Indigenous communities before and after colonization. This is a significant portion of this project. Granted, many tribal communities in both Canada and the United States are protective of their traditional knowledge, but this is a limitation that can and should be respected. This project takes into account the history of each author and the histories of their respective Indigenous communities. Furthermore, in order to illuminate subtle details of each book, the discussion of each author includes pertinent information about oral traditions and cultural practices. For each tribal community across North America,

the oral tradition conveyed rich histories and created a link between the people, their cultural practices, and their tribal lands. By including references to the oral practices of tribal communities in this project, I hope to model an approach that is not informed by strictly Euro-American approaches to Indigenous literatures.

In order to accomplish this task, I have divided the discussion into two chapters. The first chapter discusses the impact of intergenerational trauma on the female protagonists in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000) and Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon* (1994). The main characters in these two novels play a pivotal role in their individual symbolic journeys of healing, and Robinson and Bell validate the use of memory and story in the healing process. By voicing the intergenerational traumas within their communities, Robinson and Bell illustrate the origins of soul wounds within their communities. Their novels provide sites of healing through the exploration of trauma. In the second chapter, I discuss Native women's poetry in light of relationships to traditional lands. Through a discussion of displacement in Kimberly Blaeser's *Absentee Indians*, Esther Belin's *From the Belly of My Beauty*, and Deborah Miranda's *Indian Cartography*, I suggest that these poets demonstrate healing through re-connections to their family and community histories. Blaeser, Belin, and Miranda grapple with absence and displacement from traditional lands, while also understanding the power and significance of their individual contributions to their Native histories. These writers voice the tragedy of land loss and removal, but also speak to the enduring importance of traditional lands and the natural world.

The Indigenous women in this analysis are reinventing the genres of literature written in English and are validating the use of memory and story in the healing process. These women are joined by trauma, but they are also voicing the urgent need for healing to take place. The truth still needs to be told, and each of these writers engages in acts of healing through her written creation.

IV. A FUTURE ENVISIONED IN FICTION: INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA  
AND HEALING IN EDEN ROBINSON'S *MONKEY BEACH* AND BETTY LOUISE  
BELL'S *FACES IN THE MOON*

Contemporary Native women novelists across North America are expressing the vital political and cultural work needed to heal the tragic wounds that continue to plague Indigenous communities. Many of the current novels written by Native women reflect contemporary issues within their communities, issues that are particularly painful and difficult for Native individuals and communities, because they emerge from traumas that have origins within North American colonization. Authors such as Eden Robinson (Haisla) and Betty Louise Bell (Cherokee) promote healing within their communities by dealing truthfully and honestly with traumas that have been inherited from a colonial past. These inherited traumas, or intergenerational traumas, are particularly visible in Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000) and Bell's *Faces in the Moon* (1994). In these novels, Robinson and Bell suggest that in order for communities and individuals to heal the wounds of the colonial past, each individual must mend the wounds that formed in their families because of attempted genocide and forced assimilation. While the specific cultural and colonial histories of these two writers vary, they both contain the trauma of colonization. In their fiction, these two writers describe contemporary Native individuals who are burdened by histories laden with suffering due to land loss, the erosion of languages and cultural practices, boarding schools and other attempts at forced assimilation. Robinson and Bell write about similar traumas within their communities,

while also expressing healing through a symbolic reconnection to both a historical and cultural past.

Through their main characters, Robinson and Bell detail traumatic events within Haisla and Cherokee histories, and how they relate to the struggles of contemporary Native individuals. *Faces in the Moon* and *Monkey Beach* contain female protagonists who face family tragedies that shape both their individual identities and their relations to larger communal and cultural forces. Central to the tragic circumstances of these protagonists is a fractured familial history that must be healed through powerful and symbolic reconnections to their cultural histories. These women discover the tragedies that have spread alcoholism, physical and sexual abuse, suicide and depression within their families. Through memory and story, these two women are able to piece together their cultural histories and the origins of intergenerational traumas.

As mentioned in the introduction, Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran published *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* in 1995, a book that places Indigenous traumas of North America into a postcolonial and psychological context. Duran and Duran turned toward holocaust studies and notions of intergenerational trauma in their discussion of alcoholism and other social ills within Native American communities.<sup>6</sup> Intergenerational trauma studies have emerged as a means to understand the ways in which suffering continues to visit generations who did not directly experience past traumas. For Native people, past traumas originate from the introduction of diseases, loss of homelands, broken treaties, and a governmental policy intent on eradicating Native cultures through assimilation.

Throughout the history of North American settlement, Indigenous peoples experienced illnesses that wiped out their communities, the introduction of the reservation system coupled with the loss of traditional lands, forced assimilation through schooling, and the attempted eradication of their cultural systems. As a result, many Native communities continue to experience above average rates of alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence, suicide, and poverty. While the reasons for these elevated rates are complex, according to Duran and Duran, they all can be linked to the European settlement of North America. As mentioned in the introduction, Duran and Duran introduced the term “soul wound” to discuss the lasting effect that the colonization of North America continues to have on Indigenous peoples. The authors point out that “much of the pain and suffering” Indigenous people face stems from the traumas they have inherited from a colonial past (24). These soul wounds are responsible for the elevated rates of social ills within Indigenous communities and reflect the degree to which these communities continue to suffer from past tragedies. As a direct result of North American colonization, Native individuals and communities continue to experience intergenerational traumas, traumas made more acute because of the distinct cultural systems within Native communities.

The social networks within Native communities rely on the healthy relationships between generations, or on the continuation of intergenerational relationships and the orderly passing on of knowledge. When these intergenerational relationships were disrupted due to traumatic outside influences, individuals were scarred and subsequent generations were further wounded. The oral tradition within Indigenous communities

across North America has communicated tribal histories and cultural practices for millennia. Oral traditions within these communities were dramatically affected by the absence of individuals whether due to schooling, assimilation, death, or other reasons, but storytelling has remained a vibrant and essential tradition. Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki) touches on this importance in *Our Stories Remember* (2003):

Perhaps then, in the long run, it is only through our own stories that people—Indian and non-Indian alike—can begin to understand the true American Indian heritage. Stories have always been at the heart of all our Native cultures. Although they have been classified as myths and legends, or placed under the rubric of oral traditions, these powerful tales are not just spoken or written words to American Indian people. They are alive. Alive as breath and the wind that touches every corner of this land. Alive as memory, memory that shapes and explains a universe, alive, aware, and filled with power. Our stories open our eyes and hearts to a world of animals and plants, of earth and water and sky. They take us under the skin and into the heartbeat of Creation. They remind us of the true meaning of all that lives. Our stories remember when people forget. (35)

As Bruchac notes, stories connect people to the land, to their communities, and to their cultural heritages. The removal of individuals from community networks disrupted the transmission of cultural knowledge and influenced age-old traditions of intergenerational communication. Betty Louise Bell and Eden Robinson work to heal the disruptions within their communities by performing symbolic journeys of healing through their fiction to reconnect individuals to their cultural heritages. These writers detail the

experiences of individuals who have lost familial bonds and vital cultural connections, both of which must be restored for healing to take place.

The manner in which trauma is exposed within two fictional works by Native women will be examined to support the notion of healing in contemporary fiction. Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* and Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon* demonstrate the enduring importance of memory, story, and intergenerational traditions. Robinson and Bell enact healing in their fiction by guiding their protagonists through a narrative journey that reconnects them to their families and cultural heritages. These two novels convey the importance of intergenerational relationships and express the pain within their communities, while they also articulate hope for the future by legitimating the importance of memory and story. Robinson and Bell are only two examples of Native women writers who are now writing about past traumas in an effort to heal.<sup>7</sup>

While writing about their own cultures and experiences, Bell and Robinson also express hope for the future by dealing honestly with the tragedies of the past. Writers like Eden Robinson and Betty Louise Bell are validating the social concerns within their communities and powerfully (re)connecting to their cultural histories. Through their negotiation of their positions as writers, women, and members of their tribal communities, Robinson and Bell provide glimpses into contemporary Indigenous communities and detail how they have endured North American colonization. These Native women are writing about the traumas deep within their tribal histories, while also conveying the continued importance of their cultural knowledge in ways that promote healing and communicate messages of hope for future generations. *Faces in the Moon*

and *Monkey Beach* reveal similar stories of trauma and loss, but also express healing and hope. While these two novels provide only a limited illustration of how fiction is being used to promote healing in Native communities, they are vitally important for Indigenous communities that face similar challenges.

a. *Monkey Beach*

In 2000, Eden Robinson published the first Haisla novel, *Monkey Beach*, a novel that takes place along the western coast of British Columbia and details the life of Lisamarie Michelle Hill. Throughout *Monkey Beach*, Robinson uses memory to emphasize the importance of intergenerational relationships, as she explores how traumas are passed down through the generations. The plot line deals with the disappearance of Lisa's brother, Jimmy. As Lisa attempts to handle her brother's disappearance, she remembers her own history in vivid flashbacks. Each memory unravels the tapestry of Lisa's past and informs the reader of the complex circumstances that have contributed to the formation of soul wounds within her family and community. As the novel progresses, Lisa discovers the connecting threads that perpetuate trauma within her family, threads that begin with sudden, often tragic changes within community networks. Her memory helps piece together this past and is key to Lisa's investigation into her brother's

disappearance. In order to effectively communicate these intergenerational traumas, Robinson must navigate and celebrate Haisla cultural history, while at the same time, deal with painful realities within the contemporary Haisla community.

Born January 19, 1968 in Kitimaat, British Columbia, Eden Robinson is a writer who has the personal experience and knowledge to communicate the history and reality of Native individuals within British Columbia. More specifically, as the first novelist of both Haisla and Heitsuk descent, Robinson writes with a vivid sense of how dramatically history continues to affect First Nations individuals. She received her undergraduate degree in creative writing from the University of Victoria and later received her Master's degree from the University of British Columbia. She has written numerous short stories and won prestigious awards for her first book *Traplines* (1995), which won the Winifred Holtby Prize for the best first work of fiction in the Commonwealth (Random House). *Monkey Beach* won the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize in 2001.<sup>8</sup> Her recent literary additions include *Blood Sports* in 2006, which deals with characters within the east side of urban Vancouver, and she is currently working on a sequel, *Death Sports*. Robinson may be the first Haisla novelist published, but her uncle, Gordon Robinson, was the first Haisla writer to be published. In 1956, Gordon Robinson published *Tales of Kitimaat*, a book that details the cultural traditions of the Haisla through storytelling and deeply influences *Monkey Beach*.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the novel, Robinson builds upon her intimate cultural knowledge about the Haisla people, while also maintaining a great deal of respect for her cultural traditions.

Robinson weaves significant cultural elements into her novel, but at the same time respects the fact that certain ceremonial and traditional practices cannot be shared with non-Haisla people. In an online interview for *Quill and Quire* magazine, Robinson confesses, “I can’t write about certain things. . . . There are some places that are not for me to go” (Methot). Robinson cautiously negotiates a respect for her cultural heritage while at the same time writing about contemporary Haisla people. Robinson’s concern demonstrates the degree to which she still values and respects the oral tradition and cultural practices of the Haisla people. In fact, Robinson was met with shock and unease on the part of her elders and community members when she told them of her desire to write about traditional beliefs (Methot). Robinson’s literary work demonstrates an intimate knowledge of people and places within British Columbia, and *Monkey Beach*, in particular, engages in discussions of the impact of history and intergenerational trauma on contemporary Haisla individuals.

Intergenerational trauma emerged within the Haisla community after sudden disruptions within the community and matrilineal clan system. The clans were numerous until the 1930s<sup>10</sup> when only 6 clans remained: Salmon, Beaver, Eagle, Raven, Blackfish, and an almost “extinct” Crow.<sup>11</sup> According to Charles Hamori-Torok, “It appears that during the nineteenth century and perhaps into the twentieth the number of clans changed, as some became nearly extinct and merged with others, and that there were shifts in the alliances” (308).<sup>12</sup> The Haisla clan system depended upon kinship relationships, with uncles being particularly important to social networks, and it provided codes that maintained specific political relationships within the community.<sup>13</sup> For

example, while men held the position of clan chief, the successor was usually the eldest son of the chief's sister.<sup>14</sup> This specific political relationship maintained clan and family ties within the community, which is why the decline of clans prior to 1930 continues to have a dramatic impact on the contemporary Haisla community within Robinson's novel.

From the moment of contact with Europeans, the Haisla experienced detrimental changes within their community networks. The Haisla most likely encountered Europeans for the first time in the early 1790s. One account suggests that a boat piloted by Juan Zayas, an officer who was part of a Spanish expedition under the command of Jacinto Caamaño, ventured up the Douglass Channel in July 1792 and encountered the people there.<sup>15 16</sup> The Haisla also met members of the George Vancouver expedition in June 1793 and developed consistent trading relations with Europeans from this point on.<sup>17</sup> In addition to trade, European settlement introduced new spiritual practices to the Haisla. In the late 1870s, Kitamaat native Charlie Amos converted to Christianity. Amos had heard a sermon while visiting Victoria and returned home with a new religious vigor. Amos alone was responsible for the first conversions to Christianity, and by the early 1890s, the cultural practices of the Haisla were further threatened by emerging Canadian governmental policy.

The Canadian government began forming policy toward western tribes in the latter part of the nineteenth century. According to Robert Surtees, "In western Canada, it was felt that the bands were not sufficiently advanced," and "[t]here government began by concluding a series of land cession treaties, including the now normal schedule of reserves, and then concentrated on assaulting tribal customs and traditions" (89). These

assaults came mostly in the form of forced schooling, because “Residential and industrial schools were considered to be a means of removing Indian children from the hunt and from other parental influences that slowed their progress toward civilization” (Surtees 92). The forced schooling of Native children further altered cultural practices and created psychic scars within traditional communities, as a result of the traumatic removal of children from traditional living habits and the abuse that these children often suffered at residential schools. By the 1960s, even the government began to see the consequences of violent changes within First Nations communities of western Canada.

Federal policy toward the western tribes of Canada began to change around 1960, but “Despite governmental efforts and claims of achievement, school dropout rates and unemployment remained extremely high and incomes, low” (Kew 165). The school dropout and unemployment rates remained high because of the significant changes within community cultural systems. First Nations peoples, like the Haisla, were struggling with the aftermath of economic and religious changes, as well as the consequences of governmental policy. By the 1980s,

[t]he high rate of alcoholism among Indians has had drastic consequences.

Accidents have been the leading cause of deaths among British Columbia Indians . . . . Suicide and homicide are more common than among the general population, and drinking is an associated factor in these sudden deaths.” (Kew 166)

The disruption of the cultural practices of First Nations communities has led to contemporary social ills, and the consequences are visible in the alcoholism and sudden deaths due to suicide and violence within Indigenous communities. Eden Robinson

touches on these consequences throughout *Monkey Beach*. Robinson places the protagonist and her family within a larger community network and cultural history that begins with the importance of location.

Robinson stresses the importance of location to the Haisla people by emphasizing that a certain degree of geographical awareness is vital to any reading or understanding of *Monkey Beach*. Haisla oral histories illustrate an origin in two tribal groups from northern regions of Canada (Hamori-Torok 306). These two groups, the Northern Wakashans and Tsimshians, founded the village of Kitamaat. The central setting of *Monkey Beach* is Kitamaat and is located near the inner coast of British Columbia along the upper regions of the Douglass Channel. Robinson uses Lisa as a guide to finding the main village of the Haisla people, Kitamaat. Early on in the novel, Lisa leads the reader through a map of the coast of British Columbia.

Find a map of British Columbia. Point to the middle of the coast. Beneath Alaska, find the Queen Charlotte Islands. Drag your finger across the map, across the Hecate Strait to the coast and you should be able to see a large island hugging the coast. This is Princess Royal Island. . . If your finger is on Prince Rupert or Terrace, you are too far north. If you are pointing to Bella Coola or Ocean Falls, you are too far south. If you are pointing in the right place, you should have your finger on the western shore of Princess Royal Island. To get to Kitamaat, run your finger northeast, right up to the Douglas Channel . . . Near the head of the Douglas, you'll find Kitamaat Village, with its seven hundred Haisla people tucked in between the mountains and the ocean. (5)

Through Lisa, Robinson uses a common map to situate those who are unfamiliar with the area, a gesture that invites the non-Haisla reader into the Haisla world. Most of the novel takes place in the Haisla village of Kitamaat, and while the Haisla reserve is larger than this one village, nearly one-half of the population of the tribe resides there.<sup>18</sup> By choosing this location as the center of her novel, Robinson demonstrates the continued cultural importance of location to this community, as she writes about contemporary Haisla individuals.

Robinson also utilizes Kitamaat and Lisa to touch on the lives of contemporary Haisla individuals and the colonial history of the community. The narrative style of *Monkey Beach* not only allows Robinson to use Lisa's vivid flashbacks and memories to unravel the mystery that has led to Jimmy's disappearance, but it also enables Robinson to explore the origins of community traumas. As Lisa waits for news about her younger brother, she relives her experiences with death and reconnects to vital cultural practices of her people. The narrative focuses primarily on Lisa's memories of a few central figures within her family: her uncle Mick, her grandmother Ma-ma-oo, her cousin Tab, and her younger brother Jimmy. It is through these characters and their deaths that Lisa learns about the origins of the traumas that continue to haunt her family and community. Haunting is a key theme throughout the novel as Lisa remembers her struggle with ghosts and messengers from the spirit world. While Lisa does not solve the mystery of her brother's death until the end of the novel, she initiates an investigation that forces a historical reckoning in which hidden family and cultural tragedies are revealed. It is

through Lisa's investigation that Robinson explores the various consequences of trauma for the contemporary Haisla community.

In particular, Robinson uses Lisa as a means to discuss the consequences of residential school trauma, the origins of domestic violence, and the effect of these tragedies on contemporary Haisla individuals. Robinson accomplishes this by dividing the novel into four sections, each of which details significant deaths in Lisa's life. The narrative blends memory with Lisa's current investigation, and her memories overlap with the truth behind Jimmy's disappearance. A quick overview here provides a framework for later, more specific discussion. This particular narrative structure is key to Lisa's successful journey through memory. The first section, "Love Like the Ocean," deals with Lisa's memories of Mick and her recollections of Jimmy as a young boy. In the second section, "The Song of Your Breath," Lisa begins to reconnect to her cultural heritage through memories of her grandmother and by revisiting the pain in her past. "In Search of the Elusive Sasquatch," the third section of the novel, deals with Lisa's descent into depression and alcoholism, as well as the circumstances that lead to her escape from Kitamaat and subsequent return. The final section, "The Land of the Dead," is a short and intense description of Lisa's struggle between the physical and spiritual realms. In each section, Lisa recalls her acute experiences with death and pieces together the history that has led to her brother's disappearance. Through a reconnection to her memory and cultural history, Lisa is able to discover the truth behind trauma within her community. Robinson's use of memory and story throughout the narrative provides a space to carefully discuss the beauty and pain within Haisla cultural history.

Robinson uses Lisa's memory as a didactic tool that references the cultural history of the Haisla. In particular, Lisa pieces together how to communicate with messengers from the spirit realm as she learns more about her cultural history. This task is complicated, however, because Lisa does not have access to the cultural information she needs to correctly interpret the messages, which is a direct consequence of the interruption in cultural knowledge that took place due to Canadian government policy. Lisa is an individual who is gifted with the ability to connect the community to the spirit realm.<sup>19</sup> Individuals who mediated between the physical and spiritual realm were responsible for maintaining proper relations with ghosts and spirits, and they passed on their knowledge to the next generation. But in Lisa's case, her own mother does not give her this information. Instead, she must seek it from her grandmother. In particular, this knowledge was necessary for understanding the nature of death: "The souls of the dead, it was thought, lingered for a time near their former homes, where they were a danger to the living; they then went to a land of the dead" (Hamori-Torok 310). The "land of the dead" is coincidentally the title of the fourth section of Robinson's novel, and death is a central theme that will be discussed shortly. Furthermore, Ronald Olson's anthropological account of the Haisla around 1940 points out that the Haisla believe "Ghosts appear only when a relative or you yourself are soon to die" (199). Through Lisa and her connection to the dead, Robinson discusses the particular outcomes of the disruption in cultural knowledge. Without access to the proper sources of information, Lisa cannot properly communicate with the spirit world, which endangers her life, and leads her into a downward spiral of truancy, depression, and alcoholism.

Prior to her return to Kitamaat, Lisa lapsed into a dangerous lifestyle that involved drinking, drugs, and other dangerous behaviors. Even though the reader does not learn the particulars that led to these choices until the end of the novel, the reader is aware of Lisa's pain as she smokes cigarettes endlessly and struggles to sleep and eat. In one of her memories, she recalls the year before Jimmy's death: "1988. Another banner year. A catalogue of the parties I remember, the amount I drank, the drugs I did would be pointless. It's a blur. A smudge. Two years erased, down the toilet, blotto" (296). Lisa turns toward drinking and drugs, because she cannot understand the dreams and visions that provide eerie premonitions into the deaths of her close family members. Without a means to communicate with the spirits and ghosts that haunt her, Lisa struggles to understand their significance in her life.

In addition to vivid and prophetic dreams, Lisa also sees visions of a small, red-haired man, who coincidentally appears right before tragedy strikes her life. Lisa does not know that this little man is a spirit messenger and that her ability to see him represents a gift, which has been passed down through the generations on her mother's side. Without the intergenerational knowledge to help her understand her visions, Lisa stumbles through her interactions with the little man with red hair. The first time she sees him, she is a child and confused by his sudden appearance:

I stood beside a ditch, looking down at a small, dark brown dog with white spots. I thought it was sleeping and climbed down to pet it. When I was near enough to touch it, I could see that the dog's skin was crisscrossed by razor-thin

cuts that were crusted with blood. It had bits of strange cloth tied to its fur. The dog whimpered and its legs jerked.

Someone tsk-tsked. I looked up, and a little, dark man with bright red hair was crouching beside me.

“Your doggie?” I said.

He shook his head, then pointed toward my house.

“Lisa!” Mom yelled from our front porch. “Lunchtime!” (18-19)

The little man partially guides Lisa by means of his gestures and manifestation, but as a child, Lisa does not understand his appearances or cryptic messages. When Lisa later returns to the ditch with her mother, the dog is dead. The narrative does not specify how the dog was injured, but this memory has a lasting impact on Lisa and her perception of her gift. Throughout her memories, death and the little man are linked. As she pieces together her past, Lisa begins to see the patterns of the little man’s appearances:

Now that I think back, the pattern of the little man’s visits seems unwelcomely obvious, but at the time, his arrivals and departures had no meaning. As I grew older, he became a variation of the monster under the bed or the thing in the closet, a nightmare that faded with morning. He liked to sit on top of my dresser when he came to visit, and he had a shock of bright red hair which stood up in messy, tangled puffs that he sometimes hid under a black top hat. (27)

This passage conveys the function of Lisa’s memory in Robinson’s novel: Lisa remembers, “Now that I think back,” and it is with these types of remembrances that she is able to draw conclusions about her gift. Initially, Lisa does not control her visions, but

this changes as the narrative progresses. In her subsequent visions, she begins to see that that little man is a messenger of sorts. He arrives before any traumatic event in her life, but Lisa does not have enough information to adequately prepare herself for whatever lies ahead. This knowledge must be rediscovered, and Robinson reveals one method of rediscovery through a reconnection to Haisla cultural knowledge.

Lisa's gift allows Robinson a place to discuss cultural knowledge that has been safely guarded throughout Haisla history. Within the novel, Robinson guides both the reader and Lisa through lessons on how to contact the dead. These lessons have an ambiguous origin and cannot be assigned to any one character within the novel, but at the same time, they function as a guide for the reader to understand the lessons that Lisa must learn. As previously mentioned, communication with ghosts was important to the Haisla and remains vitally important in Robinson's novel. In between sections detailing Lisa's memories, Robinson weaves together directions for contacting the dead:

Contacting the dead, lesson one. Sleep is an altered state of consciousness. To fall asleep is to fall into a deep, healing trance. In the spectrum of realities, being awake is on one side and being asleep is way, way on the other. To be absorbed in a movie, a game or work is to enter a light trance. Daydreams, prayers or obsessing are heavier trances. Most people enter trances reflexively. To contact the spirit world, you must control the way you enter this state of being that is somewhere between waking and sleeping. (139)

Lisa is presumably sharing these lessons with the reader, but at the same time, Lisa's memories suggest that she too is trying to understand how to contact and, more

importantly, understand the dead. The lessons vary and coincide with Lisa's investigation. As Lisa remembers the dead, one lesson suggests, "Names have power. This is the fundamental principle of magic everywhere" (179). Robinson does not clarify where these lessons originate, but their placement within the narrative suggests that Lisa is putting the pieces together to truly understand her gift. The final lesson concludes, "If you have not contacted the dead after several tries, examine your willingness to speak with them. Any fear, doubt or disbelief will hinder your efforts" (212). Yet, in order for her fully to understand her gift, Lisa must experience the deaths of her closest family members, so that she can learn how to honor them in death.

Lisa's memories begin with a focus on her relationship to her uncle Mick and his eventual death. In the case of Lisa, her name, Lisamarie Michelle Hill, reveals a great deal about her relationship to Mick and her connection to the dead. When she meets her Uncle Mick for the first time, her mother tells him, "Michael, meet Lisamarie Michelle . . . It was supposed to be a touching tribute" (Robinson 24). Lisa's parents honored Mick, who adored Elvis Presley, by naming her after Elvis's daughter and a feminine form of Michael (Michelle). In a gothic reading of *Monkey Beach*, Jennifer Andrews suggests that Lisa is "aptly named after Elvis's daughter, a living descendant of a dead legend" (12). Andrews makes perceptive observations about Lisa's name and highlights gothic elements within the novel, and while she recognizes that *Monkey Beach* "presents its own version of the Gothic novel," she does not adequately situate her discussion within Haisla cultural history (2). In her discussion of Lisa's gift, Andrews suggests that Lisa has "a supernatural ability to predict deaths of those most precious to her," but only discusses

her gift in so far as it supports her discussion of the gothic elements in the novel.

Furthermore, Andrews discusses the effects of colonization on the Haisla people within the novel, but then re-colonizes the Haisla through a disregard for the particular history of this community. Yes, like Elvis's daughter, Lisa has a legendary past, but she is also haunted by this past, because of a disregard for the cultural practices of the Haisla. While there are elements within the novel that can be described as gothic, Robinson's novel must also be situated within Haisla cultural history. In order for Lisa to find answers, she must reconnect to her cultural history by uncovering the tragedies within her family and community.

In particular, tragedies occurred within the Haisla community after children were removed to residential schools. Through Lisa's memories of Mick, Robinson highlights how intergenerational traumas emerge from the negative experiences of various characters in residential schools. As previously stated, the Canadian government established the residential school program to "civilize" First Nations children, but this dramatically disrupted family and community networks. Robinson illustrates the consequences of this type of trauma in one of Lisa's recollections. During a family excursion, Lisa recalls being startled awake by Mick frantically muttering "Cookie," the nickname of his dead wife. At the time, Lisa was unaware of the meaning behind the name and did not understand the sudden change in her uncle. The next morning Mick declared:

“How?” Mick was shouting. “They were after numbers! That’s all they wanted! How many converts they could say they had. How many heathens they—”

“. . . You look at your precious church. You look at what they did. You never went to residential school. You can’t tell me what I fucking went through and what I didn’t.” (109)

Even years after leaving a residential school, Mick was tormented by his experiences at the hands of the “church.” Mick emphatically tells his family that the school was supported by “a religion that thought the best way to make us white was to fucking torture children—” (110). Physical and sexual abuse were rampant in these institutions and many children were physically and psychologically traumatized.<sup>20</sup> Lisa discovers that Mick met his wife Cookie in residential school, where they were both beaten and abused, and where they decided to become activists for Native rights. However, Cookie was violently murdered, which led to Mick’s further alienation from his family and his prolonged absence.

Lisa idolizes her often-rebellious uncle, who was absent from the family for many years. Once he returns to the family, Mick takes Lisa under his wing and adores his little “monster,” a nickname Lisa received from Mick after a school fight (67). In one particular memory, Robinson illustrates the important bond between Lisa and Mick and, at the same time, touches on a sensitive cultural issue for the Haisla:

“She’s got to know about these things,” Mick would say to Dad, who was disturbed by a note from one of my teachers. She had forced us to read a book

that said that the Indians on the northwest coast of British Columbia had killed and eaten people as religious sacrifices. My teacher had made us each read a paragraph out loud. When my turn came, I sat there shaking, absolutely furious. (68)

Early anthropological accounts, such as Ronald Olson's "The Social Organization of the Haisla of British Columbia" (1935), discuss cultural dance practices of the Haisla. One dance, the tanish, is veiled in respectful secrecy and involves "dancers [who] are thought to possess very strong magical power" (Olson 175). These dancers were said to have "actually [eaten] pieces of flesh from . . . corpses" and bitten off "large chunks of flesh" from observers (Olson 177). Through Lisa, Robinson provides a different perspective on anthropological accounts of the Haisla. In the rest of the memory, Lisa tells her teacher that her grandmother "Ma-ma-oo told [her] it was pretend, the eating people, like drinking Christ's blood and Communion" (69).<sup>21</sup> Despite the fact that Lisa attempts to communicate cross-culturally and to create a logical and realistic connection between Christianity and the religious practices of the Haisla, she is punished and sent to the principal's office. Mick was so proud of Lisa's resistance that he "had the teacher's note laminated and framed" (69). Through her memories of Mick, Lisa remembers learning about the importance of standing up for her rights and being proud of her heritage, while also learning about the consequences of residential schooling. At the same time, her memories of Mick's death propel her toward a fuller understanding of her cultural heritage.

The night before Mick's death, Lisa is haunted by horrible dreams of the "drifting hair of a corpse" and a visit from the little man (131). In this visit, the little man "touched [her] shoulder with a cold, wet hand," and as she remembers this moment, realizes that he tried to "comfort" her (132). The next morning, Mick goes to check on the family fishnets and ends up falling into the water and drowning. Drowning, for the Haisla, is a potent form of death, and as Olson recorded: "If a person is drowning all the animals race toward him. At death he becomes the actual animal which reached him first, regardless of his clan affiliation and regardless of whether the body is found" (200). When Lisa's father discovers Mick's dead body, he had to shoot the seals in the area that had started to devour Mick's body. While Robinson does not suggest that Mick becomes a seal after his death, she links the narrative to Haisla views on death and drowning.<sup>22</sup> Mick's tragic death scars Lisa, and she cannot grieve properly, or understand the significance of her ability to foresee death. After Lisa's recollection of Mick's death, the narrative turns toward Lisa's memories of her grandmother, and she learns even more about the consequences of intergenerational trauma within her family.

Lisa's memories of her grandmother remind Lisa of the origins of intergenerational trauma within her family. For reasons initially unknown to Lisa, Ma-ma-oo sent two of her children to residential school, which led to hostility and pain within the Hill family. When Lisa sees the strain within her family, she remembers asking her cousin Tab "Why doesn't your mom talk to Ma-ma-oo?" (59). In response, Tab tells Lisa, "Ba-ba-oo was an asshole. He beat Gran. Instead of sending him away, she sent Mick and Mom to residential school" (59).<sup>23</sup> Tab's mother, Trudy, and Mick

continue to have strained relations with their mother, because she chose an abusive marriage over her children. To make matters worse, Mick and Trudy were abused and scarred by their experiences in residential school. After these tragic experiences, Mick attempted to deal with his pain through activism, but Trudy only masked her pain with alcohol. Trudy's alcoholism temporarily assuaged her pain, but it also caused the formation of new traumas for Lisa's cousin Tab. The pain of the parents is visited upon the children. Through memories of her cousin Tab, Lisa learns even more about her fractured family history. During a sleepover at Tab's, Lisa remembers her aunt Trudy's drunken actions: "We could hear her vomiting in the upstairs bedroom, then clomping down the stairs to Tab's room, hungover and cranky, she sent me home, saying I could damn well eat out someone else's fridge" (51). In this memory, Lisa recalls Trudy's mean words, but Trudy's alcoholism also leads to more than hurt feelings. Trudy's alcoholism deprived Tab of a healthy relationship with her mother, which eventually leads to Tab's own self-destruction and death. Through Mick and Tab, Lisa uncovers this hidden family tragedy and discovers how it continues to affect her family through intergenerational trauma. However, Lisa must experience the death of her grandmother in order to learn even more about the trauma within her family.

Lisa's recollection of the impact her grandmother had on her life leads Lisa towards finally accepting the power of her gift. Her grandmother, Agnes Hill or Ma-ma-oo, teaches Lisa more about her gift and the ways of their people.<sup>24</sup> After Mick's death, Lisa found comfort with her grandmother, Ma-ma-oo, who taught her the many nuances of their cultural heritage, specifically, the proper ways to deal with death and ghosts:

“*Oxasuli*,” she said. “Powerful medicine. Very dangerous. It can kill you, do you understand? You have to respect it.” She handed me the root and I put it in the bucket. There were some more *oxasuli* bushes around, but she said to let them be. We slogged some more, found two suitable plants, then Ma-ma-oo declared we had enough. “You put these on your windowsill, and it keeps ghosts away.” (151)<sup>25</sup>

Ma-ma-oo teaches Lisa how to use various local plants and how to respect their properties. Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa that “Ghosts hate the smell” and that “When someone dies, you have to be careful” (151, 152). In this interaction, Lisa learns more than just how to keep ghosts away; she also begins to learn more about the cultural significance of her visions. Lisa asks her grandmother what spirits look like, and Ma-ma-oo responds, “I don’t know. Never seen one. The chief trees—the biggest, strongest, oldest ones—had a spirit, a little man with red hair. Olden days, they’d lead medicine men to the best trees to make canoes with” (152). Ma-ma-oo’s description matched Lisa’s spirit guide, which propelled Lisa to ask Ma-ma-oo about her gift,

“What would it mean if you saw a little man? . . . ”

“Ah, you have the gift, then. Just like your mother. Didn’t she tell you about it?”

“What gift?”

“Your mother’s side of the family has it strong. Do you know the future sometimes? Do you get hunches?”

“Predictions? From the little man. He comes, then something bad happens.”

She eased herself down onto a stump, then patted the space beside her.

“Here, sit.” She frowned. “Your mother never said anything?”

“She just said he was a dream.”

“Hmmp,” she grunted. “He’s a guide, but not a reliable one. Never trust the spirit world too much. They think differently from the living.” (153)

Lisa is shocked to learn that she has the “gift” that comes from her “mother’s side of the family,” but she is also told that it is an unreliable gift that is difficult to control (153).

Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa that her other grandmother “was a real medicine woman,” and “If you wanted to talk to your dead, she was the one people went to” (154). However, Lisa does not have the knowledge to control her gift in the same way. Lisa’s spirit guide visits her before death and tragedy, but she cannot interpret his gestures and cannot control her visions. Without access to proper sources of information, Lisa is even more at the whim of the spirit world.

Part of the reason that Lisa cannot understand her visions stems from a lack of cultural knowledge due to interruptions in the intergenerational passing on of knowledge. Ma-ma-oo says, “All the people who knew the old ways are gone. Anyone else is doing it in secret these days. But there’s good medicine and there’s bad. Best not to deal with it at all if you don’t know what you’re doing” (154). Ma-ma-oo recognizes the consequences of death, tragedy, and assimilation, as she states: “Old ways don’t matter much now. Just hold you back” (153). But, at the same time as she protests their

irrelevance, Ma-ma-oo's words reveal the path that Lisa must follow; she must understand her gift and rediscover the "old ways." Even as the narrative engages in the consequences of colonization with Ma-ma-oo's statement about the "old ways," it also expresses the continued importance of cultural practices and intergenerational knowledge through Lisa's memory of Ma-ma-oo. In this flashback, Robinson demonstrates how memory acts as a means of conveying intergenerational knowledge, while at the same time discussing the consequences of colonization and the need to retain vital cultural information.

As a result of the interruption in cultural knowledge, Lisa must piece together the knowledge that Ma-ma-oo passed on to her, as she begins to unravel the mysteries of her gift and learns how to communicate with the dead. For example, Ma-ma-oo shows Lisa the proper rituals to honor the dead: "Late in the spring, on Ba-ba-oo's birthday, Ma-ma-oo took me down to the Octopus Beds. She brought a bottle of Johnnie Walker and a pack of Player's cigarettes. She made me carry the box of Twinkies, with a stern warning that she knew exactly how many were left" (78). In this interaction with Ma-ma-oo, Lisa learns the Haisla cultural practice of burning items to give to the dead. According to Olson, "Even years after a person has died things are burned for him, especially food and clothing. Objects that cannot be burned are 'warmed' at the fire, then placed on the grave" (Olson 182). When Ma-ma-oo and Lisa start a fire, Lisa recalls that Ma-ma-oo "passed the bottle [of Johnnie Walker] over the fire, which popped and sizzled" and fed Twinkies into the fire (78). Through Ma-ma-oo, Lisa learns how to give items to the dead, as she is connected to her cultural heritage through experiences and storytelling. At

one point, Ma-ma-oo asks Lisa, “Did I ever tell you about shape-shifters?” (210), but rather than have Ma-ma-oo tell the story, Robinson demonstrates the importance of this intergenerational knowledge by having Lisa retell the history of shapeshifters,

In a time distant and vague from the one we know now, she told me, flesh was less rigid. Animals and humans could switch shapes simply by putting on each other’s skins. Animals could talk, and often shared their knowledge with the newcomers that humans were then. When this age ended, flesh solidified. People were people, and animals lost their ability to speak in words. (210)

By retelling the story, Lisa takes her place within the intergenerational tradition of storytelling and begins to understand why she is important to the vitality of Haisla cultural traditions. Lisa learns about history from a Haisla perspective and then adds her own voice to a rich cultural history. It is through Lisa’s acceptance of that role that Robinson’s novel emphasizes the enduring importance of the natural world. Within the novel, communication is often possible between humans and animals, even if the humans are unable to understand the messages, because “All animals understand human speech and know what humans are saying, even when not near” (Olson 200). The novel opens with the following sentences: “Six crows sit in our greengage tree. Half-aware, I hear them speak to me in Haisla” (1). Even though Lisa does not understand exactly what the crows tell her, she translates it as “La’es—Go down to the bottom of the ocean” (1). Furthermore, her “half-awake” status connects her to the spirit world, which enables her to understand. Lisa does not know that this smaller prophetic experience foretells the most significant journey in her life and the larger journey of the novel (Lisa ends up

literally in the ocean at the end of the novel).<sup>26</sup> As a direct result of Ma-ma-oo, Lisa is able to unearth the pieces needed to understand her gift, which unfortunately occurs around Ma-ma-oo's death.

Prior to Ma-ma-oo's death, Lisa is encouraged to ignore her gift, which means she does not have the benefit of the little man's visit or a dream to warn her of Ma-ma-oo's illness. Lisa ignored her gift, because she was taken to a psychiatrist due to her poor performance in school, a psychiatrist who did not believe Lisa could see ghosts. At the psychiatrist's office, Lisa remembers being asked:

“Do you think,” she asked me halfway through our first and last session, “that maybe these ghosts you dream about aren't really ghosts, but are your attempt to deal with death?”

“No,” I said.

Her wide, blue eyes fixed on me. “Then you believe ghosts exist?”

“Yes,” I said. (273)

Lisa attempts to state the truth about her cultural heritage, but in this same interaction, Lisa is also touched by a malevolent presence. This presence manifests as a being wrapped around the psychiatrist's body. Lisa remembers,

What I tried not to focus on was the thing beside her, whispering in her ear. It had no flesh, just tight, thin skin over bones. Its fingers sank into her arms, its legs wrapped around her waist as it clung to her like a baby. When Mrs. Jenkins shook my hand, I caught a bit of what it was saying to her. “. . . screws

her? Do you think he thinks of you? When he puts his hand on your thigh, does he imagine hers? Is he—? (272-273)

During the rest of the session, Lisa recalls being touched by the being and, with her “mouth moving by itself,” saying that she believed in ghosts “For attention” (274). The malevolent presence takes advantage of Lisa and her inability to harness the power of her gift. When she receives the shocking news of Ma-ma-oo’s illness, Lisa remembers, “Until that moment, I had never appreciated the little man. This is, I thought, what it’s like for everybody else. Hello, it’s bad news. Bam. I couldn’t grasp it; my head wouldn’t wrap around it” (283). However, even though Lisa attempts to ignore her gift, she is reminded of its importance the day before her grandmother’s death.

Even through Ma-ma-oo’s death is tragic and devastating for Lisa, her memories of it are important to her journey, as they propel her toward a reconciliation with her gift and family history. When Lisa sees her grandmother for the last time, she recalls:

When I arrived at Ma-ma-oo’s house that afternoon, the house was filled with the sound of ghosts murmuring. Ma-ma-oo rested on the couch by the window.

“There’s Mimayus,” Ma-ma-oo said to me, pointing her teaspoon at the corner of the room. “And Solomon, and Bertha, and Hector, and Vern—oh, I had eyes for him when he was young.”

“You see them?” I said. I could catch movement from the corner of my eyes and caught the whiff of cigarettes, but I couldn’t see them clearly and didn’t want to.

“They came this morning,” she said. (289)

In this memory, Lisa is reminded that she is not alone in her belief in ghosts, but she is also reminded that they are often associated with death. As previously stated, according to Olson, “Ghost appear only when a relative or you yourself are soon to die,” and Ma-ma-oo’s visions foretells her death in the novel (199). It is through Ma-ma-oo’s relationship with Lisa that Robinson is able to weave various elements of Haisla cultural history throughout *Monkey Beach*. The day after Ma-ma-oo sees the ghosts of her relatives, she dies tragically in a fire. Through Lisa’s interactions with Ma-ma-oo, Lisa learns the importance of respecting her gift, and through memories of Ma-ma-oo, Lisa is able to learn how to control her gift.

However, in order for Lisa to truly understand the power of her gift and overcome the grief and trauma that threaten to destroy her life, she must uncover the truth surrounding her family and find her own path. Lisa begins to understand how her family and community were ripped apart by the abuse they suffered in residential schooling, and the ensuing alcoholism and domestic violence. In one vision, she vividly learns that even her seemingly strong and wise grandmother once faced her own familial battles. Once she begins to uncover the truth behind her family’s history, her visions reveal the stark and painful reality:

I had a dream about Ma-ma-oo. I saw her sitting at her kitchen table. She had a dark purple bruise covering her left cheek and smaller bruises on her arms. Ba-ba-oo was singing in the shower. A thud came from the bathroom and then there was silence. But instead of moving or asking if everything was all right, she sat

and gripped her mug of tea tightly between her hands. I heard the sound of water hitting the tub and the shower curtain. “Nothing’s wrong,” she whispered, even when the water seeped under the door. “Nothing’s wrong.” (Robinson 355-356)

In Lisa’s vision, Ma-ma-oo was not surprised or startled by her husband’s fall, which suggests that in some way she was expecting his death. Moreover, her gripping of her mug signifies the emotion she continued to feel toward him as he lay dying. This vision allows Lisa to see that Ma-ma-oo was pushed to the extreme by her abusive husband, and the vision teaches her even more about the origin of trauma within her family. In one of Lisa’s conversations with Tab, Tab says, “When Ba-ba-oo was kicking Ma-ma-oo around, she sent Uncle Mick and Aunt Trudy away...Aunt Kate thinks Ma-ma-oo might have killed Ba-ba-oo after he got carried away” (Robinson 254). Lisa cannot envision her grandmother, either “letting anyone kick her around” or “hurting anyone,” yet she must confront the truth in her family’s past (254). Ma-ma-oo sent Mick and Trudy away to residential schooling, because she was pushed to desperate measures by the domestic violence in her home. While there is very little indication as to the direct cause of Ba-ba-oo’s death, there are certain hints that Lisa’s grandmother poisoned her husband. When Ma-ma-oo first tells Lisa about *oaxuli*, she cautions Lisa, “But don’t eat it, hear? You eat it, and you go to sleep and you don’t wake up. Good for arthritis. Joints. Hard to use, though. You have to do it right or your heart stops. Bad, slow painful way to go” (152). Lisa’s dream reveals the truth about her grandfather’s abusive nature as well as the events surrounding his death.

Lisa finally takes control of her gift and is able to harness the power of her dreams and visions. However, with her acceptance of her gift, Lisa also accepts its dangerous nature and knows that she must make an offering of flesh to obtain the answers she seeks. The various traumas in Lisa's life prepare her for the sacrifice she must make.

Earlier in the novel, Lisa first learns of the need for flesh offerings in the aftermath of a tragic rape. When she was in the eighth grade, Lisa was drugged by a friend who gave her a beer at a party (Robinson 257). A few minutes after drinking the beer, Lisa remembers:

I'd had a bad ear infection once, and every time I had stood up, I felt the way I was feeling right now.

The long blank spots start then. Chunks of memory are gone. I have a piece of it where I'm halfway down a hill. . . . The bushes moved, and I was fuzzily alarmed. The next piece I have, I'm lying on the ground and I can't see the sky because of the tree branches. I'm cold and someone is breathing over me.

The last piece is pain between my legs, and a body on top of me, panting. (258)

After the rape, Lisa goes to burn the clothes associated with her rape, and unknown voices tell her "We can hurt him for you" (261). But Lisa does not give them the offering of "meat" that they request (261). With her refusal, the "voices hissed into silence" and she burns the clothes associated with her rape (262). While she doesn't give an offering of flesh at that point in her life, she recognizes that she must do so now in order to know what has happened to her brother. In the final pages of the novel, Lisa embraces the danger of her gift. She finds herself at Monkey Beach, a place "full of power...like a

warmth, a tingle,” a place of personal and cultural importance (316). She hears a now-familiar voice whispering, “Lisa...we can help you” (316), a voice that she now understands. Despite the danger, Lisa gives her own blood as an offering to the voice, and as a result fully enters into the spirit world through a vision, a vision that reveals the stark truth of her brother’s death by drowning.

In the final section of the novel, “The Land of the Dead,” Lisa has successfully pieced together the necessary knowledge to learn more about her brother’s death. While tragic for Lisa, Jimmy’s disappearance guides her toward an understanding of her cultural heritage and the truths of her family’s past. Unbeknownst to Lisa, Jimmy had decided to go on the fishing trip to “make something right” – that something being the incestuous rape of his girlfriend, Karaoke (39). Josh, Karaoke’s uncle who committed the rape, is the captain of the boat that Jimmy volunteers to work on, “The Queen of the North.” In a significant side note, “The Queen of the North” is also the title of a short story in Robinson’s *Traplins* (1996). The story is told from the perspective of Karaoke, who reveals her long history of sexual abuse through memory:

“Moooo.” I copy the two aliens on Sesame Street mooing to a telephone. Me and Uncle Josh are watching television together. He smells faintly of the halibut he cooked for dinner. Uncle Josh undoes his pants. “Moo.” I keep my eyes on the TV and say nothing as he moves toward me. . . . When it’s over he’ll have treats for me. It’s like when the dentist gives me extra suckers for not crying, not even when it really hurts. (*Traplins* 190)

In the short story, Karaoke is a troubled teenager who finds herself pregnant as a result of her uncle's sexual abuse. In the midst of her pregnancy and abortion, Karaoke starts dating Jimmy Hill, who learns about her abuse. "The Queen of the North" ends with Jimmy and Josh's departure, the place where *Monkey Beach* begins. While unclear at the beginning of the novel, Jimmy's motivation for taking the job revolved around avenging his girlfriend through the murder of Josh.

After her blood sacrifice, Lisa vividly experiences Jimmy's murder of Josh and his subsequent drowning. In this vision, Lisa sees:

The waves have washed the blood from the oar tip but he can see the dents in the wood where he hit Josh—first on the hand as Josh gripped the side and screamed, trying to put one leg in the seiner as Jimmy kicked him and hit him. For what he did to Karaoke, he knew that Josh deserved to die. But he couldn't bring himself to do anything more until the boat tilted, and finally Jimmy brought the oar down on his head. (369)

Moments after Jimmy's violent form of justice, the boat sinks, "So Jimmy aims for the shore, lifts his arms in and out of the water, executing the strokes he's trained all his life to perfect" (370). Lisa does not yet know that even though Jimmy was an expert swimmer, he was unable to reach the shore and drowned. Lisa knows that the spirits have given her only a little of the information she wants, but she is weak from the loss of blood and knows that the spirits will only want "more" (370). While trying to escape the "thing [that] waits in the shadows," Lisa stumbles toward her boat, but she is weak from the loss of blood and manages only to hit her head and plunge under water. At this

moment, Lisa begins to drown both spiritually and physically, which fulfills the prophecy at the beginning of the book: “La’es—Go down to the bottom of the ocean” (1). It is only through her gift and connection to family that Lisa is saved by those who have died before her:

Someone touches my face. “Wah,” she says. “My crazy girl. Go home and make me some grandkids.”

“Hiya, Monster,” Mick’s voice says. “Don’t listen to her. You go out there and give ‘em hell. Red power!”

I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. They are blurry, dark figures against the firelight. For a moment, the singing becomes clear. I can understand the words even though they are in Haisla and it’s a farewell song, they are singing about leaving and meeting again, and they turn and lift their hands. (373-374)

Lisa cannot talk because she is physically underwater and is moving between the physical and spirit world. Ma-ma-oo and Mick give Lisa farewell messages, and right before she wakes up she hears Jimmy say, “Tell her” (374). Lisa is never told the truth of her brother’s death, but she sees Ma-ma-oo, Mick, and Jimmy dancing around a fire in her vision, singing the farewell song to her. Even though the novel ends shortly after this moment with Lisa barely waking from this experience, Lisa and the reader know that she has accepted her brother’s death. Once she understands the song “about leaving and meeting again,” Lisa knows that her family is waiting for her and she is not alone (374). She has reclaimed lost intergenerational knowledge and now understands the origins of past traumas in her family and community.

By claiming her gift, Lisa symbolically reclaims her history and begins to heal the intergenerational traumas that have haunted her family. Through Lisa's symbolic journey of healing, Robinson suggests that healing is possible for other Haisla people, and other Indigenous communities. Through *Monkey Beach*, Robinson constructs a narrative that maintains respect for her traditions while at the same time emphasizing the continued importance of Haisla traditions in the modern world. In *Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction: Refiguring Identities*, Coral Ann Howells suggests:

Robinson is engaged in the double process of rehabilitating Native traditions for her Indigenous readers and interpreting those traditions for a non-Native international readership. She faces the challenge of constructing—or reconstructing—contemporary Native identities through a narrative that both acknowledges and refigures the conventions of white literary genres while not erasing signs of Native difference. (184)

Howells notes how Robinson “refigures” the literary genre of the novel, but also sees the novel as a hybrid construction of white and Native traditions. Robinson's fiction does maintain the importance of Native traditions, while at the same time constructing contemporary Native identities, but the novel is not necessarily a blending of two disparate traditions. In the novel, Robinson forms contemporary Haisla identities by dealing with past traumas and through a reconnection to the cultural heritage of the Haisla people. Howells highlights this in the following, but she does not note the ways in which Robinson also forms a cohesive identity for Lisa:

*Monkey Beach* is more than a girl's growing up novel or even a protest novel, for it is also a novel about spiritual quest where the protagonist seeks to move beyond personal loss and the damage inflicted on her Native culture toward a position of creative survival and a retrieval of her inheritance. The novel's visionary ending though fraught with ambiguity manages to celebrate Native spiritual healing, asserting the magical power of storytelling. (185)

While the ending can be considered "fraught with ambiguity," it actually places Lisa within a larger cultural and family network that surpasses the physical world. The reader, like Lisa, must experience the ambiguity and confusion associated with traveling between these two worlds. The only way that Lisa is able to heal herself and her community is through an understanding of the past and a reclaiming of cultural knowledge, which happens when she slips in and out of the spirit world and faces her own death. It is through this symbolic reconnection to the historical and cultural past that *Monkey Beach* outlines the ways in which other individuals and communities can heal the wounds they have inherited from Euro-American colonization.

By reconstructing the history of her family, Lisa also reconstructs the history of her community and her people. Robinson emphasizes the intimate connection Lisa's family has to the cultural history of the Haisla people throughout *Monkey Beach*. Embedded within Lisa's emotional remembrances are many other stories that detail the history of the Hill family and the larger Haisla community. The Haisla people experienced traumas as a result of repeated governmental attempts at eradicating their culture. The Hill family, like many other Haisla families, has had direct experience with

these traumas and continues to feel their effects in the forms of alcoholism, substance abuse, depression, and suicide. In *Monkey Beach*, Robinson writes honestly about the traumas that her community has faced in the past. According to Howells, it is through this honesty that Robinson also refigures Canadian history:

Robinson is telling a different version of Canadian history and settlement as she rewrites Canadian history across generations, telling the story of European colonization and its disastrous consequences from a Native viewpoint, reconstructing the inevitably hybridized identities of Aboriginal people in the postcolonial present when so much of Indigenous culture has been disrupted and destroyed by white cultural practices. (Howells 184)

Howells suggestions that Robinson is “reconstructing the inevitably hybridized identities of Aboriginal people in the postcolonial present . . .” presents a dilemma to a reading of Robinson’s novel (184). If Aboriginal people inevitably have hybrid identities, then how can they heal the wounds from colonization? In *Indigenous American Women*, Devon Mihesuah suggests that “one of the first steps to empowerment is becoming comfortable with one’s identity” (xvii). While Howells draws attention to Robinson’s specific Native viewpoint, she also suggests that the “novel is a striking example of a hybridized text where different cultural systems of representation with their different languages and narrative traditions are held together in tension” (185). Howells’ repeated use of the term hybrid is bothersome, and in some ways, I would argue that the end of the novel actually resolves the tension between the two cultural systems. Lisa is able to heal the wounds within her family by reconciling her cultural heritage with her contemporary existence.

Robinson provides readers with a contemporary Haisla point of view, and one constructed by their history through their stories rather than an outside or hybrid perspective. In the novel, Lisa acts as the storyteller who heals the wounds that continue injuring her, her family, and community by understanding the origins of these family wounds.

If the above analysis succeeded, then we can now see how Robinson negotiates Haisla cultural history throughout the novel, and how one form of healing can take place. Robinson's novel articulates the consequences for the Haisla of an interruption within the matrilineal clan system, but she also illustrates how kinship relations within the community remain vital through the interactions between the characters. As with cultural traditions, traumas also begin deep in the roots of a people, and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* deals particularly with these issues. She paints a vivid picture of contemporary Haisla life, and through Lisa and the Hill family, suggests that one possible path toward healing can be found in a reconnection to traditional knowledge. Robinson's strategy in telling Lisa's story allows for an exploration of the roots of contemporary intergenerational trauma within the Haisla community and within other tribal communities that have experienced similar traumas. The narrative structure of the novel is key to this healing process, as it focuses on Lisa's journey through storytelling and memory.

The narrative structure of *Monkey Beach* reveals a theme of narrative healing, which I would suggest is also manifested in other novels by Indigenous women. These novels can be characterized as having a symbolic journey of healing at the heart of the

novel. Furthermore, the protagonists within these novels use memory and storytelling to address the intergenerational traumas within their families and communities. Through memory and storytelling, the protagonists are able to see the origins of trauma within their families and reconcile their cultural histories with their contemporary identities. Through Lisa's narrative journey, Robinson shows how many contemporary Indigenous peoples abuse alcohol and drugs in an effort to forget their past traumas or cope with the abuse in their life. Robinson illustrates these consequences of colonization throughout *Monkey Beach*, while she also outlines the importance of cultural traditions in the healing process. The narrative style enables the reader to experience Lisa's reconnection to her cultural history, and in this symbolic reconnection, the narrative emphasizes how Lisa heals the wounds inherited from colonization through a dramatic acceptance of her contemporary identity. Robinson's novel is unique in how it addresses the specific consequences of colonization for the Haisla people and in Lisa's specific journey toward healing, but its use of narrative healing is a theme it shares with other Indigenous novels. Like the characters within *Monkey Beach*, many Indigenous individuals personally experience the consequences of colonization, which is why the narrative healing is significant to the novel. We can see this pattern again in other novels by Indigenous women, like Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon*.

b. *Faces in the Moon*

Betty Louise Bell is of Cherokee heritage and wrote her first novel, *Faces in the Moon*, in 1994. The novel is volume 9 from the American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series published by the University of Oklahoma Press, a series that has had dramatic influence on Indigenous literary scholarship.<sup>27</sup> Since that time, however, the novel has received little attention. Despite the novel's thematic similarities to other fiction by Indigenous women, it has been largely ignored and very little scholarship has been done on this novel. On the back of the novel, Leslie Marmon Silko declares: "*Faces in the Moon* makes a major contribution to American literature and gives us a rare and important insight into love between a daughter and mother" (back cover). However, even though Silko points to the important intergenerational theme in the novel, this theme has been overlooked in prominent journals devoted to the study of Indigenous literatures. The reason for this apparent oversight may be the difficulty of discussing trauma within Indigenous women's literatures, but it may also reveal the nuances and complexity of contemporary Cherokee identity.

One reason for the complexity within contemporary Cherokee identity has to do with the rich diversity of Cherokee history and the severe consequences of North American colonization. Prior to European contact, the Cherokee inhabited a great deal of the Southeast portion of the current United States with a population of approximately 30,000 (Fogelson 341). The nation was composed of a confederacy of towns and different levels of chiefdoms, with certain towns being designated for war (red towns)

and peace (white towns) (“Cherokee”). However, between the sixteenth century, when the Cherokee encountered Europeans for the first time, and the eighteenth century, the Cherokee experienced drastic changes and population loss as a result of “European-introduced diseases and increased warfare” (Fogelson 341). As a result of the rich biodiversity of Cherokee lands, which offered ample lands for farming and hunting, the Cherokee people developed regular interactions with Europeans and European goods (Fogelson 337, 339). In fact, by the end of the seventeenth century, the Cherokee had adapted to new ways of living that incorporated European trade goods, but this relative peace was short lived. The incorporation of these trade goods also introduced disease, reducing the Cherokee population by nearly half. For example, with the increased contact between European traders, Cherokee individuals and communities were exposed to diseases such as small pox. Throughout the eighteenth century, disease and warfare with the English, French, and Spanish further reduced the Cherokee population, and they were unable to stop non-Cherokee incursions into their territory. Despite their early alliance with the British against the French during the French and Indian war (1754-1763), British and other European settlers aggressively invaded Cherokee lands, destroying towns in the Carolinas and sending hundreds of refugees into east Tennessee (King 354). In order to survive the onslaught of European settlement and the formation of the United States, the Cherokee people adopted new living patterns similar to the majority population.

By the nineteenth century, the Cherokee had dramatically changed their living patterns, with many people and communities adopting habits similar to those of

mainstream United States citizens. Historically, the Cherokee “could hardly be regarded as a tribe, in the sense of a unified policy with superordinate system of authority, until the mid-nineteenth century, when pressure from Americans forced the establishment of a unified government” (Fogelson 338). Before this unification took place, many members of the Cherokee Nation “embarked on a program of ‘civilization’ during the first third of the nineteenth century” (Fogelson 339). During this period, Cherokee individuals owned small farms and were “slave-owning plantation proprietors,” while others continued to live traditionally in lands to the west, not yet inundated with European settlers (Fogelson 339). In 1821, Sequoyah developed a syllabary of the Cherokee language, and a vast majority of Cherokee people quickly became literate in their own language. They even began the publication of the *Cherokee Phoenix* in the Cherokee capital, New Echota, in 1828, which was a bilingual newspaper devoted to the Cherokee nation. However, these attempts at civilization would not aid them against the emerging state of Georgia or president Andrew Jackson.

The relationship between the Cherokee people, the early United States government, and the state of Georgia demonstrates the hostile take over of Cherokee lands, and hints at the profound impact this history has on contemporary Cherokee people. In 1831, the Cherokee people attempted to sue the state of Georgia in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, because they were feeling the effects of “repressive laws passed by the state of Georgia in 1828-1829 [that] greatly restricted public activities in the Cherokee Nation” (King 358). The state of Georgia terrorized Cherokee communities, because state representatives wanted to remove the Cherokee from their lands, so that

state surveyors could determine if the land contained any mineral wealth. The court case was an attempt to get an injunction to restrain the state of Georgia, but the injunction was denied based on the Supreme Court's inability to "reconcile tribal status within the constitutional framework of the United States" (Wilkins 22). This led to another court case, *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), which "recognized the political distinctiveness of the Cherokee Nation and the supremacy of Indian treaties over state laws" (Wilkins 22). However, the "state of Georgia resented the intrusion by the Supreme Court into local affairs and with the tacit support of President Andrew Jackson defiantly refused to honor the decisions of the court" (King 358). The tensions escalated between the Cherokee people and the state of Georgia, with the state even confiscating the *Cherokee Phoenix* in 1834, "declaring it to be a subversive newspaper" (King 358). Despite the Cherokee Nation's acculturation and attempt to work within the governmental system of the United States, they would soon experience a horrific trauma due to their violent removal in 1838.

The precursor to the Trail of Tears in 1838 was a treaty signed by a small minority of Cherokee people who defied the Cherokee Nation. In 1835, a faction of Cherokee people signed the Treaty of New Echota, which ceded all Cherokee lands east of the Mississippi River to the United States for five million dollars. After the treaty was signed, the majority of the Cherokee Nation spoke out against the fraudulent treaty, and even took their case all the way to the Supreme Court. Despite the Supreme Court's ruling in their favor, the "Senate ratified the treaty on May 23, 1836, giving the Cherokees two years in which to remove" (King 358). In 1838, the approximately 15,000 Cherokee people who remained were forcibly removed from their homes by 7000

thousand federal and state troops. The process that began on May 25, 1838 would permanently alter the community's social and living patterns, because in addition to losing their homelands, "[n]early one-third of the emigrants perished either directly or indirectly from the forced removal" (Fogelson 340). Even with this traumatic removal, the Cherokee Nation regrouped in what the United States government had termed Indian Territory, which was located in the area now known as Oklahoma.

Within the bounds of Indian Territory, the Cherokee would continue to struggle for land, while maintaining cultural practices and a prosperous community. Even with the trauma of Removal, "the Cherokee people were able to make significant strides forward in the early years after Removal, rebuilding their lifeway by drawing from the remnants of society and culture they were forced to leave behind" (King 361). The Cherokee Nation adopted a new constitution on September 6, 1839 and began the process of rebuilding their community, but new tensions soon emerge over the status of blood quantum, slavery, and assimilation. In 1855, the Keetoowah Society formed, whose founders "were primarily full-blood northern Baptists [and] were portrayed by their adversaries, the pro-Southern mixed-bloods and intermarried Whites, as an abolitionist society under the influence of northern missionaries . . ." (King 362). The Society wanted to ensure that Cherokee politics wouldn't be dominated by voices of the pro-Southern mixed-bloods, and they "dominated Cherokee politics until the mid-1880s" (King 362-363). In addition to racial divisions, the Cherokee Nation also experienced divisions similar to the rest of the United States during the Civil War, which led to even more changes for the Cherokee people.

The Civil War had a profound impact on the Cherokee Nation despite its attempt to remain neutral during the conflict, and the postwar alliances led to dramatic land loss for the Cherokee Nation. Early battles on Cherokee lands in Missouri (Battle of Wilson's Creek) propelled the Cherokee Nation into an alliance with the Confederacy in October 1861, even though a majority supported the abolition of slavery (King 363). Many members of the Cherokee Nation became involved in the conflict, and the war damaged the integrity of the Cherokee Nation. Less than 25 years after Removal, the Cherokee Nation would again experience trauma as a result of the war, with one census documenting that "[o]ne-third of adult women were widows, and one-quarter of the children were orphans" (King 364). Yet again, the Cherokee Nation needed to rebuild, and in this rebuilding it would face new pressures on the Cherokee land base. In the late 1860s, the Cherokee Nation made numerous postwar alliances as a result of pressures from the United States government and other tribal groups. In the Cherokee Treaty of 1866, the Cherokee Nation agreed to permit "the resettlement of civilized Indians friendly to the Cherokee on unoccupied lands . . ." (King 364). In the course of the next decade, the Cherokee opened their lands to the Delaware and Shawnee tribes, but by the 1890s "pressures to force allotment of tribal lands by the federal government increased as did the number of non-Indians living in the Cherokee Nation" (King 367). The Cherokee Nation was not exempt from the Dawes Act of 1887. As a result, the "Cherokee people were relieved of more than six and one-half million acres, and subsequent frauds and swindles by spectators left many individuals landless and penniless" (King 367). As a

result of the Dawes Act, the Cherokee Nation lost a great deal of its land base, and many individuals were further scarred by the poverty that followed.

In addition to grappling with land loss, the Cherokee Nation soon faced Oklahoma statehood, which would lead to the further exploitation of Cherokee lands. Oklahoma statehood occurred in 1907 and “the Cherokee Nation was dissolved, remaining to serve only for administrative formalities until 1914. After that the Cherokee people had no legal government recognized under federal law” (King 367). Cherokee families had to fight for recognition in order to secure a land allotment, and to participate in the Dawes Commission Roles of 1906, which “remains the basis for membership in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma in the twenty-first century” (King 367). Cherokee individuals and families had to fight to maintain their allotted lands. Once Cherokee lands were settled by non-Cherokee peoples “forests were logged and much of the former tribal land was leased to cattlemen and tenant farmers,” which led to soil depletion and the loss of game (King 367). Even if families were able to secure a land allotment, they were not prepared for the “Depression and dust bowl era of the 1930s” (King 368). As a result of soil depletion in other areas, the land allotments were devastated by windstorms in the 1920s that swept away the land’s topsoil. The result was extreme drought conditions throughout the 1930s, and families were unable to survive economically. Families were additionally burdened by the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929, which dramatically increased poverty in these regions and lasted until nearly 1940. Even though the Cherokee Nation were able to reform their central government in the late

1940s, Cherokee families were understandably scarred by these experiences, and these scars continue to affect Cherokee individuals as can be seen in Bell's novel.

*Faces in the Moon* reflects the consequences of colonization as it illustrates the significant changes taking place for Cherokee individuals in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under the leadership of Wilma Mankiller, first female chief of the Cherokee Nation from 1987 to 1995, "the Cherokee Nation grew from 56,000 to more than 150,000 members. With no blood quantum requirement, the population growth in the 1980s resulted from applications for Cherokee citizenship from descendants of enrollees on the Dawes Roll and Statehood roll of 1906" (King 370). In order for individuals to become enrolled members of the Cherokee Nation, they had to provide documentation of their relationships to enrollees in the Dawes Roll. Unlike other federally recognized tribes within the United States, the Cherokee did not require that enrolled members have a certain amount of Cherokee blood, but they did require written proof of ancestry. The opening of the rolls has had drastic consequences for contemporary Cherokee individuals, because of the need to prove ancestry. In order for a person to be a recognized member of the Cherokee Nation, he or she needs to provide written proof of Cherokee heritage. Oftentimes, however, the proof of Cherokee heritage is also in the horrible intergenerational traumas that have haunted Cherokee families since allotment. Betty Louise Bell is one of those remarkable individuals, and, as will be discussed shortly, the protagonist of her novel reveals the intimate consequences of colonization for a Cherokee woman of mixed-ancestry.

Bell is of mixed-ancestry, which is an important theme in the novel, and she writes intimately about the intergenerational traumas surrounding her heritage. Similarly to Eden Robinson, Betty Louise Bell writes about a community with which she is intimately familiar, and a community that has been dramatically affected by government acts. However, unlike Robinson's novel, *Faces in the Moon* is highly biographical. In "Burying Paper," Bell's contribution to *Here First: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Authors*, she writes that *Faces in the Moon* "came not from the canons of English and American literature but from the Oklahoma voices of my mother and great aunt (35). In this essay, as in the novel, Bell writes about the consequences of colonization and assimilation as they influence her interactions with her mother and aunt. Bell was born in Oklahoma in 1949, and by the time she was five, she cared regularly for her two brothers. Her family struggled economically, and she often had to help care for the family, because of her mother's constant work schedule. When she was eleven, Bell moved from Oklahoma to California, but very few details are available about her life after this move, other than that writing and her mother remained critically important to her.

As a young woman, Bell was influenced by two key factors in her life: words and women. She believed from an early age that words had power to change her life. In "Burying Paper," she explains:

Always, I have trusted words. To shape, inform, and bring the world closer.

Everything I know, I was proud to say, I learned from books. At the age of six, I remember declaring my ambition to be a reader. In a house where both parents

were semiliterate, where I read and wrote letters for relatives who could not read or writes, I knew no greater ambition than to read. And in the books I read, there were real families: families free of lasting poverty, alcoholism, and violence.

Their houses were homes, their love clear and clean, their survival finally certain.

(31)

Through words and books, Bell was able temporarily to escape from poverty and imagine other roles for women at that time. She believed that writing was the necessary ingredient to become one of those “families free of lasting poverty, alcoholism, and violence” (31). In her essay, she succinctly explains her choice to pursue writing: “I wanted to become a writer because I could imagine nothing that would take me faster and farther down roads closed to women, Indians, and the poor” (39). She remembers being hailed for this difference while growing up:

“You’re different,” the women in my family said, long before organized memory began for me. It was a source of pride with them, my difference. Before the age of two, they saw something in me (and insisted that I see it as well) that spared me from the usual dreams and destinies of mixed-blood women in Oklahoma in the early fifties. I was different: I would not repeat their hard shames of poverty, illiteracy, domestic labor, or too many husbands and too many children. (33)

Through reading and writing, Bell was able to embrace this difference and work toward breaking out of the cycles of violence and abuse within her family and community. Bell reveals how the women in her family encouraged her to see herself as a different type of

woman, one who was not destined to repeat the same vicious cycles. Yet, at the same time, this difference caused strain between Bell and her mother.

*Faces in the Moon* intimately portrays the protagonist's strained relationship to her mother, a strain that Bell is personally familiar with. In "Burying Paper," Bell writes about this estrangement:

"You were born stubborn. Had to do things your own way," my mother always insisted when I attempted to tease out an apology for the early burdens of child care and family survival placed on me. "You wanted to do them," she says and, in more forgiving moments, I think she may have been right. But, most of the time, I wonder how we survived, and I look for someone on whom I can settle my anger and grief. (34)

Bell expresses the anger and grief she feels toward her mother, but at the same time she also knows that her mother had to endure her own severe hardships:

The last time I saw my mother she handed me a spiral notebook in which she had written down the facts of her early life. As if she had a premonition that we would never see each other again, she insisted I read the journal right then. . . . Quickly, I realized that these stories were different from the ones I had heard since childhood: these were the stories she could not tell a child, the stories of her life after her mother died, the stories of a nine-year-old mixed-blood girl taken into the bed of her white stepfather to negotiate shelter and food for herself and her two younger sisters. (36)

In her mother's journal, Bell learns the truth behind the pain and trauma within her family. Through these words, she understands the sacrifices her mother had to make and can see the intergenerational trauma within her family. Bell's emergence from this trauma can be seen in both her novel and her academic work.

Bell received her Ph.D. from Ohio State University and joined the department of English at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in 1993. In 1998, she received the Amoco Faculty Teaching Award from the University of Michigan, and the award described her as:

a friend and role model for Native American students. She travels throughout Michigan, meeting with tribal leaders and looking for new and better ways the University can serve Native Americans. In addition to opening up her home to students, Professor Bell advises the Native American Student Association and helps organize the Ann Arbor Pow Wow and other cultural events. (University)

In addition to community work, Bell served as director of the Native American Studies Program at the University of Michigan from 1994-2001 and was the Vice-President of the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures from 1993-1996. In her 1996 contribution to the *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, "Literature by Indians," Bell optimistically writes:

Given the current emphasis on the representation of all American cultures, Native American literature promises, in terms of content and reception, to become less isolated and marginalized in the future, to become, at last, the first of many literatures of the United States. (340)

Yet, her novel, which eloquently addresses the consequences of assimilation and colonization for a Cherokee woman, has become isolated and marginalized.

The reviews of *Faces in the Moon* reveal the various responses to the novel and provide clues to why it has been marginalized in the field of Native American literary studies. In Greg Sanchez's review for the journal *American Indian Quarterly*, he writes:

The text is frequently interrupted by italicized snippets of conversations, memories, dreams, and fanciful thoughts, all of which are presumably important aspects of Lucie's identity as it is being reconstructed; unfortunately, the relevance of these textual fragments is not always clear, and the structure of the novel alone is not enough to sustain the reader's interest in the fictional world.

(268)

Sanchez's ultimate criticism however, comes when he writes that "Lucie's remembering, or reconstruction of her Indian identity is tainted with a sense of falsehood, of the stereotypical" (268). By casting the novel in this light, Sanchez dismisses not only the text and its important contribution to literature by Indigenous women, but also the author and her experiences as a mixed-blood woman. Bell wrote the novel as fiction, but it is clearly the product of her own experiences and attempts at understanding her contemporary Cherokee identity. The novel can be considered a serious work of literature that reveals a contemporary Cherokee woman's self-examination. If Sanchez had recognized the obvious truths behind Bell's novel before dismissing it as stereotypical, then perhaps Bell's contributions to Indigenous women's fiction would

have been more enthusiastically celebrated. Unfortunately, *Faces in the Moon* did not receive a warm welcome and continues to be misunderstood.

While some reviews touch on the cycles of violence in the novel and the importance of memory, others do not see the significance of the narrative healing that is taking place. For example, the review in the journal *World Literature Today* by Howard Meredith touches on the cycles of abuse in the novel, but he does not see the novel as providing any solution to these cycles. Meredith concludes that the novel's ending "illustrat[es] the continuing cycle of fear and abuse," a statement that cannot be supported by the important narrative healing that takes place for the protagonist (201). Heather Cronin Ott's review for *VG: Voices from the Gaps*, an international website devoted to women artists and writers of color, however, applauds the novel for its journey of healing, but only after she notes how Bell referred to the novel as "autobiographical fiction" (Ott). Unlike Meredith, Ott sees the ending of the novel as a return:

The return is a connection with family members who have passed away. The return brings the narrator and thus Bell to a place of connection with her family history, a history that began when traditional, pre-colonial life ended. While there may be no return to unaltered traditionalism, the return to family is indeed filled with satisfaction, unity, and plentitude. Bell and the elder Lucie are each a nexus which leads to the future. Bell empowers herself and Cherokee women of the past, present, and future. (Ott)

Ott's review clarifies the importance of understanding Bell's personal background when considering the impact her work has had on the study of Indigenous women's fiction and

the study of Indigenous literatures. In the novel, the protagonist symbolically reclaims her Cherokee heritage and discovers the origins of traumas that have tainted her connections to her cultural past. Once Lucie uncovers the traumas of her past, she sets out to revise her documented history in order to provide tangible evidence of her Cherokee ancestry. First, however, Lucie must uncover and understand her traumatic past.

Like *Monkey Beach*, this novel revolves around the struggles of a female protagonist, Lucie Evers, who experiences intergenerational traumas that reflect the consequences of colonization in her community. Set in rural Oklahoma, *Faces in the Moon* details Lucie's life and focuses specifically on her relationship to the women in her family. As a mixed-blood woman who initially cannot embrace her Native ancestry, Lucie must discover the truth within her family's history and reclaim her Native heritage, a heritage that has been scarred by traumas she and the other women in her family have experienced. Through memory and story, the narrative weaves moments from Lucie's past with her present and illustrates the intergenerational traumas she has inherited from her mother, Gracie Evers. It is in this narrative weaving that Lucie understands the origin of trauma in her family's past and begins to understand herself and her future as a Cherokee woman.

Throughout *Faces in the Moon*, Lucie narrates her various experiences and details the abuse and fear that control her life. The act of telling this story is crucial to Lucie's personal development because Lucie cannot heal the traumas that have power over her without dealing explicitly with them. Lucie declares early on in the novel, "I had no

story” (32), signifying her inability to see herself as a part of a larger family and tribal narrative; but, she does tell her story as the novel progresses. Lucie heals herself by becoming the storyteller who can continue the story of her family, and through her storytelling, she reclaims her cultural heritage. Lucie highlights the importance of memory when she writes:

Some parents believe children have no memories. They hold their stories and lives until they are ready to return them, with full chronology and interpretation. History is written in this complicity, an infinite regression of children forgetting and remembering. It takes a long time to remember, it takes generations, sometimes nations, to make a story. And sometimes it takes a call in the night before the story is known. (22)

When Lucie receives the “call in the night,” she learns of her mother’s illness and begins her storytelling journey. Lucie takes on the role of storyteller and weaves her own narrative into the story of a nation and numerous generations of Cherokee women. Lucie discovers the origins of the intergenerational traumas that have ripped her from her Cherokee heritage. The intergenerational quality of Lucie’s story is essential for her reconnection to her cultural past through memory and story.

Even though Bell refers to the novel as “autobiographical fiction,” she takes Lucie on a narrative journey of healing and acknowledges that her own journey is not yet over. Bell opens the novel from her perspective and mentions how she was “raised on the voices of women” (4). She also acknowledges how the voices and stories of these women emerge throughout the novel:

And I know their stories have grounded my sympathies, speaking through my spirit without time or place or will, Momma, Auney, Lizzie: they come alone or together, sometimes carrying with them Uncle Jerry and Uncle Henry and Robert Henry. Sometimes, they simply stand in the mortal light of their beloved Hellen, Lizzie's sister-in-law, Momma's mother, my grandmother. But, always, their real companion is Lucie, the child who sat and listened and stared into their stories, the child whose place I have taken. (5-6)

Bell identifies with Lucie, the fictional child who retains the stories of her family and community. When Bell reveals that she has taken Lucie's place, she accepts the role of storyteller as she reintegrates with the child and her painful past. The fictional portion of *Faces in the Moon* begins shortly after this paragraph, and chronicles the intergenerational traumas within Lucie Evers family as it demonstrates Bell's form of narrative healing. As the novel progresses, Lucie is able to forgive her mother and take her place as a contemporary Cherokee woman.

The key to Lucie's journey of healing is her mother's stories and the overwhelming need to forgive her. In one memory, Lucie recalls learning about her family history through her mother's stories,

"Your grandma was a full-blooded Cherokee," my mother said again and again, as far as I can remember. It was the beginning of the story, the beginning of a confidence, and I lean forward, knowing that in the next few minutes no cheek will be pinched, no broom handle swung, no screams or tears wasted. (8)

The young Lucie relishes the confidence shared with her mother in the act of storytelling and appreciates the temporary respite from violence in her home. Lucie knows that during the storytelling “no screams or tears [will be] wasted” and that she will share an important bond with her mother (8). Lucie notes that her mother informed her of her heritage “again and again,” signifying the repetition of the story and its importance to Lucie and her mother (8). Furthermore, in her own retelling, Lucie reveals the importance that storytelling continues to hold for contemporary Cherokee individuals and the healing process. It is by the act of retelling and remembering the story that Lucie situates herself within it and begins to unravel the origin of trauma within her family.

As storyteller, Lucie pieces together her story and the story of her family as she engages in the act of remembrance. In particular, Lucie recalls learning about her mother’s tragic upbringing, and the circumstances that led to her aggressive attempts at complete assimilation. Her mother, Gracie, “is of the generation of Cherokee women who turned away from traditional culture in order to find a place in mainstream white America” (Sanchez). Bell hints at the origins of Gracie’s life problems by writing the following:

They were Evers, sometimes more, sometimes less, but always Evers.

The daughters of Hellen Evers and some no-account traveling Scotch preacher who never married their mother, turning up only to impregnate her a second time, and leaving them, finally, on the side of the road. The young Indian mother walked, carrying one baby and coaxing the other, until she came to a junkyard. There, she made a home for them in an abandoned car. There, until the rent

money was saved, she left Gracie in the back seat to look after the baby, Rozella, while she walked into town and looked for work. (11-12)

In this passage, Bell details the family history of Lucie's grandmother, mother and Aunt Rozella. Abandonment, poverty, and domestic violence are consistent themes throughout the novel, and each of these women experiences abandonment and violence in her life. Hellen Evers, as the passage explains, was left penniless and homeless with two young children. In order to support her family, Hellen started cleaning local houses where the "white women worked her to death, and the white men was always touching her up" (17). Lucie discovers how Hellen's Cherokee heritage became a mark of shame for Gracie and uncovers the intergenerational traumas, or cycles of violence, the women in her family suffer.

Lucie does not initially see the intergenerational trauma within her family or its profoundly negative impact on her, her mother, and her aunt. In fact, Lucie resents her mother and describes her mixed feelings toward her mother early on:

I did not hate her, then. It was easy to believe in the photograph on Lizzie's bureau: a dark-eyed beauty with olive skin and black hair to her waist, shapely in a cotton housedress and holding a newborn baby. She stood forward in a new field, the baby close to her cheek, the woods far behind her. As a child I called the woman "Momma," slipping close to the photograph and tracing her outline with my fingers, whenever I passed through Lizzie's parlor. After my great aunt's death, it was harder and harder to put the pretty girl with the child

together with the fat, beat-up woman who cursed and drank, pushed into her only threat, “Maybe I’ll just run away and leave y’all to yourself.”

Some tension had given, some spirit snapped in the space of ten years, and the pretty girl had swollen into fatigue and repetition. (8-9)

At this point in her narrative, Lucie does not fully understand the consequences of her mother’s past or the circumstances that led to her horrible transformation. Her comment that she “did not hate her, then” indicates a hatred for her mother that developed as she grew older. Lucie develops this hatred as a result of abuse, neglect, and emotional abandonment, but at the same time, her memories lead her toward an understanding of the origin of trauma within her community and the drastic affect they have had on her mother, her family, and the larger Cherokee Nation.

Through Lucie’s memories, *Faces in the Moon* outlines how the women in this story are victims of an intergenerational trauma, which forced them into unhealthy cycles of domestic violence and attempts at complete assimilation. Lucie learns that throughout their lives, Gracie and Rozella went from one abusive relationship to another in an attempt to find their own places in the world. Gracie’s self-hatred is manifested in her repeatedly bleaching her hair yellow and in her unwillingness to see herself as a Cherokee woman. In one of the early storytelling sessions, Gracie tells Rozella and Lucie, “Y’all carry the Indian blood, that’s for sure. Your black hair and Rozella’s quiet ways, ain’t no mistaking y’all. I ended up with the Scotch blood. Don’t look like there were a drop left for y’all” (10). Gracie believes that she “ended up with the Scotch blood,” but has to bleach her hair and wear makeup as a mask in order to maintain this

image of herself (10).<sup>28</sup> When Lucie considers what has happened to her mother, she begins to recognize the way in which she has felt her mother's trauma and pain: "My blood carries the worry and wear that made her middle-aged at thirty and old at forty" (33). Lucie acutely feels the intergenerational trauma that has scarred her and prematurely aged her mother. But, at the same time, in order for Lucie to truly understand and forgive her mother, she must relive her trauma in order to forgive her mother and see the true origin of trauma within her community.

In one of Lucie's most painful memories, the narrative shifts into a third-person discussion of Lucie's past as she remembers the circumstances that led to her estranged relationship with her mother. "When Lucie was four years old, J.D. moved into their tiny house. He was a tall, red-faced, ugly man with a short temper, a supply sergeant with a good salary, stationed at Fort Sill" (64).<sup>29</sup> The memory is so painful to the present Lucie that she must refer to her younger self as Lucie rather than using the pronoun I. The shift from the first person to the third person suggests a removal from a painful trauma in Lucie's life. At this point in the narrative, Lucie also recalls J.D. repeatedly calling her a "half-breed" and drinking excessively with her mother (65). J.D. continuously assaults Lucie, and Gracie eventually chooses J.D. over her own daughter. Lucie remembers the circumstances that led to this as follows:

"I've a mind to come over there and knock some sense into your head.

T'aint nothing but Injun trash. Your momma's trash, and you're trash too."

Lucie looked at him, stared at his pitted face.

"Scum," she said.

Her hands flew to her mouth. The sounds of apology were beginning as the fist struck her face. She covered her face as he dragged her across the linoleum by her hair.

“I’m gonna teach ya a lesson you ain’t gonna forget. Now’n you shut up or I’m a-gonna make it hard on ya.” She tried to swallow her sobs, but they refused to stay down. She saw Momma, sleeping. He tightened his hand around her face and locked her mouth. With his other hand he unbuttoned her nightgown and fished it down her shoulders. Her body lay lifeless beneath him as he pulled her cotton panties down. (68)

Lucie remembers being violently raped at age four, and even more damaging is that this rape occurs after Lucie attempts to stand up for herself, her mother, and their shared Cherokee heritage. At this point in the novel, Bell’s use of memory and story allow for Lucie to experience the rape from a distance. In this memory, Lucie returns from a third-person discussion of these experiences to a first person insertion that reveals an inner strength: *“There was the flash of pain and the taste of vomit. In the same dizzying flash the pain took the fear. I know now that fear left me that morning. I began to plan to kill him. I kept my eyes down, I didn’t look at him, but I watched for my chance”* (68). With the shift from third to first person, Bell also utilizes an italicized font style to further demonstrate the healing that is taking place for Lucie. Lucie initially remembers her rape from the safety of the third-person, but she is also able to reclaim the strength she felt surge after the attack. In reliving her rape and abandonment, Lucie is able to release the traumas that have had a firm hold on her, but she still cannot forgive her mother. After

this rape, J.D. insists that Gracie choose either him or her daughter, and Gracie takes Lucie to live with her great aunt Lizzie. In Lucie's narrative journey, her memories of Lizzie help her to reclaim her Cherokee ancestry and work toward finally forgiving her mother.

Gracie's decision to abandon Lucie in favor of J.D. scars the young Lucie and contributes to the narrator Lucie's inability to forgive her dying mother. However, while her arrival at Lizzie's is due to traumatic circumstances, Lucie is finally able to connect to her cultural heritage. Lizzie is her great-aunt through marriage, and the woman who teaches Lucie about the history of her family and fragments of their Cherokee heritage. In one memory, Lizzie informs Lucie that,

“I ain't gonna say I approve of your momma's ways. I weren't raised thataway. Always dancing and drinking and going around with soldiers. Leaving their families and hightailing it to the cities. It seems like we lost a whole generation of children.

“The Cherokee always been a proud people. They took care of their children and families...Nowadays seems like people forget how to look out for their families. But it ain't their fault, I reckon. Times is different. No truer word been said. Now you're gonna grow up 'out knowing your people. We's not always gonna be round, and ya gonna have to count on your momma. And she can't count on herself.” (122-123)

As the narrative unfolds, Lucie begins to see and understand her mother in a new light. The reason Lucie's mother “can't count on herself” stems from a larger family and

Cherokee history. After generations of traumas, from relocation to forced assimilation and racism, Native women like Gracie have been traumatized and have grown to consider their Native heritage a liability. Lucie discovers that her grandmother, Hellen, died when Gracie was nine, and Gracie had to raise her younger sister Rozella. As a result, Gracie had to drop out of school in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and try to make a life for herself and her younger sister. In the storytelling process, Lucie begins to unravel the intergenerational traumas that have deeply wounded the women in her family. While Lucie initially resents her mother, she begins to find forgiveness and understands that Gracie was part of a lost generation of Cherokee people, a generation scarred by significant historical traumas.

As the narrative progresses, Lucie discovers that her mother inherited trauma as a result of the drastic changes that occurred within the Cherokee community after allotment. In the novel, Bell uses narrative breaks in order to provide detail about Lucie's great-grandfather, Robert Henry Evers, who applied for Cherokee citizenship in 1900. Bell outlines the entire process that Robert went through in order to secure a land allotment for himself and his children. At the end of this process, the Dawes Commission asks Robert a series of questions, questions that reveal a great deal about United States policy toward Cherokee people at this time:

Q: Are you or have you ever been a member of the Ketoowah Society?

A: No, sir.

Q: Have you ever been a party to discussions about seceding from the Union?

A: No, sir.

Q: Would you support the Cherokee Nation in its secession from the Union?

A: No, sir.

Q: Is it your intention to raise your children as citizens of the United States?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Why have you petitioned for an allotment of land?

A: To find some way of living, sir. For myself and my children.

Q: Do you understand the terms of this allotment?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Do you understand that said allotment is given to you in trust? That you may not sell or dispose of said allotment? That said allotment may be revoked at the pleasure of this court?

A: Sir? (Bell 129-130)

In this exchange, Bell points out the manner in which the United States government dealt with the Cherokee people. As previously mentioned, the Keetoowah society was founded in 1855 “by primarily full-blood northern Baptists” who sought “control of the Cherokee government . . . [to] determine the destiny of their people” (King 362). The Dawes Commission wanted to make sure that they only granted land allotments to Cherokee people who would not help maintain Cherokee political autonomy. In order to receive a land allotment, Robert Evers had to turn his back on his people and accept the terms of the allotment. Robert’s final answer in this exchange is actually a question, indicating that Robert does not understand how he still does not have control over the land. The rules under the Dawes Act allowed the Commission to ask Robert these questions,

because as agents of the United States government, they wanted to ensure that Robert would not support Cherokee sovereignty. Even though the Commission also acted to protect Cherokee individuals from losing their land allotments, it ultimately maintained control over Cherokee lands. Robert wanted a land allotment to support his family, but the land allotment led to his family experiencing the same traumas as other Cherokee families at this time.

Even after Robert received his land allotment, he and his family experienced the same struggles of other Cherokee people in the Depression and Dust-Bowl period of the 1930s. In addition to recovering from the Trail of Tears and the land allotment process, the Evers family struggled socially and economically. Lucie's grandmother, Hellen, mistakenly got involved with a man who took her away from her family and abandoned her. As a result of having few choices in life and no way of finding her family, Lucie's grandmother, Hellen "had two little girls and no body to look out after her" and ended up marrying an abusive man (157). Hellen dies shortly after this marriage and Gracie and Rozella are left to suffer his abuse. When Lucie hears this story, she discovers that her mother and Aunt Rozella experienced their own traumas. While Bell doesn't clarify what abuses took place, she makes it clear that Gracie and Rozella suffered because they were removed from their family. Through Lucie's memory of these events, she is prepared to face her mother's death and finally forgive her.

In order for Lucie finally to forgive her mother, she must confront the resentment she still harbors toward her. When Lucie learns that her mother has passed away, she makes the following remarks:

I felt myself open to the light. I almost dropped to my knees in gratitude. I looked around the living room and considered the things I might keep. The photos of my young mother with her new baby and Lizzie and myself in front of the Packard would pack easily; everything else could just as easily be hauled away. (175)

Lucie is unable to feel sorrow at her mother's death, because she cannot yet understand what caused such a horrible transformation within her mother. She experiences "gratitude" and casually remarks about what can be "hauled away" (175). Lucie has become removed from emotion and, like her mother, is another victim of intergenerational trauma. However, Lucie makes a crucial discovery in her mother's home that allows all of her memories and emotions to reveal the truth of the trauma within her family. Lucie discovers a composition book with an enclosed memoir entitled "My Life," which opens with the following letter:

Dearest Daughter,

I had in mine you mite need anuther storie sometimes. It's a good storie plain working people jest gitting by in this world out much to be proud a cep a loving and a helping one anuther in a hard times. Corect my bad spelling an gramer I onlee went to a 3 grade I a hate fer people a knowed my ignorrence. You knowed to do it rite you got yurself edjucated not like me can't spell to save my life you knowed best. (179-180)

For the first time, Lucie experiences a side of her mother that she had not known, a side that is vulnerable and aware of the impact of her ignorance. Lucie discovers the truth behind her mother's pain and her own pain as well. As she reads the stories, she recalls:

They were not the stories I had heard at the kitchen table. These were the details of a girl child growing up abandoned and unprotected, silenced in beer and laughter; these were the stories that spun the others, making the laughter high and loud, building a hysteria of family and need, holding without splitting and running without distance. (183-184)

As Lucie reads through her mother's stories that illustrate the struggles and loss of Gracie's early life, she finally sees the consequences of colonization and assimilation on her mother. Once Lucie discovers these truths, she burns the composition book as she remembers one of Lizzie's warnings, "Don't wash your dirty linen in public. . . . Ever' story ain't for repeating. A body don't need tell ever thing he knowed" (184). Lucie's memories prepare her to confess "I did not hate her then," as she takes back her life and honors her family history for the first time (185).

Bell vividly describes Lucie's reconciliation with her Cherokee past through a powerful image: "In a store window I caught a glimpse of the small Indian woman, and I eased forward to catch her, with the stealth of a cat, pushing my face into my own reflection" (187). Lucie sees a reflection of herself, but does not claim her image and only notices a "small Indian woman" (187). However, when she symbolically catches this image and pushes her face into her own reflection, Lucie begins to see herself as an Indian woman. This moment is crucial to Lucie's rediscovery of herself and her place

within Cherokee history. When Lucie claims her heritage, she realizes that she is now the storyteller and the woman who can set the story straight. While staying in Gracie's house, Lucie discovered a copy of her grandmother's death certificate. The death certificate does not list the name of Hellen's father, Robert Evers, but Gracie had scribbled his name on a sheet of paper and had attached it to the certificate. In order to really set the record straight, Lucie decides to amend her written history, but in order to do so, she must operate within a governmental system that is responsible for her family's trauma.

Lucie attempts to amend her grandmother's death certificate, but despite her letters asking for the change to be made, she was told that she needed to provide documents. Lucie decides to confront the system that believed, "[o]ral histories were not reliable sources . . ." (190). She goes to the Oklahoma Historical Society to find evidence of her ancestry and to file the amended death certificate for her grandmother. She asks the desk clerk for a copy of the Cherokee roles, and he asks her who she thinks she is,

"Who do you think you are?" he said.

"Lucie Evers."

"No," he sighed, "what tribe?"

"Cherokee?" I said, but heard the question in my voice.

He smirked and reached behind him for the book. He stretched the heavy black book toward me, grinning broadly at the joke. (191)

In this small exchange between Lucie and the librarian, Bell engages in a critical discussion about the consequences of claiming Cherokee ancestry. The librarian's "smirk" indicates how often people claim Cherokee ancestry, while it subsequently dismisses contemporary Cherokee identity. Many members of the Cherokee Nation are of mixed-ancestry, and when Wilma Mankiller opened enrollment in 1980s, many more people decided to embrace their Cherokee ancestry. Lucie has the dual burden of amending a document without written proof and defending her ancestry. Lucie responds:

"I ain't asking you to tell me who I think I am. I am the great-granddaughter of Robert Henry Evers, I am the granddaughter of Hellen Evers Jeeters, I am the daughter of Gracie Evers, the niece of Rozella Evers, and the grandniece of Lizzie Sixkiller Evers."

My hands almost relax, but I catch the grin forming at the corners of his pale mouth.

"Let me put it to you this way. I am a follower of stories, a negotiator of histories, a wild dog of many lives. I am Quanah Parker swooping down from the hills into your bedroom in the middle of the night. And I am centuries of Indian women who lost their husbands, their children, their minds so you could sit there and grin your shit-eating grin." (192)

In the final pages of the novel, Lucie can finally accept her family and her position as the "negotiators of histories." When she cries out that she is Quanah Parker, Lucie embraces the legendary man who inspired her grandmother and many other Native people of the southeast. Lucie knows that her grandmother's favorite story was about Quanah Parker:

He was the Indian Jesse James. He were a half-breed, his daddy was a Comanche and his momma a white woman. And if ya were a white settler, a-squatting on Indian lands, ya didn't wanna wake up in the middle of the night an' find him standing right over your bed. Lordy, no, that woulda been your worst nightmare. (142)

By the end of the novel, Lucie recognizes that she represents “centuries of Indian women” who have been abused, neglected, and traumatized by insidious governmental dealings and attempts at eradicating cultural practices (142). In her declaration that she is Quanah Parker, Lucie does not take the road of assimilation or accept the condescension of the clerk at the Oklahoma Historical Society. As Lucie takes the Dawes Roll book, she waves her pen in the air and says to the clerk “I am your worst nightmare: I am an Indian with a pen” (192). In this declaration, Lucie claims the pen as a weapon and tool that can be used to correct the version of history that has been documented. Lucie understands that she can now influence her future and the future of the Cherokee people through her role as storyteller. By claiming her history and the history of the Cherokee people, Lucie is able to heal the intergenerational wounds within her family and claim her own future as a storyteller.

The title of this novel, *Faces in the Moon*, is significant to Lucie's journey and relates to the larger story of Cherokee women and their shared histories. In the beginning of the novel, as has been mentioned, the narrator recalls, “[o]n clear full nights, I have seen Grandma's or Lizzie's face in the moon. Sometimes, my mother's face floats across it. If I'm lucky, I can make out Lucie, squinting down at me and waiting, like a patient

memory, for my claim” (6). At this point, the narrator was unable to connect herself to the storyteller, Lucie, who is “waiting” for her to make her “claim” (6). However, through memory and story, Lucie is able to discover the origin of trauma within her family and recover her place in the history of Cherokee women and their stories. When Lucie was a child, she remembers her mother saying, “Used to be we believed Indians went to the moon when they passed on” (19). After this remark, Lucie asks if she too will make it to the moon, her mother replies “You just tell them you’re Hellen Ever’s grandbaby. She ain’t gonna let them turn ya away” (19). When Lucie visits the Oklahoma Historical Society, she claims this heritage and tells the world that she is “Hellen Ever’s grandbaby” (19). When Lucie finally accepts her family and claims her history, she is able to become the storyteller who passes down the stories of her family and the Cherokee in both oral and written ways. In this action, Lucie becomes one of the many faces in the moon.

*Faces in the Moon* and *Monkey Beach* illustrate the consequences of colonization through two protagonists and the intergenerational traumas they suffer. Betty Louise Bell and Eden Robinson demonstrate how two Indigenous communities have been profoundly affected by colonization, and they both provide similar approaches to healing. Through

their fiction, Robinson and Bell enact symbolic journeys of healing that reconnect individuals to their historical and cultural pasts. They use memory and storytelling throughout their novels, which allows for their protagonists to recognize the intimate consequences of North American colonization within their communities. Lucie Evers and Lisamarie Hill must fully understand their pasts and relive their traumas in order to heal themselves. Lisa and Lucie heal wounds they have inherited by unraveling the complex narratives of their pasts and uncovering the origins of trauma within their communities. The acts of remembrance in these novels lead to the protagonists' own remembering and validates the importance of memory and storytelling in the healing process.

The stylistic similarities between the two novels suggest that the two authors are engaging in narrative healing, or healing that takes place through a narrative weaving of memory and story that ultimately reveals contemporary consequences of North American colonization. These two authors are reinventing the form and function of the novel to suit the healing needs of each protagonist, and in these acts provide sources and sites of healing. The distinct narrative styles of these two novels reflect new forms of personal healing through the use of memory and storytelling to (re)connect individuals to their cultural histories. Eden Robinson and Betty Louise Bell are storytellers who write novels that deal truthfully and honestly with traumas their communities have inherited from a colonial past, and it is with this truthful resolution with the past where healing can begin.

## V. THE POETICS OF DISPLACEMENT: NATIVE WOMEN (RE)CONNECTING TO LAND AND COMMUNITY THROUGH POETRY

For many Indigenous writers, poetry has become a medium for expressing distinct relationships to personal and tribal histories. It connects these writers to their families and lands, and their intimate poetic expressions are powerful examples of the ways in which poetry is used to further mend the wounds of a colonial past. As Native peoples grapple with issues of displacement, relocation, land loss, and even threats of cultural extinction, recent publications by Native poets Kimberly Blaeser (Anishinabe), Esther Belin (Diné), and Deborah Miranda (Esselen/Chumash) offer glimpses into the ways Native women continue to express resilience and hope for the future. In their publications, these writers tie themselves to the past, present, and future through evocative connections to place. For these writers, place encompasses more than just a present physical location and reflects larger family and tribal histories. This connection to place is expressed even from physical or historical distances and relates each writer to her community through (re)connections to family, community, storytelling, and the natural world. While each writer expresses her own unique poetics of place, together they share this binding theme throughout their recent collections. Blaeser's *Absentee Indians*, Belin's *From the Belly of My Beauty*, and Miranda's *Indian Cartography* demonstrate the profound importance place continues to hold for Native peoples. Through poetry, these writers directly connect to their individual and tribal histories, while often weaving elements from their oral traditions into their work. These

autobiographical collections affirm connections to family stories and community histories, as well as reaffirm important relationships to land and cultural traditions. It is in this shared connection to place that healing takes place.

The rich oral histories of North America must be considered when speculating why contemporary poets are connected by this theme of place. Poetry by Native women *is* a direct descendant of the oral traditions of their families and communities, in fact, more so than other written genres. The various practices used to pass on oral histories often employed rhythmic schemes and the use of various prosodic elements, such as alliteration, assonance, repetition, and other mechanisms used to enhance memorization of stories -- practices also encoded in the poetics of Native women. Throughout the United States and Canada, Native songs, languages, and ceremonies maintain connections to land, and family stories continue to play a large role in the transfer of cultural knowledge. The fact that these collections maintain significant associations with place despite removal and displacement suggests that *family* storytelling also acts as a method of conveying the histories, oral traditions, and distinct cultural knowledge of Native peoples. Storytelling acts as a means of retaining connections to land and the natural environment, and the Native poets in this chapter express intimate relationships to traditional lands, despite their removal to urban settings or separations from traditional tribal lands.

In addition to the importance of storytelling and connections to the oral tradition, the poetry by these three Native women also contains themes dealing with colonization and experiences with land loss. From the early moments of European contact, Native

communities have been victimized as a result of European and Euro-American desire for their lands; and the relationship that all Native peoples had with the land changed dramatically. Tribes were often severed from their traditional lands and forced to adopt living systems that compromised the ecologically sound relationships they previously had with their lands. Some tribes adapted quickly to the changes taking place, whereas others fought to maintain their older ways of life. When aggressive European settlement began in North America in the latter half of the seventeenth century, many Native communities in both Canada and the United States were pushed west in search of land and/or the means to live as their own distinct people. With the continuous flow of immigrants to North America, Native communities were subjected to the rules and laws of foreign cultures and were often denied representation or recognition in colonial governments. During the zenith of the fur trade (early seventeenth century to mid nineteenth century), many Native peoples were able to subsist on this new thriving economy, but by the time the early governments of the United States and Canada formed, animals were becoming scarce in many traditional hunting grounds, more notably in the eastern parts of North America. This scarcity proved devastating to Native economies for two reasons: Native communities no longer had the currency to trade goods with non-Natives, and many cultural practices were interrupted by the changing landscape. The loss of land has had a profound and lasting impact on the farming practices and hunting/gathering habits of Native communities, but through this all land has retained its importance for Native peoples.

As will be demonstrated, the poetry of select Native women reflects the importance land continues to hold, as it also reflects the various consequences of voluntary and involuntary absences from traditional lands. In each collection, these writers discuss the consequences of major post-contact events dealing with land, events that will now be touched on briefly and dealt with in more detail during discussions of each poet. After contact and settlement, land claims by Indigenous peoples were often guaranteed if they agreed to remain neutral during the conflicts taking place between France, England, and American rebels, but land claims by Indigenous communities were also affected by the outcomes of these conflicts. Once the British gained control of what is now Canada and the early United States government formed, the first issue that both governments dealt with was land.

The history of relations between present day Canada and Native communities reflects the consequences of various alliances made over land treaties. Initially, the French held a great deal of land in northeastern North America and maintained positive relationships with Native peoples in the area, but many conflicts eventually developed as a result of political alliances over land. After the Seven Years War (1756-1763), the French had to accept Britain's new role as dominant colonial power in the world, and the French lost their territories in North America. Once the British took over, the Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763 created "a vast Indian territory west of the Appalachian highlands," and "Britain recognized the aboriginal rights to occupancy" (Surtees 86). But increased pressures over land rights led the British to form strict policies toward Native communities. For example, by 1830, the colonial secretary of England

determined that Native people were “wards of the government” and should be placed on reserves, and “[t]he new policy of 1830 required that these reserves be developed to pursue the goal of civilization” (Surtees 88). In order to achieve that goal of civilization, Native communities were forced to accept economic and subsistence patterns based on European traditions. By the 1860s, the early Canadian government began to engage in land cession treaties with Native peoples of western Canada and passed numerous acts regarding Native communities in Canada. In 1868, The Indian Act was passed, “providing a definition—largely racial—for an Indian and . . . emphasizing penalties for non-Indians who trespassed on Indian lands” (Surtees 90). However, this act was followed by the Enfranchisement Act of 1869, where “the enfranchised Indian ceased to be an Indian and became a member of Canadian society at large” (Surtees 90). Yet another Indian Act was passed in 1876, which introduced “the location ticket . . . a method designed to promote the acquisition of private property by Indians . . .” (Surtees 90). In this Indian Act, the Canadian government decided that “[r]eserves were to be divided, under the authority of the superintendent general, into lots that could be assigned to individual band members who had previously shown extensive progress toward a civilized state” (Surtees 90). These acts were unique to Canada, but the United States also adopted similar paternalistic stances toward Indigenous communities throughout the nineteenth century.

Conflicts between Native communities and the early United States government were often due to land disputes. In 1775, even before the Declaration of Independence (1776), the Continental Congress had established “Indian departments” to “attempt to

persuade the Indians to remain neutral” during the Revolutionary War (Horsman 29). After the conflict between England and the American colonies, the early United States government had to settle numerous land disputes. Early on “a number of states by their colonial charters claimed that they owned lands far to the west of their colonial boundaries,” lands that were being used by Indigenous communities and were central to traditional living patterns (Horsman 29). In order to deal with the conflicts between settlers and Native peoples, the U. S. government passed numerous laws, which dramatically altered the living habits of Native peoples across the continent. While all deserve mention, two in particular dramatically affected Indigenous relationships to land: the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the Dawes (Allotment) Act of 1887.

Both the Indian Removal Act and the Dawes Act were controversial and had drastic consequences for Native American communities. The Indian Removal Act was vigorously debated in Congress, but with the support of President Andrew Jackson, it passed by a narrow margin (Prucha 45). The Indian Removal Act allowed Jackson to “negotiate with the eastern tribes for their removal,” but the Native peoples in the east had little choice but to surrender their traditional lands. Any resistance led to violence and forced removal in the form of long marches. For example, the Cherokee were violently removed from their traditional lands, a removal that became known as The Trail of Tears (1831-1838), and the Navajo were subjected to The Long Walk from 1864 to 1868. As a result of conflicts over land, other Native communities experienced horrific massacres, such as the Sand Creek Massacre (1864) and the Wounded Knee Massacre (1890). After removal, the United States government passed the Dawes Act, which

forced Native peoples who lived on reservations to accept land allotments of 160-acres for heads of family and 80-acres for individuals (Hagan 61). However, hidden within the legislation was a desire for additional lands retained by Native communities. From the period of 1887 to 1900 “approximately 32,800 allotments of Indian land, covering 3,285,000 acres, were made. During this same period the federal government forced the cession or sale of approximately 28,500,000 acres of ‘surplus land’ from tribes that were in the process of being allotted” (Kelly 66). At this time, many members of the United States government believed that the future success of Native communities depended on them adopting Euro-American relationships to land that were based on sedentary farming practices by families and individuals instead of communities. The U.S. government agents could not see the drastic consequences of these various acts. It should come as no shock that many Native communities were dramatically affected by land loss in both Canada and the United States. By the end of the nineteenth century, new policies emerged in both governments, which were intended to address the poor conditions within Indigenous communities, but only continued an assault on cultural practices.

Many Indigenous communities did not respond positively to removal and relocation, and the governments of Canada and the U.S. began focusing on the education of Native youth. Often when Indigenous communities signed treaties, they also had to agree to educate their children in schools that were operated by government agencies or institutions with religious affiliations. In the U.S., the Indian Bureau opened 24 schools from 1880 to 1900, and by 1891, Native communities were required to send their children to school. It was at this time that Richard Henry Pratt, a Civil War veteran and

experienced officer, suggested “the concept of the off-reservation boarding school, or industrial school,” and believed that the U.S. government could “lower the costs of educating the young Indians while at the same time . . . increase the efficacy of that education by removing the student from the tribal environment” (Szasz and Ryan 290). Pratt convinced the federal government that the best course of action was to remove Native children from their lands and families, a sentiment that was echoed in Canadian policy. By 1890, the Canadian government also required Native youth to attend distant residential and industrial schools, believing them to be the best way to improve “progress toward civilization” (Surtees 92). Indigenous communities in both Canada and the U.S. fought the removal of their children, but they were ultimately forced to trust their children to these educational institutions. Those Indigenous families that survived removal and relocation had to endure the removal of children from traditional family and cultural practices. Native individuals, their families, and their communities were understandably scarred by these experiences. Even though removal, allotment, and education did not have the desired outcomes, both governments did not see the consequences of these dramatic changes until the mid-twentieth century.

In the 1950s, the governments of Canada and the U.S. diverged in terms of federal policy. The Canadian government adopted policy that recognized the special status of Indigenous peoples and Canadian federal policy began to change in the 1960s, in large part due to *The Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada*, a comprehensive report published by Harry Hawthorne in 1966-1967. Hawthorne’s report “described the situation of Indians as being generally very greatly depressed, materially, when compared

to Canadians in general,” and suggested a remedy: the Canadian government “should not require an Indian to ‘acquire those values of the major society he does not hold or wish to hold’” (Surtees 94). However, “[d]espite governmental efforts and claims of achievement, school dropout rates and unemployment remained extremely high and incomes, low,” undoubtedly due to the wounds of colonization within these communities (Kew 165). In the United States, however, policy was quite different. By the 1950s, a popular belief that “the solution to the Indian unemployment program lay in persuading large numbers of Indians to relocate away from the reservations” had spread among members of the U. S. Congress (Kelly 76). The Eisenhower administration had adopted a “Termination Experiment” (1953), which “sought to change the government’s special relationship with Indian tribes by terminating recognition of them” (Evans 109). In 1953, a congressional resolution was passed that terminated federal controls over numerous Native communities. Without federal recognition, “many Indian groups were alarmed by the requirement in the termination resolution . . . [and] were also alarmed by the discretionary power to given to other states to extend their laws over Indians living within their boundaries” (Kelly 76). In 1956, the U. S. Congress passed the Indian Vocational Training Act, with the intent of improving the economic conditions of Native peoples through vocational training, often removing them from their traditional lands or reservation homes. As a result of this act, over 31,000 Native people “had received advanced vocational training off the reservations . . .” (Kelly 77). Many Native families relocated to urban centers and adapted to different lifestyles while maintaining their

Native identities, but these relocations, as had the relocations in the past, continue to have drastic effects on Native individuals as can be seen in the poetry discussed below.

Each poet expresses her unique connection to land through various prosodic elements, many of which can be connected directly to elements of her oral tradition. In 1977, Ruth Finnegan's *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* outlined the biased manner in which scholars and academics often approached oral literatures: "It is often suggested that oral literature, not being written, is self-evidently the possession of non-literate people living in isolation from the centres of urban civilisation, or differentiated in some radical way from modern civilised society. . . . The truth, however, is more complicated." (8). In fact, the truth is so complicated that even current approaches to poetry and oral traditions sometimes lapse into these stereotypes or generalizations almost 30 years after the publication of Finnegan's book. Finnegan provides a starting point for this analysis in the way that she approaches oral poetry. According to Finnegan,

The prosodic system is perhaps the feature which most immediately gives form to a poem. We tend to think of this mainly in terms of metre, because of the influence of Greek and Roman models...But as soon as one analyses the ways in which verse can be structured, one has to extend prosody to cover alliteration, assonance, rhyme, tonal repetition or even parallelism. (90)

One way in which aspects of the oral tradition continues is through contemporary poetry by Native writers, such as Blasaser, Belin, and Miranda. Finnegan stresses the manner in which poetry is traditionally approached, influenced by western historical models of

proper poetics, yet this approach is limiting and neglects the cultural nuances of the Native authors. The poets analyzed within this chapter reinvent the conventions of poetry, using various prosodic elements, as they discuss the consequences of colonization and displacement.

Within this chapter, I will discuss how three Native women write from a particular tribally centered or family centered perspective. It is by writing from this perspective that these writers maintain connections to their tribal histories and traditional lands. In shaping a model for analyzing Native women's poetry, I consider the prosodic systems within selected poems by Blaeser, Belin and Miranda, or the patterns of rhythms and sounds used by each writer, as well as the themes of each collection. I tie the prosodic elements and themes to personal and tribally specific histories of each author to more fully respect and understand the connections to place in each collection. It is important to note that, within these collections, these Native poets have both positive and negative relationships with their traditional lands. These writers discuss the consequences of colonization and displacement, as they illustrate the various social ills that continue to plague and ravage their communities. They see the pain within their families and communities, but at the same time they find hope and healing through strong connections to their cultural histories. The three authors discussed here are from distinct communities and histories, yet they share a connection to place through family histories as told through personal stories.

In this discussion, I focus on the way three Native women navigate the beauty and tragedy of their histories, and on the way they maintain strong family and cultural

connections through their poetry. These women write about language loss and shifting cultural traditions, but at the same time, their poetry is rich with beauty and survival, and one only need browse the surface of these works to see evidence of thriving peoples and cultures. The poetry discussed below only further supports the notion that “American Indian cultures have shown and continue to show an incredible ability to survive, change, and yet remain distinctly ‘Indian’” (Stout 324). This chapter will focus on the trauma and healing taking place within Native women’s poetry when it comes to issues of land and displacement. During the course of this discussion, I will shape an approach to Native women’s poetry that outlines the importance of place and displacement in recent collections of poetry. Their autobiographical collections reflect connections to place unique to their individual and tribal histories: Blaeser’s collection demonstrates her strong connection to her Anishinabe homelands despite choosing to live far from the White Earth Reservation, Belin’s work focuses on her one generation removal from the Navajo Nation, and through Miranda, we can see the importance place holds despite the fact that the Esselen “became culturally extinct, the first of the California Indians to vanish” (Hester 497).

a. *Absentee Indians*

“The experiences of my life have seldom seemed individual, isolated. They have been informed and sometimes determined by the strands of connection to people, place, and history.”

- From Kimberly Blaeser’s “The Voices We Carry” 280

Kimberly Blaeser (Anishinabe) is a poet and scholar who writes with an awareness of the profound effect people, places, and history have on her work. Blaeser’s *Absentee Indians* (2002) is a collection of poems that reaffirms her sense of place despite her separation from family and tribal lands. Throughout the collection, Blaeser reflects on the loneliness she feels as a result of her personal migration and absence from the White Earth Reservation, and her poems reveal a keen awareness of the impact place has on her identity as an Anishinabe writer. For Blaeser, any work that she produces is automatically the product of her experiences and her history, a history intimately connected to her family, her people, her tribal lands, and the Anishinabe oral tradition. By taking the time to examine Blaeser’s tribal and personal history, I believe that more nuanced elements of *Absentee Indians* will emerge, and we can begin to understand why place is so significant in not only Blaeser’s work, but the work of other contemporary Indigenous poets as well. The history of the Anishinabe people, particularly those of the White Earth Reservation, reveals the intimate relationship contemporary Anishinabe people, like Blaeser, have toward their land.

The Anishinabe, a central-Algonquian speaking people, currently reside in both Canada and the United States, with lands in five U.S. states and three Canadian provinces. The Anishinabe, widely known as the Ojibwe, are part of the largest Indigenous group north of Mexico and experienced an eventful history before and after European contact.<sup>30</sup> Prior to European arrival, the Anishinabe lived along the northeastern coast of North America near the opening to the St. Lawrence River. However, after a prediction indicating death and destruction after the arrival of European peoples, the Anishinabe decided to begin moving westward (*Waasa*). The east to west migration was mapped by seven stopping points, with the first one being an island in the shape of a turtle, Turtle Island. The Anishinabe learned of the second stopping place with the appearance of a large Megis (cowry) Shell in the river, near the place-of-thunder-water (Gichi-Ga-Be-Gong) or what is now known as Niagra Falls (*Waasa*). At the next three stopping points, the Anishinabe peoples migrated into what is present-day Michigan and along the northern side of Lake Huron. Along the way, many members formed new settlements, becoming the Ottawa and Potawatomi peoples, and those who continued along the migration path were known as the “faith keepers” (*Waasa*). Near the intersection between Lake Huron and Lake Superior (present-day Sault Ste. Marie), the group found the fifth stopping place and split into two, with one group migrating along the northern portion of Lake Superior and the other group taking a southern route. The sixth stopping place, near present-day Duluth, Michigan, is where the Anishinabe discovered a vital resource, wild rice. In the final stopping place, the two groups of migrants reunited near today’s Madeline Island outside of Duluth. The Anishinabe

Migration Story is at the heart of Anishinabe history and continues to bind contemporary Anishinabe peoples.

Once this migration took place, the Anishinabe experienced the onslaught of European settlement. Since they resided around the Great Lakes region, the Anishinabe first started encountering French trappers in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century and began interacting regularly with European settlers. They quickly adapted to the new European trade goods and had a thriving fur trade economy, with most people becoming dependent upon European trade goods by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, “by 1825 furbearers and caribou had been greatly reduced in numbers and moose had been annihilated” in certain Anishinabe communities nearer to Hudson Bay, drastically changing Anishinabe relationships to the land (Rogers 233). With the loss of hunting animals and the collapse of the fur trade economy, most Anishinabe groups experienced severe starvation and death throughout the 1830s and 1840s. With people dying from illness and starvation, many leaders of Anishinabe groups began selling lands to the United States government. In the first two treaties of 1837 and 1842, the Anishinabe peoples secured many of their lands in exchange for minimal support from the federal government (*Waasa*). Throughout the 1860s, numerous treaties were signed that placed Anishnaabe peoples within reservations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. It was at this time that the White Earth Reservation was formed, the place where Blaeser was born and raised. It is one of seven reservations within Minnesota and formed after the treaty of 1867 between the Mississippi band of Chippewa Indians and the United States. However, Anishinabe peoples experienced drastic changes in their lifestyles as a result of the land loss. The

lands they retained no longer sustained their traditional subsistence economy, and Anishinabe individuals were forced to hunt off of reservation lands in order to provide for their families.

By the late nineteenth century, the Anishnaabe in the United States experienced the devastation of allotment. Believing the lands to be well suited for farming, federal Indian agents forced individual Anishinabe families to accept land allotments. However, the land proved ill suited to Euro-American farming practices, and since the U. S. government specifically wanted to open Anishinabe lands to settlement, these communities experienced significant land loss and extreme poverty (Kelly 66). Moreover, at the turn of the century, states began to pass laws prohibiting fishing, hunting, and trapping, and Anishinabe individuals had to violate state laws in order to practice federal treaty rights. For the next 50 years, the Anishinabe peoples struggled economically, but many families continued to subsist on natural resources, including maple syrup, fish, wild rice, and game. While the Anishinabe were dramatically affected by the acts of the governments of the United States and Canada, these changes in no way compromised Anishinabe relationships to traditional lands, but rather reaffirmed the importance lands hold for Anishinabe people.

According to the award-winning PBS special, *Waasa Inaabidaa: We Look in All Directions*, contemporary Anishinabe peoples are guided by a principle of “That Which Is Given To Us” (Gaa Miinigooyang). The idea can be broken down based on the following three relationships: the individual depended on the group, the group depended on nature, and nature depended on the supernatural. In order for these relationships to be

successful, the individual had to practice the necessary ceremonies and believe that every living thing has a purpose. This tradition continues to have a profound impact on contemporary Anishinabe peoples. The importance of this tradition, as well as other cultural practices, can be seen in contemporary stories and writings by Anishinabe people, such as Kimberly Blaeser, Louise Erdrich, and Gerald Vizenor. The stories passed down from generation to generation continue to guide Anishinabe individuals. According to “Oral Literatures of the Northeastern Algonquians and the Northern Iroquoians” by Gordon M. Day and Michael K. Foster, “Algonquian mythologies are dominated by Transformers, who converted the primal earth and its creatures into their historical forms, and Tricksters, who were involved in numerous escapades, either with or without a moral purpose. The Northern Algonquians, such as the Cree and Ojibwe, combine these antithetical personalities in one figure.” (74). The Trickster and Transformer figure within the Anishinabe oral tradition, usually referred to as Nanabush, Nenabozho, or a similar spelling, was responsible for guiding the Anishinabe peoples and for centering them within their traditional lands. The Anishinabe also had elaborate ceremonial practices, which “did not develop among the Northeastern Algonquians to anything like the degree it did among other Algonquian groups such as the Anishinabe” (Day 75). These oral narratives and ceremonial practices were vital in conveying the rich history of the Anishinabe people and their placement within the land. In fact, “Ojibwe narratives were important for the transmission and reinforcement of a traditional worldview,” and they “were the major means of keeping the tribe alive” (Ghezzi 444-445). Through the oral tradition, Anishinabe people learned about plants and animals in

their region, as well as how to live in an appropriate way by practicing “That Which Is Given to Us.” The stories of Nanabush alone served as a way of conveying the expectations of Anishinabe society as “His actions served as a reminder of appropriate behavior and of the consequences of disobedience” (Ghezzi 445). Embedded within the traditional stories of the Anishinabe is a history of survival, and we can see this survival in Kimberly Blaeser, who is a writer who honors her heritage through her literary work.

As an Anishinabe woman and enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Blaeser strongly identifies with her tribal history. She was born in Billings, Montana in 1955, but grew up on the White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota. In the late 1970s, she graduated from Mahnomon High School, which is on the White Earth Reservation, and went onto the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota, a little under 200 miles from White Earth. After graduating from St. Benedict, Blaeser earned both an M.A. (1982) and a Ph.D. (1990) in English at the University of Notre Dame and has been an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee since that time (Strom). She currently lives on six and a half acres in the rural Lyons township of Wisconsin with her husband and two children (University). Rather than live nearer to the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Blaeser chooses to commute over forty miles, which illustrates Blaeser’s desire to be close to the natural world.

Since joining the faculty at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Blaeser has written numerous essays, scholarly articles, short stories, poems, and other types of writing. Blaeser’s writing reveals the importance of her Anishinabe heritage and connection to the natural world. This importance is articulated in Blaeser’s contribution

to *After Confessions: Poetry As Autobiography* (2001), which reveals a great deal about her personal relationship to her poetry. In her contribution, “The Voices We Carry,” Blaeser writes,

A Native woman living in the twenty-first century, I am but the tiniest bud on an ancient oak tree. My lips open in the liquid language of poems because the root system of my family tree draws deeply from the dark soil of history. What I speak and write comes to me dank and tangled among the years and lives I carry. I write not only out of a knowledge of the past, but within a chamber of voices from that past. (269).

These words speak to the power Blaeser has over language and demonstrates how she uses writing to untangle the history she comes from. Part of this strength lies in exactly what Blaeser outlines, a long history centered in place and informed by voices from the past. Blaeser recognizes that her writing not only comes from her community and her history, but that it also has a place in the future of her people: “Like many colonized people throughout the world, my Anishinabeg ancestors were not given a voice in their own destiny. It is my privilege and responsibility to reclaim their right to speak and to be heard” (“Voices” 276). Blaeser connects to her tribal heritage through her strong connection to her own family.

Throughout her written materials, Blaeser articulates the importance of her family. In one example from *Women of White Earth*, Blaeser writes:

I still feel strongly that, for the sake of my parents and my relatives, I would like to accomplish what they didn’t have a chance to try. They created me,

and I am they. They've supported me, in the past and today, in a way that's very unselfish. That's not the way the rest of the world operates. I feel a strong sense of commitment to them. (*Women 5*)

Blaeser notes the importance of relatives and how her relation to family differs from “the rest of the world” in positive ways (*Women 5*). Blaeser speaks as a descendent of the Anishinabe community, and the history of her family parallels that of the larger community:

From our earliest years we hear ourselves and the events of our lives compared to that of a litany of relatives...Family stories form a map of remembrance that we both trace and extend in time and scope. Ultimately family history overlaps cultural history. The story of my elder uncle's experiences at Indian boarding school, the account of their running away and returning home to the reservation, becomes a *tribal* tale of hardship, colonization, and resistance. (“Voices” 274)

For Blaeser, colonization, assimilation, and relocation have not only affected her community, but close family members as well. Blaeser cannot separate her personal history from her community history, because “[l]anguage and voice emerge within a speech circle; and we can only ever write ‘self’ relationally, from within the very plural ‘we’ context of family, community, cultural, national, or inter-national story” (“Voices” 275). She can see the direct consequences of colonization in her own family, and her poetry reflects these realities.

Blaeser discusses the impact of her personal history on her poetry in *Women of White Earth*: “I think that feeling of crossing borders has an effect on my poetry, too. I

write in all sorts of genres, and don't really see the distinctions that are set up by our academic system. Some of my poetry is very narrative, very much like a story" (Women 7). Blaeser knows that her poetry deviates from certain Western norms, but this deviation is a powerful reflection of her connection to the history of her family and Anishinabe community. In addition to understanding the importance of place, Blaeser also knows that she carries the history of her people through the oral tradition. Blaeser lets her readers know that "[t]ogether with the stressed pronunciation I am only beginning to learn to translate into print, they allow a reader access to the cultural *sound-ings* that carry place, nation, and sometimes, time" ("Voices" 270). As part of her responsibility to speak for her people, Blaeser notes that she is beginning to learn how to "translate" into print, or reinvent the English language in order to convey the "cultural sound-ings" of her people ("Voices" 270). She recognizes that there are oral qualities to her writing, and that they must be properly translated because they "carry place, nation, and sometimes, time" ("Voices" 270). Moreover, the greater Migration story of the Anishinabe people continues through Blaeser's work, as she continues to tell the stories of her people, because, according to Paula Giese, "[t]he Migration Story is not finished, it is still going on. There is no book you can 'look it up' in, because we help it to go on with our lives and work" (Giese). Giese notes how Anishinabe peoples, like Blaeser, continue the Migration story through their lives and work. As an Anishinabe individual, Blaeser knows the importance of her connection to place and to her personal and tribal history.

Blaeser's own thoughts on the importance of place will provide a starting point in this analysis. Within *Absentee Indians*, Blaeser's poems are strikingly autobiographical

and deal with her balancing between living the life of an academic and maintaining a strong connection to her Anishinabe identity and tribal lands on the White Earth Reservation. For Blaeser, writing is a method for connecting her to the Anishinabe people, and it is through her writing that she also connects to other absentee Indians. In *Women of White Earth*, Blaeser comments on her writing:

I feel the need to write about certain things that have happened in my life because it's cathartic, or healing in some way or a way to put it in order. I try to have whatever I write feel true, whether or not I choose to include all the details that might interest people . . . That's not to say I'll never write about them. But it seems to me that part of what I do as a writer is healing other people as well as myself. Somehow it's a gift. (*Women* 5-6).

Blaeser not only recognizes the cathartic aspect of her writing, but also sees how her writing is healing for herself and others. The classification of her writing as a gift signifies how Blaeser views her position as a writer, and how she feels connected to other Native peoples. Karen A Redfield notes in "Inside the Circle, Outside the Circle" that Kimberly Blaeser spoke to her Native American Literature class at Madison Area Technical College in Madison, Wisconsin. In response to a question about her audience, Blaeser replied, "that it was first and foremost 'Indian people who know the things I know'" (Redfield 160). In her writing, Blaeser speaks to the pain her absence from the White Earth Reservation causes, as well as to the displacement other Native peoples feel. By writing about this pain, Blaeser (re)connects them to their Native identities through

the creation of communities for those who are also dealing with the consequences of absence and loss.

One of the ways in which Blaeser reconnects is through mapping. In her contribution to *As We Are Now: Mixblood Essays On Race and Identity*, “On Mapping and Urban Shamans,” Blaeser specifically discusses the implications of mapping and the consequences of it on the urban Indian experience. She believes that “[w]e plot our lives in various searches. Sometimes they work at crosscurrents. Ties to tribe, place, families, belief systems, careers tug us in many directions. Their pathways may converge, run parallel; more often they diverge. For those of us from mixed cultures this is perhaps particularly true. We carry multiple maps” (“On Mapping” 124). Blaeser’s idea of carrying multiple maps gives us insight into how she sees her own situation, and how she connects to her homelands from a distance. For example, in the same article, Blaeser speaks specifically to her connection to land and the displacement she feels when removed from her traditional lands:

I didn’t grow up appreciating crowded streets, bright lights, or city noises. That hasn’t changed. But now I teach at an urban university. I won’t live in the city, but on teaching days or for meetings I drive in. I spend two and one half hours in the car each working day simply to avoid urban life. It isn’t my heritage. (“On Mapping” 117)

Even her removal from tribal lands does not compromise her heritage or connection to the land. Blaeser sees the world through two lenses and understands the ways in which people are influenced by their communities and educations:

Just now, migration is the pattern of my life. It takes me into classrooms where students dutifully follow lines that have been drawn to dissect literature. Plot maps with rising action, climax, crisis, falling action, denouement. I suggest there are other figures that might be shaped by the words. I say let's look at the center, the centripetal forces, the weaving motion, the webbed relationships . . . I find my way in softly redrawing the perimeters of possibilities. The continual redrawing is also for me. It takes me back home. This is one branch, one vein, one motion in my life. I am finally learning the trick to surviving is to keep it connected to all the others. That connection comes with story, memory, dream, heartbeat—all motion and relation. ( "On Mapping"125)

Blaeser reflects on her life in terms of migration and finds the keys to surviving absence from family and traditional lands through teaching and from strong ties to her community. Blaeser intimately understands the importance of "redrawing the perimeters of possibilities . . ." and how that redrawing "takes [her] back home" ("Mapping" 125). Her declaration that "the trick to surviving is to keep it connected to all the others" provides a solution for absence as she writes of the importance of story, memory, dream, and heartbeat. At another point in this article, Blaeser discusses the manner in which maps influence the way people see the world: "The maps we require have much to do with our own way of reading and understanding the world. Perhaps the way we live now we need many maps overlaid like layers of earth to form our home, or like layers of clouds to filter our sky" ("On Mapping"122). She complicates this by suggesting, "[t]he standard flat maps print easily, fold neatly, and can travel in any pocket or glove

compartment. But life pathways are harder to chart; the lessons of internal mapping, more elusive” (“On Mapping” 122). Blaeser’s suggestion that “we need many maps” speaks to the multiple perspectives found within *Absentee Indians*, the significance of the notion of migration, and the importance of maintaining a connection to place.

The title of the collection, *Absentee Indians*, further identifies Blaeser with other Native peoples who live far from their homelands or who have lost connections to their tribal lands. By sharing her personal stories of migration, absence, and homesickness, Blaeser affirms a connection through storytelling and speaks to other Native peoples who struggle with similar feelings. Blaeser sees herself as part of the continuum of the history of Anishinabe people and writers. Early on in *Absentee Indians*, Blaeser identifies herself as an absentee Indian who “dreams of home” on the White Earth Reservation, but at the same time, Blaeser knows that she is still intimately connected to her home through her writing and storytelling (xi). Blaeser writes *as* an absentee Indian and *to* the absentee Indian, reminding them of how their own stories connect them to their families and lands. Family is a centerpiece of *Absentee Indians*, and Blaeser demonstrates this by framing the collection with a recognition of the support her family gives her. In the opening lines, she explains that “In the writing of these poems support came in various forms from my family and friends” (ix), and closes by noting “the community [is] alive in my poems” (127). This recognition of family and community connects Blaeser to her history and to the White Earth Reservation. Blaeser’s *Absentee Indians* speaks to the importance traditional lands continue to have within Anishinabe communities and voices the importance of these land bases for Native peoples across North America.

Blaeser's poems within *Absentee Indians* are predominantly autobiographical, with a majority of the collection's poems written in the first-person or using the subject pronoun "we." Blaeser's collection is divided into 6 sections entitled: "Absentee Indians," "Studies in Migration," "Evolutions," "Motherbirth," "From One Half Mad Writer to Another," and "Those Things that Come to You at Night." Each section contains numerous poems and is organized through subtle prosodic elements, such as repetition, alliteration, and parallelism. For example, the opening section of her collection shares the same title as the book, "Absentee Indians," and contains six poems that are connected through a common theme: each poem contains the title for the next poem in the section. This parallelism is seen in the first poem, "Absentee Indians," which contains two lines, "twelve steps / to ward off homesickness" -- two lines that become the title for the second poem. "Twelve Steps to Ward Off Homesickness" then contains the title of the third poem, "Recite the Names of All the Suicided Indians," and so forth. These varying prosodic elements unite each section by weaving together the similar threads that bind the collection: family, community, land, history, and the future. This connection is vitally important when considering the subject of this section, the so-called absentee Indian.

By writing herself as an absentee Indian, Blaeser joins thousands of other Native peoples who have had similar experiences with absence and removal. The title poem, "Absentee Indians," starts with a powerful statement, "Used to think they were white," referring to the relatives who would occasionally visit the reservation (3). At the same time, this phrase implies that she now thinks differently, which she further articulates in

the next stanza: “Now it’s me returning / going visiting / making the rez rounds / like all other absentee Indians” (3). Blaeser writes intimately about the return visits and how absentee Indians suffer from “Old Man Blues,” pointing out that there “Ain’t no cure for it / but home” (3). Absentee Indians come “Back for a memory / a fix if they could find it,” but at the same time they are outsiders “Searching some magic antidote / . . . / to ward off homesickness” (3, 4). Blaeser’s description of the absentee Indian illustrates her broad understanding of absence and its consequences. In the final stanza, Blaeser recalls laughing at “A city Indian / some relative from California” who brought his kids so they could “learn about their heritage” (4). She remembers that “We used to laugh / when he said heritage / like every book on Indians / instead of people or tribe or life,” but adds that “Ain’t hardly laughing now” (4). By ending with this final line, constructed in a similar fashion to the first line, Blaeser bookends the poem with two powerful statements, both of which indicate her changed attitude toward absentee Indians. Blaeser used to laugh at absent relatives, but she now returns home searching for ways to ward off her own homesickness. “Absentee Indians” details the full extent to which Blaeser understands the consequences of absence, speaking to both the absentee Indian and the relatives back home.

In *Absentee Indians*, Blaeser writes from a vantage point where she can see the multiple perspectives surrounding absentee Indians, while at the same time articulating how she deals with her own absence. Part of what helps her cope stems from her use of tragicomic humor, as well as her deep understanding of the importance of place even from a distance. The second poem of the collection, “Twelve Steps to Ward Off

Homesickness,” uses the twelve-step program at the heart of Alcoholics Anonymous (A. A.) and demonstrates one example of Blaeser’s survivance. Unquestionably, Blaeser has been influenced by Vizenor, an Anishinabe scholar who has done extensive work on the notion of “survance.”<sup>31</sup> One can consider survivance as,

a term coined by Vizenor to describe survival and endurance in a comic mode.

Tragedy is terminal; comedy is not. What is more, Vizenor’s Anishinabe progenitors were members of the Crane Clan, a clan noted for skill in Oratory.

Clan identity places individuals within systems of privileges and

obligations—obligations to know clan and tribal histories, genealogies,

landscapes, mythologies, and to evaluate and share such knowledge in dialogue

with others. (Lundquist 91)

In this introduction to Vizenor and survivance, Suzanne Lundquist situates Vizenor in his cultural clan system and in doing so respects the nuances of Vizenor’s theory and culture. The humor in the title is only conveyed to those who understand A. A., or those whose lives have been negatively impacted by alcohol abuse. For those who see the subtle humor in this title, they also must reconcile it with the pervasive alcoholism within Native communities. This use of tragicomic humor extends throughout the poem with each step suggesting ways for the absentee Indian to be reminded of home. For example, Blaeser suggests that the first step is to, “Eat oatmeal and bacon for breakfast. Fry eggs in bacon grease and eat over cold oatmeal for lunch. Make macaroni and canned tomatoes for supper. Repeat for 5 days.” (5). The first step requires eating food with barely enough nutritional value for daily dietary needs, yet at the same time these foods

remind Blaeser of home. Blaeser recalls the memorable aspects of reservation living, while also noting how these truths negatively reflect reservation life. The steps are intended to ward off homesickness, but at the same time these steps remind the absentee Indian of parts of their life. Blaeser's sixth step further illustrates the contradictions the absentee Indian must reconcile: "Enter your car through the passenger door. Drive it without using reverse. Continue for one week or until you remember a rez car is not a picturesque metaphor" (5). Blaeser's poem reveals how the absentee Indian longs to return home, but it also reminds the reader of the painful realities within many Native communities. This dual perspective allows Blaeser to speak candidly about the people, places, foods, and images that connect her to family and home.

Within *Absentee Indians*, Blaeser reflects on the effect of absence while at the same time recognizing how much she retains of her Anishinabe heritage. The second section of *Absentee Indians*, "Studies in Migration," connects directly to the Anishinabe Migration story and offers a glimpse into how Blaeser identifies survival. The "Studies in Migration" section responds to the difficulty of being an absentee Indian by offering a different perspective on absence through landscape and patterns. Furthermore, the poem demonstrates Blaeser's use of prose within her poems, and as previously stated, how "[s]ome of [her] poetry is very narrative, very much like a story" (Women 7). In the poem, "Studies in Migration," Blaeser illustrates the feelings she confronts when returning home:

Pulled into Joe Olson's landing. Patterns of the past leaping before  
us like the frogs caught here for fishing. With the force of long his-

tory they return. Welling up in the iron scent of spring water. Pooling amid last fall's leaves. Slowly seeping into shoes worn through at the big toe. (30)

This poem does not conform to Western poetic conventions, but rather functions as a narrative, illustrating the ways in which memory and traditional lands affect Blaeser. Memory and the “[p]atterns the past” remind Blaeser of “the force of long history” (30). Patterns emerge in the sights, scents, and sounds of the landscape, and it is through these patterns that Blaeser connects to home. She further illustrates the importance of patterns in this poem by likening people's absence to migratory birds:

Each year someone comes home. Pat moved in next to her dad. Von settled on Grandma's old land. Laurie Brown, gone since after the war, came back that same year as the trumpeter swans. Pelicans have been filtering in for seven summers. (30)

The significance of the number seven in the Anishinabe Migration Story is paralleled here in the Pelicans' return. With the return of Anishinabe peoples to their traditional lands, the natural world also returns to balance. This poem illustrates the importance of Anishinabe peoples living on their land, as it also conveys the importance of “That Which is Given to Us.” Her memory and return signify the connection between Anishinabe people and the natural world: “Each space held for years in stories. Waiting. Now reclaimed. Your / name was never empty. We could have told them. We kept it full of memories. Our land the color of age (30). In this stanza, Blaeser talks to the land, saying “[y]our name was never empty,” and notes that the Anishinabe people kept

the land filled with memories (30). Blaeser demonstrates the vivacity of the Anishinabe Migration Story and its continued significance for Anishinabe people. By considering the absentee Indian in terms of migration, Blaeser further signifies the importance of place and storytelling. She ends the poem as follows: “And flight the birds could tell us is a pattern. Going. And coming / back” (30). The theme of patterns and migration throughout *Absentee Indians* illustrates Blaeser’s deep connection to her Anishinabe heritage and also serves as a way to reconcile her absence. Throughout *Absentee Indians*, Blaeser writes from a perspective that considers her life in terms of pattern, motion, and migration.

Blaeser’s connection to place emerges from a complex web of relations and stories that help her to survive her absence. Her poems reflect on important elements of home and the natural world. In poems like “Tracks and Traces” or “Haiku Seasons,” Blaeser writes vividly about the animals and landscapes she encounters. Some of these encounters are connected to the landscape of the White Earth Reservation, whereas others are set in various places across North America. In her poem “Of Landscape and Narrative,” Blaeser highlights the flora and fauna of places in California, Colorado, Alaska, and others. These poems demonstrate Blaeser’s approach to and knowledge of the natural world through vivid descriptions of seasons, animals, ecosystems, and plants. “Tracks and Traces” further illustrates Blaeser’s relationship to her environment:

Days after the storm I walk back into the small woods. Early afternoon sun  
flashing, winking off knee-deep winter snow. I stretch, take awkward, too-long  
steps following large waffle-bottom boot prints. Then find a gait—one lower foot

in the path, one breaking a new crust of snow. Cold crystals fall into my mukluks where they gap open at the top. Snow tingles down my calves. Soon I switch to deer paths. Following these I begin to read the stories, tiny tracks and traces of birds, rabbits, mice. (31)

The “tiny tracks and traces of birds, rabbits, mice” tell a story that Blaeser interprets (31). She reads the “stories” in the tracks and traces found within the natural world, as she captures one moment in her life with a keen awareness of the weather, time of day, and season. While it is not clear where Blaeser takes this trip, her understanding of snow navigation and how to read animal tracks conveys her knowledge of the natural world. Blaeser situates herself fully within her environment and demonstrates the importance of stories through her connection to the land. Blaeser exists along a continuum of Anishinabe knowledge that relies on the power and beauty of storytelling. The natural world is where life begins and ends for the Anishinabe; it is where they find food, medicine, and learn the history of their people. The intimate knowledge of the surrounding environment revolved around storytelling and figures like Nanabush who “served as an ideal; he invented important aspects of material culture, taught subsistence skills, and discovered wild rice; he told humans how to use medicines from wild plants to protect themselves” (Ghezzi 444). As a result of her Anishinabe heritage, Blaeser has a deep knowledge of and respect for the natural world. Despite her distance from Anishinabe tribal lands, Blaeser holds onto the importance of place, and *Absentee Indians* reflects the connection to her heritage through her relation to storytelling and the natural world.

*Absentee Indians* also illustrates how Blaeser connects to place through personal stories from her past. One poem in particular, “Kitchen Voices,” sustains a powerful narrative of memories and thoughts at significant moments in her life. The poem is divided into 3 segments – the first segment contains three stanzas (1:3), the second contains two (2:2), and the final segment ends with one stanza (3:1).<sup>32</sup> I believe that the organization suggests different moments and phases in Blaeser’s life. In the first segment, Blaeser begins with her childhood memories spent “listening” to the kitchen voices:

In the crowded rooms of childhood  
 listening.  
 Your voices  
 the familiar lullaby  
 punctuating the world  
 from one door away. (51)

The first stanza outlines the feelings that she had as a child toward the kitchen voices. The voices from her childhood contributed to her knowledge and were “Sounds / lapping against the shore / of my knowing / of my sleep” (51). However, the second stanza moves into a discussion of the same voices “crashing / heedless angry waves / wear themselves out / and stumble off to bed” (52). In this stanza, Blaeser recalls memories of eavesdropping on Christmas preparations and boxing matches along side the sounds of drinking and fighting. The final stanza in the first section recalls “Every slumber woven with vibrations. / Chair legs scraping the floor, / ice cubes cracked from their trays, / . . . ”

and remembers the “Shadows cross / the narrow stream of light / beneath the door of my room / . . . ” (52). In the kitchen voices, Blaeser recalls: “Twin aches, / comfort and loss, wake me again. / Torn between rising / to the night kitchen, / or letting the spell / of unreality / lull me like water . . . ” (52-53). The voices are like water that lulls Blaeser to sleep as a child. Blaeser ends this stanza by further connecting the voices with water: “Water running from the faucet / your day’s stories flowing out” (53). Her memories of the kitchen voices connect her to family and moments of joy and pain, and she recalls “Wanting despite everything / to hear it forever” (53). Blaeser writes of her childhood memories throughout the first section and moves into a discussion of her own children in the second.

The second segment of “Kitchen Voices” details Blaeser’s feelings toward her son sleeping beside her in one of her return visits home. She writes:

In my childhood’s bedroom  
 beside my own deep-dreaming baby  
 resting together in one hollow  
 of the age-worn mattress.  
 Listening again—and still.  
 . . . . .  
 My breath always coming and going  
 with the motion of your voices rising  
 and whispering themselves away.  
 Waiting now,

child rustling the bed beside me,  
 humming soothing his Morphean visions  
 careful never to disturb my own.  
 Twin dreams with only a door between them.  
 One spun of longing of need  
 for old voices to speak on and on  
 to ferry me across time on their currents. (53-54)

Blaeser illustrates one night in her “childhood’s bedroom” as she finds herself “Listening again—and still” to the kitchen voices (53). Blaeser wants the voices and stories of the past “to speak on and on” with the hope that they will ferry her across time, while also seeing how she is now important to her son’s sleep and dreams (53). The second stanza of this section further details this connection:

Huffs of child warm breath on my arm  
 trace like voices the buried vein patterns  
 born of blood and devotion  
 from the bed hollow of sound and history.  
 Softly here I try my voice  
 cooing the story of years  
 years shaped by the wash  
 of womb sounds breaking against sleep.  
*Rest, baby, in this room made of memories*  
*still now, my heartsounds patter against yours. (54)*

This segment further demonstrates the importance of place to Blaeser and her poetry. The bedroom reminds Blaeser of the voices born of “blood and devotion,” and she sees how this room is “made of memories” (54). In this place, she was a child listening to the kitchen voices, and now her son listens to the kitchen voices and sounds of his mother’s heartbeat.

The final segment and stanza of “Kitchen Voices” reveals how the voices and sounds connect Blaeser to memory and story. She ends as follows:

In the locked house of memory  
 old spirits rise, sing rockabye.  
 Rounded vowels soften our sleep  
 oohing like pine wind  
 sweeping through our dreams  
 stardusting us with longing. (54-55)

Blaeser’s shift into a discussion of “our” sleep indicates her connection to her son through the shared experience of the kitchen voices (54-55). Memory acts as a means of raising the “old spirits,” and sounds continue to sweep through her dreams (54-55).

Through memory Blaeser remains connected to her past, her family, and her heritage.

Blaeser ends with with a vivid description of the moments before sleep:

Nap, nod, drowse,  
 sink to soft rest and surface  
 always to the subtle base  
 background rhythm of kitchen nightlife.

.....

Static, sulfur smell of a match  
 just scratched awake,  
 splat of a flyswatter,  
 a cough, a sneeze  
 one final yawning, *Sweet dreams*,  
 and *Turn out the light*. (55)

Blaeser captures the moments before sleep as she writes of the significance of sound, memory, and place. Through her memories, Blaeser remains connected to family and the past, and through her poetry, she highlights the importance of memory and place for other absentee Indians.

I would like to end by examining the book reviews for *Absentee Indians* in order to demonstrate the critical importance of understanding Blaeser's unique connection to place and the importance of her heritage. Blaeser published her second book of poetry, *Absentee Indians*, through the Native American Series out of Michigan State University Press in 2002 and has received little attention in the form of book reviews. Of the two reviews available, only one was substantial and the other only briefly mentioned Blaeser's collection. Three years after its publication, the fall 2005 North American Review examined *Absentee Indians*, but only quickly summed up the collection as, "These poems are lyrical roadmaps to ancient Indian traditions alongside scenes of everyday non-Indian life in America" (Gotera 49). Vince Gotera notes the mapping taking place within this collection, but does not note the importance of mapping for

Blaeser as an Anishinabe woman. Gotera also suggests that “The ‘absentee Indians’ are those who, now urbanized, can only *visit* their traditional cousins on the ‘rez.’” (49). The tone of this sentence implies that there is a flaw in urbanization and that only traditional people live on the “rez.” I would suggest, however, that Blaeser’s collection deals with the notion of absentee Indians in an effort to undermine these ideas. Blaeser does not live on the reservation, and while she does struggle with her absence, it does not compromise her Anishinabe identity or relationship to the natural world. Blaeser demonstrates how she survives her absence from the White Earth Reservation through poems such as “Twelve Steps to Ward Off Homesickness” and “Absentee Indians.” While Blaeser identifies as an absentee Indian, she also sees herself as existing along a continuum of Anishinabe history, not one shattered by arbitrary boundaries defined by non-Native governments and communities. Within this collection, Blaeser deals with the tough questions surrounding her absence and provides a voice for other Native peoples struggling with similar questions across North America. Her Anishinabe identity provides her with the means of (re)connecting, an important facet of her poetry that is often overlooked.

The other review in the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* was published in 2003, but also does not account for the importance of Blaeser’s Anishinabe identity. Philip Heldrich identifies Blaeser’s themes throughout *Absentee Indians* as “the need for home, the nourishment of family, and the importance of community, place, and the natural world” (103). Heldrich correctly points to the elements that bind Blaeser’s collection of poems: family, community, and place. Blaeser writes about the importance

of all of these elements, and intimately connects the reader to a personal relationship to place and home. However, Heldrich goes on to suggest that “Where the collection has its weaknesses are in poems that lack the tensions and insights of the more successful poems, poems too impenetrably personal or those not fully developed, that seem purposefully exiled to the rear of the book” (105). However, Heldrich’s statements cannot be supported when one considers the nature of this collection. Heldrich sees the manner in which Blaeser situates herself within her community and family history, despite her absence, but does not see how her writing is also a product of her cultural history. Some poems are “impenetrably personal,” but this is far from a weakness of the collection, and by suggesting that some of her poems are “not fully developed,” Heldrich fails to see the complexity of these poems and how they contribute to her collection (105). The poems that are “impenetrable” are not intended for those who are not a part of Blaeser’s family or community. Blaeser writes for those who can relate to the experiences and memories she illustrates through her poetry. Heldrich does not note the influence of the Anishinabe Migration Story or the principle of Gaa Miinigooyang (That Which is Given to Us). Blaeser does not create falsehood or theatrics with her work; her work is both personal and a reflection of her Anishinabe identity. At another point in his review, Heldrich illustrates a small example of Blaeser’s “use of tragicomic humor,” but even in this fails to make an important connection to Blaeser’s Anishinabe identity. Many of Blaeser’s poems that present what Heldrich terms “tragicomic humor” are consistent with Vizenor’s theory of survivance, but Heldrich does not make this connection. Blaeser’s connection to Vizenor is even greater when one considers that she worked

extensively with Vizenor and published *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition* in 1996. Any discussion of Blaeser or her work should consider the manner in which her identity is tied to family, home, and her Anishinabe identity.

Blaeser (re)connects to the White Earth Reservation and to her family through memory and story. Blaeser eloquently situates the importance of storytelling in *Women of White Earth*, “Indian people don’t *teach* their children. They *story* them.” (Women 5). Native poets like Blaeser recognize the importance storytelling holds within their families and communities, and her poetry reflects the vibrancy of storytelling and the significance of place. As a Native woman who maintains intimate connections to her traditional lands, Blaeser’s work acts as a significant starting point in this analysis. Blaeser writes with a vivid sense of her tribal lands, and in her writing, she enables other Native peoples to reconnect to their traditional lands through family and storytelling, two aspects of her identity that also powerfully resonates for other Native peoples.

Blaeser’s *Absentee Indians* is also part of a larger story of survival. Through storytelling and a deep connection to place, Blaeser remains tied to her family, tribal lands, and history. Through an understanding of Blaeser’s absence from traditional lands, we can begin to see how her poems reflect a method for surviving absence through storytelling and maintaining connections to place through memory. Despite her own personal absence and migration, Blaeser continues to tie herself to her tribal lands and histories. She intimately understands what it means to be an “absentee Indian” and talks openly about the consequences of absence, while at the same time weaving together the rich tapestry of her personal and tribal history. Place retains importance as she negotiates

the multiple maps of her life, and her collection speaks to the power storytelling continues to hold within Indigenous communities. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will be discussing two other authors, Ester Belin and Deborah Miranda, and how they are also negotiating the multiple maps of their lives. Belin's *From the Belly of My Beauty* and Miranda's *Indian Cartography* will reveal the continued importance of memory, storytelling, and place for Indigenous peoples who are dealing with different forms of absence – absences due to relocation and even a complete loss of tribal lands and traditions.

b. *From the Belly of My Beauty*

Whereas Kimberly Blaeser's *Absentee Indians* expresses the consequences of *becoming* an absentee Indian, Esther Belin's (Navajo) *From the Belly of My Beauty* (1999) grapples with second-generation displacement due to relocation as it voices an urban Indian experience. The collection is number 38 in the Sun Tracks series out of the University of Arizona Press, a series that was launched in 1971 and was one of the first publishing programs to focus solely on the creative writing of Native American peoples<sup>33</sup>. *From the Belly of My Beauty* won the American Book Award in 2000 and has received positive praise for its gritty portrayal of urban Indian life. In her collection, Belin

conveys the realities of an urban Indian who can see the consequences of displacement and removal, while also expressing the importance land continues to hold for a contemporary Navajo woman despite her displacement. She writes about frequent return trips to the Navajo Nation and provides a raw and often bitter voice that resents the colonial history that has led to the urban Indian experience. She writes with a sense of the impact colonization has had on her and other Indigenous peoples, while honoring her Navajo heritage and on her urban life.

In order to fully understand the consequences of colonization, we must understand a few points about Navajo cultural and political history. The Navajo people, or Diné people, are primarily located in the southwestern United States. Archaeological sources suggest that the Navajo arrived in the present-day American southwest as early as 1000 A.D. to as late as 1525 (Brugge 489). The lands were previously occupied by Anasazi peoples, as well as peoples who spoke Shoshonian or Yuman languages. The Navajo language is part of the Southern Athapaskan language family. Athapaskan languages extend from Alaska and Canada down to the present-day Southwest. Linguistic evidence suggests that the Navajo migrated from areas near the Rocky Mountains and were influenced by the various peoples they encountered. Even though they now employ farming practices similar to other southwestern peoples, the Navajo learned these practices from the Puebloan peoples they encountered. However, many cultural practices of the Navajo are unique from other Indigenous peoples of the Southwest. Even though the Navajo were first identified as a people by early Spanish explorers in the late 1500s, they have a distinct emergence story that places them within the boundaries of

the Navajo Nation prior to Spanish arrival. The Navajo oral tradition reveals the continued importance of living within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation.

The oral history of the Navajo people continues to have a dramatic impact on Navajo identity and the importance of a connection to land. Navajo oral history records an emergence from “a subterranean domain of unaccounted origin,” which consisted of numerous worlds and was “inhabited by insects (usually ant) or animal peoples” (Gill 502). According to Andrew Widget, the theme of emergence is an important feature to all oral histories from the Southwest: “Throughout the Southwest the origin story everywhere is the myth of emergence, which describes how the ancestors of the present population emerged onto the earth’s surface from within the earth” (Widget 57). The first beings to emerge from the underworld were First Man and First Woman, who were similar to humans “only in that they were male and female and they were attracted to each other” (Witherspoon 141). After emerging into the current world, First Man and First Woman “sang into existence the world as the Navajo now know it” (Schwarz 20). From soil gathered in the underworld, First Man and First Woman created mountains in order to mark the sacred boundaries around the land.

First Man and First Woman created the four sacred mountains, which were associated with the cardinal directions and retain significance within Navajo education. According to Maureen Schwarz’s *Molded in the Image of Changing Woman*, “[t]he following mountains mark these directions in Navajo sacred geography: east, Sisnaajini, or Blanca Peak; south, Tsoodzil, Mount Taylor; west, Dook’o’oosliid, San Francisco Peak; and north, Dibé Nitsaa, La Plata Peak” (21). In addition to marking the sacred

boundaries of Diné'tah, the mountains were associated with “four foundational principles of Navajo education and philosophy . . . ‘thinking,’ . . . ‘planning,’ . . . ‘living according to the pattern,’ . . . and ‘confidence assurance, and security’” (Schwarz 21). These foundational principles define the Navajo worldview and provide contemporary Navajo people with a guide to proper living. The Navajo retain a powerful connection to land as a result of a vibrant oral tradition that places a great deal of importance on the four sacred mountains that border Navajo lands.

Furthermore, according to Navajo oral history, the Navajo were created by Changing Woman, a figure who emerged in these sacred lands and who demonstrates the proper ways of living for Navajo people to this day. The Holy People (Diyin Dine'é) created Changing Woman after the “perfect order of the world was disrupted because of the sexual aberrations and excesses of the last underworld” (Schwarz 23). The inappropriate sexual activity led to the women of the underworld “[giving] birth to misshapen creatures who grew into monsters” (Schwarz 23). These monsters were responsible for infertility across the world and brought only death and destruction, but the world was saved by the birth of Changing Woman and the birth of her twin sons. The Holy People “arranged for First Man to find Changing Woman,” and she was raised by First Man and First Woman in a “miracle way” (Schwarz 23). She matured quickly under the guidance of the Holy People and began menstruating after only twelve days, an important moment in her life that “symbolized the restoration of power and fertility on the earth . . .” (Schwarz 23). Shortly after her menstruation, Changing Woman “mated with the sun and gave birth to twin sons, Monster Slayer and Born For Water,” two

beings who eradicated the monsters in the world (Schwarz 23). It was at this point that Changing Woman created humans. Once humans were created, the Holy Ones created a charter with humans and conveyed the rules for proper living through “songs, prayers, ceremonies, and stories” (Schwarz 24). These various forms of knowledge convey to Navajo people “how they must live in order for the world to be maintained and life to continue” (Schwarz 24). The stories surrounding the Holy Ones, Changing Woman, and her sons continue to convey the proper ways of living for Navajo people. According to the charter that the Navajo have with the Holy Ones, in order for life to continue in this world, the Navajo must continue to live within Dinétah, “the area demarcated by the four sacred mountains,” and continue practicing proper ways of living (Schwarz 266). However, Navajo life ways were threatened by abrupt and traumatic removal from their lands.

Like the Anishnaabe people, the Navajo have also been dramatically affected by land loss and aggressive federal attempts at civilization through forced or encouraged removals. The Navajo first encountered Europeans during Spanish exploration in the Southwest during the 1580s. At this time, according to David Brugge’s “Navajo Prehistory and History to 1850,” the Navajo people experienced dramatic changes to their culture, because of “two major influences, the arrival of occasional Pueblo fugitives and the impact of European culture” (491). Puebloan peoples had numerous battles with the Spanish, which led to individuals taking refuge within Navajo territory. As a result, the Navajo adopted new cultural practices that incorporated elements from Puebloan cultures. Furthermore, the Navajo people participated in numerous revolts against the

Spanish and “[w]arfare with the Spaniards continued until about 1716,” when peace developed due to the emergence of a new enemy, the Utes (Brugge 493). At this time, the Utes and Navajo competed for lands throughout New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah. As a result of the conflict over land, the Utes frequently raided Navajo lands. Despite the diminished conflict with the Spanish, the Navajo still had to defend their lands from invasion by other people, such as the Utes and the other Europeans who were beginning to settle in the area. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Navajo were accustomed to warfare, but they were still not prepared for the United States army that arrived in the mid 1800s.

The United States sent representatives to the Navajo people in 1846 to try and quell the conflict between the various peoples residing in the area now known as New Mexico. By 1850, the Navajo had signed three treaties with the United States government, but the relations between U.S. soldiers and Navajo people were strained. In one incident, on August 31, 1849, seven Navajo men were killed after a brief meeting with Colonel John Washington and Indian Agent James Calhoun, representative of the United States government. One of the men killed, Narbona, “was one of the most influential Navajo leaders, who tried to keep a state of peace” (Roessel 506). The tragedy of his death left the Navajo feeling even more distrust of the European peoples intruding on their lands. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, the Navajo people lost a majority of their land base due to invasion by Mexican and Euro-American shepherders and the Bonneville Treaty of 1858, which “materially reduced the size of the land recognized as belonging to the Navajo” (Roessel 508). The tension between the Navajo people, the

soldiers and representatives of the United States government, and the non-Navajo settlers in the region led to a great deal of conflict. After repeated assaults on their lands and their people, the Navajo people decided to retaliate. In 1860, a group of Navajo men unsuccessfully attacked Fort Defiance, which gave the United States government a reason for the massive removal of Navajo people in The Long Walk from 1863-1867.

Even though The Long Walk started in 1863, it was initiated by the conflict over land in the early 1860s. After the raid in 1860, numerous individuals started to plan and execute the forced removal of Navajo people from their homelands. In 1863, Brigadier General James H. Carleton and Colonel Christopher (Kit) Carson started a campaign against the Navajo and began the removal process. Carleton “frequently spoke of moving the Navajo from their homelands so miners could reap the mineral wealth of their land . . .” and implemented a “scorched-earth policy . . . in which the troops destroyed cornfields, peach trees, hogans, water holes, animals, and people . . .” (Roessel 508, 511). Carleton’s statistical records for 1863 “showed that the Navajo campaign resulted in 301 Indians killed, 87 wounded, 703 captured” (Roessel 513). Over the course of the next few years, Carson aided in the removal of Navajos to Fort Sumner (also known as Bosque Redondo), an area set aside by Congress in 1862 as the first Indian reservation west of Oklahoma Indian Territory. During the removal process, hundreds of Navajo people died as a result of fatigue, starvation, or disease, which is why it became known as The Long Walk. Even though thousands of Navajo people evaded capture and The Long Walk, many more thousand experienced the horrors of Fort Sumner until Carleton came under scrutiny for his handling of Indian affairs in New Mexico.

Carleton's campaign against the Navajo was criticized after the Navajo experienced severe starvation and health problems, and he was relieved of duty in 1866. While still residing at Fort Sumner, the Navajo were placed under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. After this transition, Roessel notes, "[a] peace commission was established by Congress in 1867. It assailed the present treatment of Indians and sent its members to meet and to treat with different Indian groups" (517). In 1868, the Navajo signed a treaty with the United States government, which allowed them to return to their traditional lands. Part of the reason the Navajo were able to negotiate a return to their homelands had to do with the trauma they experienced as a result of their removal from their sacred lands. Roessel notes the profound impact of removal and return as follows:

They were people who related to Navajoland in a spiritual manner since it was given and made safe for them by the Holy People. To be forced to leave their beloved land with its sacred mountains and shrines, and to cross three rivers, all of which their traditions warned them never to do, was to subject the Navajo to unparalleled anguish and heartache. When this anguish and heartache is combined with the unequalled physical suffering experienced at Fort Sumner, a faint glimpse of the impact this tragedy had, and continues to have, for the Navajo may be realized. (518-519)

The Navajo worldview is conveyed through stories that are connected to place, which is why displacement and removal caused the formation of wounds for individuals and the community. Unfortunately, this would not be the Navajo peoples' only experience of removal.

Over the course of the next 55 years, the Navajo faced the boarding school era and the introduction of new federal policies. Even though the treaty of 1868 allowed the Navajo to return to their sacred lands, the treaty also required Navajo children to attend school. The United States government's focus on educating Navajo children threatened traditional Navajo knowledge and had a profound impact on cultural practices. Navajo children were taken from their homes, often forcefully, and sent to schools far removed from important family and clan networks. In addition to dealing with interruptions within their family systems, the Navajo also experienced the introduction of paternalistic governmental policy that was intent on the acquisition of Navajo natural resources. In 1921, oil was discovered on Navajo lands, and the U.S. government began to influence the structure of Navajo tribal government. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs at this time, Charles H. Burke, in 1923 issued a document entitled "Regulations Relating to the Navajo Tribe of Indians," which allowed the secretary of the interior to appoint a commissioner for the Navajo tribe. The commissioner subsequently was authorized "to sign on behalf of the Navajo Indians all oil and gas mining leases granted within the Navajo reservation" (Roessel 523). In other words, the commissioner had legal authority to sell the natural resources within Navajo lands, even without the consensus of the Navajo people. Even though the Navajo people were able to live within the boundaries of the sacred mountains, they had little control over their lands as a result of federal governmental policy.

Even though numerous changes have come to pass since the implementation of regulations toward the Navajo in 1923, the Navajo people are still dealing with the

aftermath of colonization and removal. A Navajo nationalism movement began in 1969 when the Advisory Committee for the Navajo Tribal Council called for a change from the name Navajo (which was Spanish in origin) to Diné (Iverson 636). At this time, Native peoples across the United States and Canada were participating in the American Indian Movement, a national organization that supported tribal sovereignty, and the Navajo were able to work toward improving conditions for Navajo communities. The nationalism movement brought with it new approaches to health care and education, but the Navajo Nation still faced a challenge with incorporating traditional approaches to education. According to Schwarz:

The role of the maternal grandfather's clan is to instruct its children in the proper pattern of life according to the Navajo way. It is this clan's responsibility to instruct children in 'iina—the act of living according to a pattern established by the Diyin Dine'e. Clan members accomplish this by teaching children about their history. They teach a philosophy for living by recounting Navjao oral history. This process allows children to place themselves in a context, to envision their own lives within the time frame of the entire history of the Navajo people. (77)

In the past, Navajo individuals learned about their cultural practices and history through their maternal grandfather's clan. Even though the clan system remains vitally important to Navajo people, many individuals are still educated outside of their communities and without the support of their maternal grandfather's clan. Contemporary Navajo people, such as Esther Belin, are still dealing with the changes within their communities while honoring their cultural history and cultural practices.

Esther Belin is a second-generation off-reservation Navajo who was born July 2, 1968 in Gallup, New Mexico. In order to respect her cultural heritage, I would like to include her personal introduction, which she included in her autobiographical essay “In the Cycle of the Whirl”: “Who I am is determined by my mother. I am Tl’ógí, related to Tódich’í’níi, the Bitterwater Clan. I am the granddaughter of Pearl Toledo and Richard Antone” (57). Even though Belin was born in New Mexico, she was raised near Los Angeles in Lynwood, California. Her parents, Eddie and Susan Belin, were required to attend an educational program at the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California as a result of the U.S. Indian Relocation policy, which is where they met<sup>34</sup>. During the 1950s, when Belin’s parents were at the Sherman Institute, the school administered a special five-year program that targeted only Navajo students. After they married in 1963, Eddie and Susan Belin had three children and decided not to teach them the Navajo language, but emphasized the importance of family and cultural practices in frequent visits to the Navajo Nation.

Belin’s frequent visits to family connected her to her cultural history, but also made her aware of living in an urban setting. She writes of her growing awareness of this as follows:

URIs (Urban Raised Indians). We are city cousins. The ones who didn’t know how to ride. Or jump arroyos. Sometimes it didn’t matter if you were full-blooded because they knew you weren’t from the rez. I was raised on a mixture of traditional knowledge and urban life. I used to think everyone ate fry bread and mutton. If you were Indian, you were Navajo. If you were Navajo, then both

parents were Navajo. I had no conception of mixed-bloods. I thought all grandmothers lived in a hogan and could catch a sheep and butcher it, no problem. I did not know that being urban could be such a disability. A degree from UC Berkeley will never change the fact that I cannot understand my grandfather when he asks for more coffee.” (“In the” 59)

Belin reveals the pain she feels at not understanding her grandfather, as well as her early ignorance of mixed-blood identity. She also indicates that she considers being urban a “disability,” because it impairs her abilities to function within Navajo communities (59). After graduating from Earl Warren High School in Downey, California in 1986, Belin decided to attend the University of California, Berkeley. When her father died after her first year at Berkeley, she took a year off, but returned to receive her degree in 1991. Belin’s time at Berkeley had a profound impact on her personal development and sense of urban Indian identity.

While at Berkeley, Belin was marginalized as a result of her heritage and learned about the politics associated with being an urban Indian. In particular, Belin was affected by the questions she would encounter about her heritage. She recalls:

People asking, what country did you flee? What island did you come from? The gnawing glare from eyes of those who questioned my place in this country. Then, when people discovered I was native, I was either ultra-cool or overprivileged. They assumed I received money and kickbacks from the government. Many of my classmates had no concept of natives, especially those indigenous to California. (“In the” 61)

As a result of her visible difference from the majority of students at Berkeley, Belin encountered racist questions that demonstrated the ignorance that non-Native people had about Native peoples and other people of color. She would have to deal with people who thought she was “ultra-cool” as well as individuals who considered her “overprivileged,” because they assumed she received government support for her schooling (76). However, Belin also discovered the unpleasant politics surrounding the few Native students at Berkeley:

Out of a student body of 30,000, 250 had registered themselves as native. The small group of us that reformed the Inter-Tribal Student Council often wondered where the couple hundred other skins were. As we began to investigate the list of students claiming native ancestry, we encountered an alarming number of students who checked the box “American Indian” fraudulently, using the native minority status to get into the university. Some traced the “American Indian” blood back many generations and had no knowledge of the tribe. . . . My outrage guided me to begin voicing my concerns early in my career as a student. (“In the” 61-62)

Even though Belin experienced outrage and marginalization, she was also motivated by these incidents to give voice to her concerns. Belin became involved in film production and produced five videos, one of which is entitled “Urban, but Definitely Indian.” She also founded the Women of Color Film and Videomakers’ Collective and participated in numerous discussions of how to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the ethnic

studies curriculum (Berglund “Planting” 64). Belin’s experiences at Berkeley motivated her to express the truth surrounding urban Indian identity.

After graduating from Berkeley in 1991, she attended the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico<sup>35</sup>. IAIA also had a profound impact on Belin, and she was able to experience the pain that other Indigenous writers were grappling with:

The haven for emerging writers at IAIA is an inspiring working model. From the center of its skull, IAIA houses a furnace of voices, scrambled with signs of recovery, gagging on oppressors’ tongues, a hope chest treasured with stories.

From here I write. This point of trauma, twisting from the depths of emergenc(y);

hear, perhaps, listen with keen ears; our rage will transform (“In the” 71)

At IAIA, Belin was affected by the “furnace of voices” from her fellow students, who were also struggling with oppression and racism within the United States (71). At the same time, Belin saw Indigenous writers who were still “gagging on oppressors’ tongues,” and the need for “recovery” to continue taking place (71). Belin knows the power of her writing in this recovery process as she tells her readers to “hear” and “listen with keen ears” (71). The suggestion that writing can be heard conveys Belin’s unique view of her writing, as well as its importance in her healing process.

As a writer and in a similar fashion to Blaeser, Belin knows that she reinvents the genres and structures of the English language in order to tell her story of survival and recovery. She demonstrates the unique aspects of her written language as follows, “*The landscape of my writing will always focus on our struggles, from my memory, what I*

*witness in my blood coursing through my veins, and stories overheard in bar-talk. . . .*

*The hunger in my writing feeds from my journey homeward*" (Belin's emphasis, "In the"

71). Writing is of great importance to Belin and provides her with a means of communicating the pain of her displacement, as well as the pain that other Indigenous peoples feel. She knows that her writing will always focus on "our struggles," or the struggles of Native peoples, and that "the hunger" in her writing will be key to her "journey homeward" (85). Belin also highlights the importance of land through her use of the words "landscape" and "homeward," as she notes how her journey homeward heals the displacement she feels. Furthermore, Belin uses the written genre to suit her own needs, "Sometimes there are experiences too delicate to re-live through memory, which often happens when re-told by the constructed and sinuous voice of nonfiction. Sometimes only the whimsical yet sinuous voice of poetry will suffice" ("In the" 65). Again, Belin notes how writing has a "voice," which indicates that writing has an audible quality for Belin. *From the Belly of My Beauty* engages in a discussion of the consequences of being away from Dinétah, while it also discusses the impact of colonization on an urban Navajo woman.

*From the Belly of My Beauty* contains numerous poems and short prose pieces that convey Belin's relationship with writing, her Navajo heritage, and her views of displacement. The collection is divided into four sections, indicating a connection to the importance of the number four in the Navajo worldview. In the first section, Belin establishes the voice of an urban Indian experience, while also touching on key aspects of

Navajo history. In the poem, “On Relocation,” Belin reflects on the United States’ motivations for removing Native peoples from their lands:

The physical is easier to achieve  
 a boundary drawn to separate people  
 Navajos say no word exists  
 establishing form to the air we breathe. (11)

Belin’s insight that the “physical is easier to achieve” suggests that a mental removal is more difficult, or that Native people cannot let go of their lands even when they are geographically removed from them (11). In order to separate Native from non-Native peoples, the United States government adopted a policy of removal. By removing Native peoples from their lands, the U.S. government was able to secure land and resources for non-Native use. In this poem, she also highlights the consequences of removal for all Native peoples:

Stand and wait for crossblood babies  
 generic cultures blending new versions of red nations  
 brain-dead at birth from pollution ingested  
 umbilical cord of sweet grain alcohol . . . (11)

In this passage, Belin touches on the racial and cultural impact of removal and relocation. The opening line is an imperative statement, which suggests that those who have been relocated have no choice but to “wait for crossblood babies” to be born (11). Belin also notes how relocation causes the formation of new cultures, but her use of the word “generic” suggests that the new cultures are only the diluted remains of once-great

societies. In the final two lines, Belin references birth and pregnancy in her discussion, while also noting the consequences of displacement on the next generation through her mention of how pervasive alcohol has become for Indigenous peoples. Through her discussions of alcohol, Belin explores the ways in which future generations are damaged by the unresolved anger and pain as a result of displacement. The land connects people to their histories and communities, and the question of how to (re)connect is an emerging theme in urban communities. In her autobiographical section of the collection, “In the Cycle of the Whirl,” Belin writes, “In conflict with our creator, the spirit of alcohol feeds off wounds acquired from centuries of genocidal battle” (In the 56-57). The formation of generic urban identities is of concern to Belin, and she does not hesitate to voice her concern through her poems.

One consequence of displacement is the urban Indian, a person who Belin gives voice to in various ways. Rather than focus solely on how Navajo people have experienced relocation, Belin engages in discussions of the consequences of displacement for urban Indians. In “Blues-ing on the Brown Vibe,” Belin uses the trickster figure of Coyote to discuss the impact of displacement on various Indigenous peoples across North America. The poem is significantly broken into four sections, with each section detailing Coyote’s encounters with different Indigenous peoples across the country. The first section begins as follows:

And Coyote struts down East 14th  
 feeling good  
 looking good

feeling the brown

melting into the brown that loiters

rapping with the brown in front of the Native American Health

Center

talking that talk

of relocation from tribal nation

of recent immigration to the place some call the United States

home to many dislocated funky brown

ironic immigration

more accurate tribal nation to tribal nation (3)

Through Coyote, Belin is able to articulate the ways in which other urban Indians experience displacement. She uses the word immigration to describe the movement of Native peoples, which signifies both a physical and political move. Her depiction of urban Indians as “dislocated funky brown” conveys her impression of the consequences of displacement (3). Without a place to call home, urban Indian peoples become dislocated and funky, even though they may retain their brown skin. She also suggests that the movement of Native peoples is an “ironic immigration,” which should be understood as movement from “tribal nation to tribal nation” (3). Native peoples should not be seen as immigrants, or even emigrants, within the United States, but as a result of displacement and land loss, Native peoples are subjected to what Belin terms “ironic

immigration” (3). In the rest of the poem, Coyote encounters Native peoples across the nation and sees the effects of tourism and poverty on Native peoples. In the final segment of the poem, Coyote ends in an urban location:

IV.

And Coyote blues-ing on the urban brown funk vibe

wanders

in and out of existence

tasting the brown

rusty at times

worn bitter from relocation. (6)

Belin notes the effects of relocation by mentioning that the “urban brown” are “worn bitter” and “rusty at times” (6). The urban Indian experience is not necessarily positive, because many urban Indian peoples do not have a collective voice. However, Belin provides this voice through her poetic creation, Ruby.

In the heart of her collection, Belin gives voice to “Ruby,” an urban Indian with a great deal of anger. Ruby does not shy away from expressing her anger or resentment toward people of European ancestry. Ruby is the subject of all seventeen poems that make up the second section of *From the Belly of My Beauty*. In one of the most provocative poems, “Ruby’s Answer,” Ruby responds to a woman in a restaurant who claims Native American ancestry:

If you’re Indian

I’m a WASP

White Indians aren't Indians, blondie

Indians survive

You mixed and assimilated and trashed and denied your Indian  
blood

You want to claim and regain your Indian identity . . .  
maybe in another life (41)

Ruby's reaction is in response to the people who want to be Indian, but have not actually experienced the same realities Ruby associates with Native identity. She goes on to ask the woman: "Why do you want to be considered a minority? / An insignificant, inferior piece of red trash?" (41). Like many other displaced Native peoples, Ruby's urban experiences have led her to feel "insignificant" and marginalized in society (41). In this poem, Belin does not allow the woman to answer Ruby's questions, and she ends the poem with Ruby getting thrown out of the restaurant. Rather than be upset by her forced removal, Ruby appreciates the free meal that she receives. In giving Ruby a voice, Belin is able to articulate the pain that many Indigenous people feel as a result of their displacement.

Even though Belin expresses anger and resents the history of colonization and relocation within the United States, she also celebrates her cultural heritage. In poems such as "Directional Memory" and "'Euro-American Womanhood Ceremony,'" she writes about the power of place and being connected to the natural world, as well as the consequences of absence from traditional lands. "Directional Memory" provides a type of healing as it grounds the narrator of the poem within the sacred power of the four

directions. Even though the narrator of this poem is in California, rather than Dinétah, she is reminded that “L.A. has sacred mountains” (9). The poem begins West, navigates through the North and South, then ends in the East “where / grandparents plant corn and herd sheep on a brown-eyed/blue- / eyed horse . . .” (9). In each direction, the narrator remembers significant elements from the landscape of that area. West is associated with a lost sandal that reminds the narrator of a specific memory:

Specific memory of wanting to go back and get the shoe and in your  
head you even telepathically announce to everyone that you left your  
shoe at the old home. Never to be seen again. Part of you left behind.  
Never to be seen again.

The narrator is speaking about an unknown person who reminds her of the pain that removal and loss cause. Toward the South, the narrator remembers a trip to the beach “wanting to sleep there / not wanting to awaken in someone’s private property” (9). In addition to experiencing the consequences of private property, the narrator also must confront the changes that have happened to the natural world around her: “When you were little the water called your name to jump in / same as the stench of contamination warns you to stay out” (9). In these lines, Belin references the changes that have occurred in the natural world. The narrator empathizes with the person who was once able to play in clean waters, waters that are now poisonous and dangerous. Despite the pollution and class divisions the narrator experiences in California, she also feels “the ghosts of native brothers and sisters of this tropical climate” (9). She notes how “grade school, high school never told of their existence,” or in other words, the existence of the

Indigenous peoples of California (9). However, Belin ends the poem by writing, “I always forget L.A. has sacred mountains,” which indicates a remapping of the landscape that takes the entire history of the lands into account. In this remapping, Belin provides a site of healing as she honors the ghosts of her native brothers and sisters and her urban community.

Belin also honors the past by voicing the particular pain that Navajo women felt as a result of removal and relocation. In “Euro-American Womanhood Ceremony,” Belin specifically addresses the consequences of being removed from Dinétah. She writes:

Some say the boarding school experience wasn't that bad  
 because they learned a trade  
 at least the men did

The women  
 they were trained to specialize in domestic household work  
 to mimic the rituals of Euro-American women  
 to cook roast beef and not mutton  
 to eat white bread and not frybread  
 to start a family and not an education (20)

After removal due to the boarding school system, Navajo women were trained to accept the ways of the Euro-American woman. However, according to the narrator of the poem, they were “young women who never really became women because they / were taken off the rez before they could go through a womanhood / ceremony” (20). The narrator notes:

Instead of fasting and sweating and praying and running  
 They set the table and vacuumed and ironed and nursed and fed  
 and gave birth and birth and birth to a new nation of mixedbloods  
 and urban Indians (20)

In these lines, the narrator points out the ways in which Navajo women were forced to perform the Euro-American womanhood ceremony rather than the Navajo womanhood ceremony. Belin ironically refers to a Euro-American womanhood ceremony, a ceremony that only involves tedious housework and does not celebrate the important roles that women hold in Navajo society. Without the proper womanhood ceremony, these women have been wounded, and the narrator reveals herself as one of those women who needs to “heal our wounds / from the Euro-American womanhood ceremony” (20). Belin provides a voice of healing by maintaining a connection to her family and cultural histories.

By ending *From the Belly of My Beauty* with a fragmented autobiographical essay, “In the Cycle of the Whirl,” Belin comments on the healing that still needs to take place. She knows that her voice and her writing provides sites of healing, but she still struggles with honoring her Navajo heritage as an urban Indian. Belin’s collection presents healing by giving voice to a previously dismissed group of people. The urban Indian is a victim of displacement and turns to alcohol to cope with the marginalization he or she experiences in urban settings. Being removed or relocated from one’s community and tribal lands leaves a severe wound that must be healed. Belin heals these wounds through her anger and honest articulation of the struggles and feelings of the

urban Indian experience. In the opening note to the novel, Belin writes, “The manifestation of this book comes from the love and strength of our creator. . . . This book grows from and is a contribution to human existence on this planet” (v). Belin’s work is intended to be read as a “contribution to human existence,” and its contribution can be seen in the emotion she expresses, whether it is joy, anger, or resentment. *From the Belly of My Beauty* demonstrates how Belin’s struggle with displacement is more acute because of the sacred importance of Navajo lands and Navajo cultural traditions. Belin describes the cultural traditions that connect the Navajo people to their lands and history, and why a connection to land retains current significance due to Navajo experiences with colonization, land loss, and repeated threats to their cultural traditions. *From the Belly of My Beauty* catalogs the feelings associated with urban living, while it also expresses the healing powers of a connection to place and history for a contemporary Navajo woman.

Like Blaeser, Belin acknowledges how her poetry is influenced by her tribal history. These women hold on to cultural knowledge and validate their distinct worldviews through their poetry. In addition, these women speak to the continued power of traditional lands and articulate the urgent need to maintain connections to traditional lands. For Blaeser and Belin, traditional lands are inextricably intertwined with their cultural traditions. However, not all Indigenous groups were able to hold onto their lands, and yet, connections to place retain their vital importance. Deborah Miranda’s *Indian Cartography* speaks to the tragedy of land loss, while also illustrating the enduring importance of traditional lands.

c. *Indian Cartography*

Deborah Miranda's manuscript for *Indian Cartography* won The North American Native Authors Poetry Award – Diane Decorah Award in 1997, which led to the publication of her first book of poetry in 1999. *Indian Cartography* also won the Poetry Writer of the Year Award in 2000 from the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers. Her poems have been celebrated for their intimate portrayals of abuse and hard times, as well as her survival and courage. In her collection, Miranda expresses connections to her family and tribal history through painful and moving memories. Unlike Kimberly Blaeser and Esther Belin, Deborah Miranda no longer has a tribal homeland to return to, and she cannot alleviate her displacement through physical returns. However, like Blaeser and Belin, Miranda maintains a profound relationship to the land and to the history of her family. In this collection, Miranda describes the sorrow within her family and voices the consequences of land loss on cultural practices. Despite the trauma of land loss, Miranda illustrates the endurance of Indigenous peoples in California. Through its intimate connections to tribal history, *Indian Cartography* illustrates the consequences of land loss on a contemporary Esselen and Chumash individual, while also providing a site of survival. Miranda's collection presents a contemporary voice influenced by the tragedies of the past, while it also honors her Esselen and Chumash history.

The Esselen and Chumash are Indigenous peoples of California who have experienced the drastic consequences of European settlement. According to Sherburne F. Cook, “the Indians of California underwent a very severe decline in numbers following the entrance of White civilization. From the beginning to the end of the process, the native population experienced a fall from 310,000 to approximately 20,000, a decline of over 90 percent of the original number” (91). While the Esselen and Chumash had distinct beliefs, they both maintained similar living habits and both had the same experiences with the settlement of southwestern North America by the Spanish and eventually by the United States. The histories of the Esselen and Chumash detail the tragic circumstances for Indigenous peoples who once resided along the Pacific coast of present-day California. As a result of the horrific population loss after European contact, there is very little information available about the cultural practices and oral histories of these peoples.

In regards to the Chumash peoples, the term Chumash “was arbitrarily chosen by [John Wesley] Powell” in his work *Indian Linguistic Families of America North of Mexico* published in 1891 (Grant 507). The Chumash peoples spoke six different languages and lived within the Santa Barbara area of California. As “the first major group of California Indians to be discovered by Europeans,” the Chumash first encountered European explorers in 1542 with the arrival of Portuguese conquistador Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo. The Chumash met with only a handful of explorers over the course of the next 200 years, but by the late 1700s, they began to experience the onslaught of Spanish settlement. Records from Spanish missionaries at the time “describe only the

heavily populated Santa Barbara coast,” but do not note any nuances of Chumash cultural practices (Grant 505). By the end of the eighteenth century, the Spanish founded numerous missions throughout Chumash territory, including the mission of San Luis Obispo in 1772. According to the records from Spanish exploration of the area, the Chumash “were docile and friendly to the Spanish and readily went into the mission system that ended their native culture” (Grant 505). However, after they entered the mission, the Chumash soon experienced “the deadly benevolence of their Spanish masters,” and attempted a revolt (Grant 507). Even though the Spanish missionaries believed that they were benevolently helping the Chumash, they were severely damaging the Chumash peoples and their cultural practices.

Initially, the Chumash voluntarily migrated to the missions, but they eventually tired of the physical labor and frequent attacks on their cultural practices. After the founding of the Mission San Luis Obispo in 1772, the Spanish founded four more missions in the Chumash area.<sup>36</sup> The missions were instructed to suppress Indigenous languages and cultural practices, in order to “prepare Indians to take their place as lower-class citizens in Spanish society” (Sandos 509). In order to accomplish these tasks, the missionaries embarked on a rigorous investigation into Chumash activities. The priests assigned to the missions demanded that the Chumash participate in a *confesionario*, which “followed the patter of questioning by Commandment” (Sandos 512). The missions learned a great deal about the Chumash people through the *confesionario*, but “[e]ven as the friars deepened their probe of Indian daily life, external political events caused the Spanish to arm and organize the Indians militarily, making the uprising [of

1824] possible” (Sandos 514). The missions depended on the Indians for survival and protection, because “[w]ithout Indian labor the mission could not survive; [and] without Indian souls to save, the mission could not exist” (510). The Chumash people who lived at the missions were “driven to desperation by mistreatment by the mission soldiers and the endless toil” (Grant 507). The final straw was the flogging of a Chumash individual who was visiting a relative being imprisoned by the Spanish soldiers (Sandos 515). In a recent examination of the context surrounding the revolt of 1824, James A Sandos suggests that the Chumash were also encouraged to act by the appearance of a comet in the sky (505). According to Sandos, “it seems clear from the unfolding of events that the Indian conspirators envisioned a movement more of liberation than of vengeance” (515). Even though the Chumash uprising was unsuccessful and the Spanish army defeated the resistance, many of the Chumash fled from the mission system in order to revitalize cultural practices. However, the malaria epidemic from 1830-1833 devastated the Chumash population, which “finally ended their resistance to the mission” (Sandos 520).

After the Chumash people became dependent on the mission system for survival, they were further victimized by the sudden decline in mission support. By 1834, the California missions were secularized, or no longer controlled by the Catholic Church, and the Chumash peoples were left to fend for themselves (Grant 507). Even though the Chumash were promised land allotments, by the time of secularization only a few individuals received small parcels of land. However, “this land was soon lost through gambling and traded to Whites for whiskey and blankets” (Grant 507). Furthermore, the Chumash who “remained at the mission were enslaved by the administrators,” and only a

few found employment with Mexican rancheros in the territory (Grant 507). In 1855, the Chumash received a small piece of land, 120 acres, “near Santa Ynez Mission and 109 Chumash were settled there” (Grant 507). The U. S. government eventually reduced the land base to 75 acres in 1901, and at this time “very few full-blooded Chumash were alive” (Grant 507). The population of Chumash peoples continued to dwindle throughout the 1900s, and in 1972, only 40 mixed-blood Chumash people remained on the remaining 75 acres of land. Today, according to a community profile of Morro Bay, California, the Chumash have a “business council, thriving bingo operation, and a federal housing program on their small reservation. There are approximately 5000 people who now proudly identify themselves as Chumash Indians” (National).

Like the Chumash, the Esselen population was devastated by the arrival of Europeans. The Esselen lived north of the Chumash and their language has been placed within the Hokan language stock, but very little information exists regarding their languages or cultural traditions. The first European to visit Indigenous peoples in the area of present-day Monterey Bay was Sebastián Vizcaíno in 1602 (Hester 496). Vizcaíno was a Spanish explorer who is best known for the settlement of San Diego and the naming of Monterey Bay. During his voyages along the coast of California, he encountered numerous groups of Indigenous peoples, including the Chumash. In addition to naming one area San Diego, Vizcaíno also named the bay within Esselen territory Monterey Bay after the viceroy of Mexico, the Count of Monte Rey (San Diego). However, after most of his crew died during the return voyage, Vizcaíno never returned to Monterey Bay.

After Vizcaíno's voyage, the Esselen encountered very few Europeans, and since the Esselen became "culturally extinct" in the early 1800s, very little information exists about their history or cultural practices (Hester 497). According to Thomas Roy Hester's contribution to the *Handbook of North American Indians*, "the bulk of information on Esselen culture was obtained from informants (primarily Costanoan) who had only vague recollections of Esselen lifeways" (497). Even though the Costanoan peoples resided around the Esselen, they were not culturally or linguistically similar to the Esselen and were unable to provide specific information about the Esselen. The Esselen, like the Chumash, were comprised of small groups of peoples throughout a specific territory; they "inhabited a thickly wooded, mountainous environment on the south-central California coast, south of the present city of Monterey" (Hester 496). One archaeological study by Richard Levy in 1973, recorded six Esselen "tribelets" in this area and living patterns that suggest "the Esselen moved their villages every few years and usually reoccupied former village sites" (Hester 497). The Esselen practiced similar subsistence patterns, but due to dramatic population loss "[n]othing of substance is known of Esselen social life customs" (Hester 497). Once the Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Monterey was founded in June 1770, the "bulk of the Esselen population was gathered into this mission" (Hester 498).

Once the Esselen became a part of the Mission San Carlos Borromeo, they quickly deteriorated as a people. Even though initial depictions of the Esselen characterized them "as friendly and generous people," later depictions illustrate the horrific consequences of the mission system (Hester 498). By the end of the eighteenth century, "the Esselen apparently existed in a degraded state, for in 1792 the Indians of the

San Carlos missions were characterized as ‘the most stupid as well as the ugliest and filthiest of the natives of America’” (Hester 498). Hester provides one view of the Esselen people: “If this is an accurate description of their condition at that time, it is no surprise that Esselen culture completely disappeared within the course of a few decades” (498). Even though the Esselen have been termed “culturally extinct,” many people continue to trace their ancestry to the peoples of the Monterey Bay region.

Miranda is a member of the Esselen Nation, a group that does not yet have federal recognition, but is working toward that goal. Currently, the U.S. federal government does not recognize the Esselen, but the Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen Nation of Monterey, California has submitted a petition for federal recognition (Ohlone). The addition of Ohlone/Costanoan to the term Esselen indicates the formation of a group of individuals whose histories are united by a common geographic area. According to the eighth volume of the *Handbook of North American Indians*, these three designations – Ohlone, Costanoan, and Esselen – describe separate peoples, who were only united by geography. Each group was comprised of peoples who spoke different languages, and they lived near one another along the coast near present-day Monterey Bay. There are eight branches of the Costanoan language family, and the groups who spoke these languages resided directly north of the Esselen people (Levy 485). However, in the early 1900s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs placed the peoples of this region into one category, the Monterey Band of Monterey County (Ohlone). According to the Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen Nation, the peoples of this area were overlooked when land allotments were allocated, and they have been paid only very small amounts for the loss of their lands:

Without any benefits from the government and with only minimal compensation for the theft of California Indian lands, our families enrolled with the BIA in 1928-1932, 1948-1955 and 1968-1972. For the loss of 8,000,000 acres of land that was to be set aside for Indians as specified in the 18 Treaties of 1851-1852, our people were paid \$150.00 per person in the 1950s. For the rest of the value of the remaining 70,000,000 acres, our people were paid with interest back to 1852, the sum of \$668.61 in 1972. Our ancestors were here for over 10,000 years and in 1972 the United States admitted that the land was illegally taken from the California Indians, but the only compensation was approximately \$700.00 with which to build our futures. The BIA recognized community members as Indians on an individual basis but did not recognize a collective community. Some individuals sent their checks back requesting land instead. (Ohlone)

The Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen Nation currently has over 500 enrolled members and has submitted a petition for recognition to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Ohlone). In addition, the Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen nation has pointed out that the anthropologist Alfred “Kroeber stated in his influential Handbook of California Indians that Esselen- and Costanoan-speaking peoples were ‘extinct.’ His statements have been unquestioned in the anthropological and popular literature dealing with California Indians and are the basis for a widespread belief that we are extinct” (Ohlone). Even though as of October 2006, the group had no official tribal council, Lorraine Escobar has pledged to provide information about the peoples of this region, as they continue to petition for recognition (Escobar). In embracing her Esselen and Chumash history, Deborah Miranda

demonstrates the ways in which Indigenous peoples of California have endured colonization.

Miranda's family history illustrates the realities of colonization for many Indigenous families and communities of California. Miranda's father, Alfred Edward Robles Miranda, is of Esselen and Chumash decent and has connections to Santa Barbara, Santa Ynez and Monterey, California. According to Miranda, her father provided her with "rich memories of growing up as the last generation to experience a physically cohesive tribal unit (his mother's Chumash family compound in Santa Barbara)" (Miranda). Miranda's mother, Madgel Eleanor Gano Miranda was of French and Jewish ancestry and had expertise in genealogical history. She passed away in 2001, but her genealogical contributions helped to bring together "long-lost family and tribal members" (Miranda). In her own words, Miranda was "born at UCLA hospital, raised in and around L.A. until age 5, when my mother moved to Washington State" (Miranda). Miranda's father would reunite with his family 8 years later, and while the reason for his absence is not explicitly clear, both *Indian Cartography* and her second collection of poetry, *The Zen of La Llorona*, alludes to her father being in prison at San Quentin (8, 16-19). After moving to Washington, Miranda grew up in Kent "isolated from other kids and from [her] tribe" and never saw or heard of a Native poet or writer (Miranda 2006). As a result of this absence of Native writers in her early life, Miranda's initial life path steered her away from poetry.

Throughout the 1980s, Miranda married, had two children, and received a B.S. degree in Teaching Special Needs Children from Wheelock College in Boston,

Massachusetts. Miranda returned to Washington State after receiving her B.S., where her two children were born in 1987 and 1989. After the birth of her children, Miranda began writing poetry again and was “supported by Northwest Renaissance Poets and Performers, MUSE (an artist’s group for mothers), and sessions in The Flight of Mind Writing Workshops for Women (now Soapstone)” (Miranda 2006). Soon after returning to poetry, Miranda also returned to school and focused on English Literature, earning both an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Washington by 2001 at the age of 40. After graduating from the University of Washington, Miranda worked at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington for three years. During this time, Miranda experienced a divorce, but also found her life partner: “I am grateful to share life with my partner Margo Solod, poet, cook, and hunter/gatherer from Virginia” (Miranda 2007). In 2004, Miranda joined the faculty at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, where she continues to voice the current concerns of Native women in the academy.

Miranda’s scholarship reflects the experiences she has had as a mixed-blood Native woman, as well as the concerns she has as an educator and writer. In her essay “What’s Wrong with a Little Fantasy?: Storytelling from the (Still) Ivory Tower,” Miranda writes about the lack of Native women’s voices in the influential publication *This Bridge Called My Back*:

I wanted more. I wanted to belong to this book, I wanted to own this book, I wanted my struggles as an *Indian woman* to be present and to be *part of* this beautiful, incredible book! . . . In many ways, the book was somebody else’s

story. I felt that in order to have some claim to the book's power, I needed to become a sort of "generic" woman of color, lose my Indianness. (333-334)

In pointing out that Native women's voices are underrepresented in this particular book, Miranda adds her own voice to the important discussions taking place about women of color. If the book was intended to let readers know that the experiences of women of color are ignored or neglected, what does it mean for Native women's voices to be underrepresented in *This Bridge Called My Back*? In the same article, Miranda also notes the significant impact of Native literatures and why they deserve particular attention: "If you do not examine Native experiences and voices, you agree to live in, and help construct, a culture of erasure, invisibility, lies, disguise" (334). Miranda's powerful declaration demonstrates her commitment to honoring both Native women's experiences and the history of North America.

Even though Miranda's scholarship emphasizes the importance of Native women's voices, it also criticizes the pervasive focus on racial quantifications of Indianness. In her autobiographical contribution to the Karen M. Strom's Storytellers website, Miranda writes:

The world's peoples, and the earth herself, are in a tough place as I write these words. As a mixedblood who cherishes both sides of her family, it is impossible for me to engage (any longer) in the self-hatred that essentializing the "races" feeds off. In order to love ourselves, Natives must love our Indianness; but in order to love this earth as human beings, we must also love all souls who love life, the creative, and the erotic forces of being alive. We are **all** indigenous to this

place; that is the knowledge that I feel I have learned the hard way. Writing is an expression of this knowledge, and a way of communicating this voice. It is how I can best honor this world, the planet -- truly, our Mother. (Miranda)

Miranda questions the focus on the strictly racial definitions of Indianness, while also voicing her own perspective and concern for the planet and its inhabitants. Miranda combines her passion for Native history with a larger apprehension about the state of the world. At the same time, these blended concerns allow Miranda to ground her readers in the landscape of the world.

Miranda engages her readers in the traumas of the Native peoples of California with the preface to *Indian Cartography*. The preface is an author's note that contains valuable information about Miranda's perspective on her poetry and life:

Because some of my relatives survived the Missions, survived secularization, survived the poverty, prejudice, alcoholism, diabetes, and abuse that followed and still persists, I am here. Because our tribe has begun the process of applying for Federal Recognition, we have found relatives, stories, and strengths that we didn't know we had. Because the color of my skin, my eyes, my hair, called out for those who knew me, because of some spiraled, resilient chain of events that led me home, I now know who I am: a mixed-blood woman with passionate ties to her Native ancestors. And I want these poems to say those words that testify to a miracle, that make song out of quivering air: Here we are, here we are, here we are. (xiii)

Her passion and dedication to the memory of her people provides a voice of survival in spite of tragic circumstances. Like Blaeser and Belin, Miranda sees how she becomes an essential voice of experience, just as vital as the voices that came before her. Moreover, her voice is unique and particular to her own family and community history:

For years I was told the Esselen (also known as Costanoan) had been terminated as a tribe by the United States Government, and the Chumash, my grandmother's tribe, were understandably leery of registering me without clear proof of relationship. . . . In large part because the few remaining [California] tribes with land were constantly shorted and cheated by the U.S. Government, Indians have been forced to demand "blood quantum" certification from each other, fostering mistrust and bitterness. The worst legacy of all for California Indians whose ancestors emerged from the Missions was the basic loss of familial connections through a diasporic, desperate scattering of tribes without a landbase. (xi-xii)

By opening the collection in this way, Miranda emphasizes the influence that her family history has on the poems within *Indian Cartography*. Miranda's collection reflects the "tribal connection [that] ached in [her] bones," a connection that she reinforces through her poems and experiences as a contemporary mixed-blood Esselen and Chumash woman (xiii).

*Indian Cartography* is a collection that demonstrates endurance, survival, and healing. It contains three sections of poems entitled "Certain Scars," "Bodies of Water," and "Indian Cartography." The poems within each section deal with abuse and loss, while they also emphasize the consequences of an ultimate displacement. Through her

poems, Miranda intimately reveals the consequences resulting from the mission system and U.S. government policies toward Native peoples of California, while also honoring the continued importance of land despite these traumas.

Throughout the collection, Miranda's poems focus on the landscape of the body as they deal with the consequences of abuse and racism. In "What Part of Me," Miranda illustrates the pain one experiences with sexual abuse and addresses the person who sexually abused her as a child:

What part of me said yes?

What part of me gave consent?

What part of me motioned you forward,  
nodded, spread my legs for you?

Was it my long black hair,  
bangs uncut, tangles uncombed?

Was it my skinned knees, unbandaged?

Was it my thrift store clothes?

The questions within this poem reveal both an inner strength and a need for answers. In the first stanza, Miranda has the courage to ask her attacker what motivated him to abuse her. The repetition of "What part of me . . ." intensifies each question and focuses on the various "parts" of her. The concentration on parts is revisited throughout the poem and reveals the personal fragmentation that occurred after her attack. The second stanza attempts to locate the part responsible and Miranda begins to reveal her own theories

about her attacker's motivations. The questions in the second stanza suggest that her dark hair, tomboyish ways, and poverty gave him the impression that she was vulnerable.

As the poem progresses, Miranda illustrates the consequences of her abuse:

You stole parts of me:  
 legs, hips, what rests in between –  
 you took half of my body.  
 Chopped it up in parts I possess  
 and parts I have lost,  
 parts left alive  
 and parts paralyzed  
 parts in the dark  
 parts in the light  
 parts I can see  
 parts you made invisible. (20-21)

In this stanza, Miranda's parts have been divided, with half of her "lost," "paralyzed," and "invisible" (20-21). Her body has been severed, but the poem symbolically reconnects these parts as each part is exposed. The body becomes the site of scars, as is revealed in other poems, but the body also eventually becomes the site of healing.

Miranda illustrates the consequences of abuse in numerous other poems, such as "Venom" and "Certain Scars." In each of these poems, Miranda describes the fear, anger, and pain she continues to feel as a result of her abuse. "Venom" recalls the way in which Miranda experiences flashbacks to her sexual abuse. The poem begins with her

daughter's nightmare and request to sleep with Miranda and her husband. Even though her own daughter is "safe," Miranda dreams of the abuse she remembers suffering as a child (29). The title of the poem, "Venom," exposes the abuse as a poison that continues to seep into her dreams and life. The poison is only one of the scars Miranda carries with her. In "Certain Scars," Miranda vividly portrays some of these scars as "phantom pains:"

At night  
 a wound throbs  
 bitter and lonely  
 under a thin membrane,  
 cries against silence.  
 You must sit up with it,  
 rock phantom pain  
 in your arms near  
 a closed window. (32)

In a similar fashion to poison, the wound that Miranda describes has power over the body. The body has no choice but to experience the wound and "phantom pain" (32).

The wound and the pain lead to the reflection:

If beauty is symmetry –  
 lips, eyes, all limbs  
 in balance—then  
 you are ugly. The wound

migrates through muscle

and bone.

.....

This scar will not share you. (32-33)

The body in this poem carries a wound and is scarred by past experiences. Miranda intimately describes a body out of balance, one that is controlled by this imbalance. The “scar” she identifies is all consuming and will not “share” (33). At the same time, however, Miranda’s openness about the consequences of sexual abuse on her body also provides a site of healing.

In this collection, we can experience a voice of healing and survival through Miranda’s use of scarring and remapping territory, particularly on the human body. Poems within the “Certain Scars” portion of the collection deal with the formation of scars – the tragic memories and experiences that have defined Miranda’s life. In “While You Were in San Quentin,” subtitled *Eight years for my father*, Miranda tells her father what happened while he was in prison. The poem is broken into eight parts, and each section corresponds to the year that he was in prison, detailing important moments in Miranda’s life. She tells her father of losing teeth, best friends, needing food stamps, being molested, and her mother’s drinking. The final section “8” mentions Miranda’s survival:

I took up drums instead of typing.

I waited for a new best friend.

I tried cigarettes.

I kept a journal of my dreams.  
I began to wonder who I looked like.  
I wondered if I looked  
like you. (10)

In this section, Miranda reveals her own attempts at understanding life around the age of thirteen. Rather than take a typing class and accept a typical role for women, Miranda decided to learn how to play the drums. Miranda also recalls wanting to be around her father, so that she could see if she looked like him. Her body connects her to her family and cultural past. The poem ends with year 8, when Miranda was thirteen and her father was released from San Quentin. Even though she was scarred by the sexual abuse she suffered and the temporary loss of her father, she still provides a voice of strength and finds healing through her family and cultural history.

For Miranda, however, a connection to a cultural history is compromised by the colonization that took place in present-day California. In “Without History,” Miranda describes the hope that once existed for history to be revealed, as well as the consequences of the loss of both hope and history. The poem is dedicated “for the Woman of San Nicolas Island,” the woman who was reported to be the last Indigenous person to live on San Nicolas Island. According to the *California Mission Resource Center*, in the 1830s, the missions started removing the Indigenous inhabitants of the Channel Islands. During the removal of the inhabitants of San Nicolas in 1835, a woman pleaded to return to the island for her child, and she was not seen again until 1853. In 1853, Captain George Nidever voyaged to San Nicolas Island and met the woman who

had been on the island for 18 years. In this span of time, every person who spoke her language had died, a fate that she shared only seven weeks after journeying to Santa Barbara. The story revolving around the Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island is also the inspiration for the young adult novel, *The Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960) by Scott O'Dell. Miranda's poem inhabits the body of this woman and begins:

Once I dreamt that the truth was inscribed  
 in bone, sacred skeletons waiting to be found—  
 messages translated and sung out  
 in a genealogy of memory.

This dream conveyed hope that the truth of the past would be revealed, but the dream of recovered messages and memories has faded. With this dream, the belief and trust in language has also faded:

Once I believed my account survived, written  
 on my heart—a secret fragment  
 carried safely to some future place  
 where blood is ink, like faith,  
 indelible.

Once I trusted our story to my tongue:  
 told it to my child in milk-language,  
 first sounds of a dialect  
 woven from the certain web of the past. (74)

Nothing has been inscribed or written, and the story has faded to the point that there is “No trail to follow back to / a genesis of soul” (74). The dreams, beliefs, and trust in language have faded just like the cultural history of the San Nicolas people has faded. In this poem, Miranda conveys the pain of not having access to cultural knowledge and only seeing the remains of the past:

They call me *survivor*, but  
 there is no honor in what I came out of,  
 no joy in a testimony of ashes.  
 All those who knew me  
 fell into extinction.  
 My history  
 abandoned me in smoke.  
 I’ve sifted the earth for bits of stone,  
 a lock of black hair.  
 Nothing remains—  
 only my cupped hands  
 like burnt baskets  
 too empty to hold a cry. (74-75)

Even though Miranda notes that there is “no joy in a testimony of ashes” and “[n]othing remains,” she give this woman a voice and ends with images of the woman’s body, her “cupped hands” (74-75). In this poem, Miranda speaks to the pain of loss, but through

the woman's voice and body, she also rewrites California history and the history of Native women.

In the final section of the collection, "Indian Cartography," Miranda transcribes her own map of her past with "I Dreamt Your True Name," a poem "*In honor of Lorraine Escobar, Inam Mec Tanotc (Rain Cloud), Esselen Nation tribal genealogist*" (94). The opening stanza connects healing to the symbolic power of naming:

I dreamt your true name.  
 It moved on my lips,  
 swirled in my mouth,  
 stretched out on my tongue.  
 I swallowed it.  
 The name was warm and round,  
 filled me. Our past (94)

The "your" in this sentence remains unclear, yet it is in this ambiguity that its true power lies. Without a concrete definition, the "your" becomes Lorraine Escobar, Deborah Miranda, the Lone woman of San Nicolas, and the Indigenous voices of California.

Furthermore, the undefined body becomes the site where the true name emerges:

evolved in my belly:  
 centuries of rain  
 gave way to ripening.  
 Between my legs valleys  
 deepened into rivers

where you bathed  
 in early mornings;  
 my spine marked the curving  
 coastline of rich harvest;  
 across soft meadows  
 of my breasts, you gathered  
 milkweed and beargrass for weaving.

Generations flowed around us (94)

The narrator addresses an undefined person who was intimately connected to the generational history of the land. The narrator's body is inscribed into the landscape and becomes both the site of displacement and the source of re-place-ment. The collective past evolves in the woman's body, and memory becomes inscribed on her various parts.

The woman goes on to articulate the consequences of colonization:

We did not see  
 evil coming in masks of  
 disease, murder, displacement.  
 We became separated  
 from one another.  
 I could not find you  
 even in the intimate heat  
 of my blood. Your bones  
 came back to me broken,

scattered without ceremony.

My body bore bright scars

of extinction. I slept

but I could not die. (94-95)

In using the narrator's body this way, Miranda reclaims it from the victimization and abuse associated with the mission system and land loss. The colonization of these people and their bodies is undone by Miranda's ceremony of dreaming true names. The narrator of this poem waits in slumber, unable to die and burdened by "bright scars / of extinction," waiting for the moment of healing (95). The final stanza of the poem reflects the healing taking place throughout *Indian Cartography*:

And I dreamt your true name

in a language worn

smooth and clean

as stones in a dry riverbed.

Follow it back to me.

I want to feel your handprints

on my skin, your teeth in my hair.

I want the dark cloud of

memory to open—

release the perfect syllables

of your birth. (95)

By dreaming the true name, the narrator reclaims history and feels the power of an old language “worn / smooth and clean / as stones in a dry riverbed” (95). The narrator symbolically connects memory and language, noting that “the perfect syllables” still exist in memories of the ancient languages of her people (95). In this poem, Miranda demonstrates how the body can be a site of healing, as it re-connects those who have been displaced.

In the final poem of the collection, “Waking,” Miranda finds solace within her body. The poem is an ode to darkness and the beauty that can be found in it. The poem’s subtitle reveals the perspective of the narrator: “‘the beauty of darkness/is how it lets you see’—Adrienne Rich” (98). The narrator, Miranda, and other Native peoples of California, must find the beauty in the darkness of their histories. In the poem, Miranda writes:

darkness is my homeland  
 my origins, my grave—  
 all the history I need.  
 When I braid my hair,  
 whole tribes recite genealogies  
 between the strands. (98)

Miranda articulates how she experiences her homeland as a site of origin and death, while also touching on the importance of her inheritance. In braiding her hair, Miranda notes how her hair reflects the strands of whole tribes. Miranda voices the trauma within her history, while also finding the beauty within it. In connecting to her history, Miranda is

“not relying on light / to find the bones of [her] ancestors,” but rather finds them in the darkness of the body, family, history, and land. Her final words reveal the way she has dealt with her displacement: “Here in the dark / nation of my body / I am never homeless” (99). In remapping the bodies of women, Miranda connects to a cultural history that has been termed extinct. The body becomes a nation and a home, providing a site of healing through reconnection. Miranda honors her ancestors and demonstrates survival, courage, and beauty in the face of extinction.

Miranda combines her memories of abuse and pain with recollections of the beauty of her family and cultural history. Without a land to return to, Miranda writes about the landscape of the body and returns to place through it. Her use of the body and focus on memory provide something tangible to hold onto and function as traditional lands – a place and a home to return to. Through her focus on memory, Miranda defies the statement that the Esselen are culturally extinct. *Indian Cartography* turns pain into healing and is a testament to the enduring importance of traditional lands and storytelling. Now there are messages inscribed for others to read, and the voices of the Esselen and Chumash endure.

Three hundred years ago, Native storytellers were not engaging in the act of writing poetry, but they shared a belief in the power of words and speech. Words and speech acts were essential for chant and ceremony traditions, and they connected people to their landscapes and worldviews through storytelling traditions. Oral narratives and myths grounding Indigenous peoples within their traditional lands and communicated

proper ways of living and understanding the natural world. Storytellers were responsible for passing on origin stories and communicated the vitality of a people and their cultural traditions. Kimberly Blaeser, Esther Belin, and Deborah Miranda are contemporary storytellers who use poetry as a means of communicating their rich cultural histories and maintaining connections to traditional lands.

Poetry has become an important method for Native writers to communicate distinct cultural traditions and worldviews. Furthermore, the increasing number of Native poets has inspired an abundance of new literary approaches to Indigenous poetics. In 2003, the University of Arizona Press published *Speak to Me Words: Essays on Contemporary American Indian Poetry*, the first collection of essays devoted to American Indian poetry, which is an indication of the relatively early stages of scholarship dealing with this form of expression. Editors Dean Rader and Janice Gould (Maidu/Konkow) wanted to publish a book that addressed the unique qualities of poetry by Indigenous writers. Rader illustrates some of these unique qualities as follows:

The Native poem's refusal to comply with traditional Western notions of form, the tendency to transform the lyric moment into a dynamic narrative event, and the use of creative typography to emulate spoken diction all suggest that form and content work together. Furthermore, most lyric poems resist linear constraints, allowing poetry the fluidity that Native discourse embodies. (8)

Rader suggests that Native poetics combine form and content through distinctly poetic devices. Native poets use poetry to convey narrative and freely restructure the English language to convey particular patterns of speech and storytelling. Rader creates a

category of “Native discourse,” which Gould adds to by suggesting, “What is unique about American Indian poetry may be the particular truth telling it embodies, in the particular kinds of insights Indians bring to this question of who we are or what we are about as a nation” (10). Even though Rader is not of Native ancestry, he is from Oklahoma and recognizes the profound importance of Native history on the larger United States nation. Blaeser, Belin, and Miranda express these unique poetic traits over incredibly different cultural traditions and distinct experiences with the European settlement of North America.

While these writers use poetry to illustrate the significant consequences of colonization, they also use the genre to create unique perspectives on traditional lands through their poetics. Blaeser used the genre to communicate, what she termed, the “cultural sound-ings” of her people, thereby reinventing the genre to match the particular Native discourse of her Anishinabe community (“Voices” 270). *Absentee Indians* illustrates the enduring importance of healthy relationships to traditional lands and makes numerous references to the Anishinabe Migration Story. In *From the Belly of My Beauty*, Belin manipulates the poetic point of view to articulate the pain and anger associated with displacement and urban Indian identity. For example, Belin’s series of poems written from the perspective of Ruby speak to the anger that many urban Indians experience. At the same time, Belin also uses poetry in an autobiographical fashion to create a narrative experience of her life. Belin’s poetics are influenced by her Diné heritage, and her poems demonstrate the enduring power of Navajo cultural traditions and homelands. However, even when traditional lands have been lost, Native poets like Deborah Miranda are

healing the wounds of displacement through their poetics. Miranda's poetry is defined by a remapping of territory through the fragmented map of the body. *Indian Cartography* expresses the fragmentation associated with displacement, but also uses the same fragmentation as a powerful source of reconnection, thereby providing a site of healing. Each of these writers modifies the conventions of poetry and the English language to express feelings associated with displacement. These writers heal the wounds of displacement through their poetic creations, and their collections testify to the enduring power of memory and storytelling.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Eden Robinson, Betty Louise Bell, Kimberly Blaeser, Esther Belin, and Deborah Miranda are the storytellers of this generation. Their fiction and poetry honestly express the consequences of North American colonization, while simultaneously becoming sites of healing. These women illustrate the enduring importance of their cultural heritages and raise awareness of social issues within their communities. Through unique manipulations of the English language, each of these writers is able to communicate nuances of her cultural heritage. Each writer is influenced by distinctive cultural traditions and reflects the ways in which her community and family have been affected by colonization. Even though these writers produce different stories of survival, they create a national coalition of Native women dedicated to endurance and healing.

Within the field of study devoted to Indigenous literatures, scholars such as Louis Owens and Paula Gunn Allen have been highly influential and initiated dialogs that should be continued here. Louis Owens' *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* articulated a theme of re-membering and suggested that this theme was a characteristic of the American Indian novel. Owens' powerful insights into the American Indian novel remain of critical importance when considering literatures by Indigenous peoples of North American, but at the same time, a few of his points can now be reconsidered. For example, in the introduction to *Other Destinies*, Owens writes:

Regardless of how effectively a novel may incorporate the cyclical, ordered, ritual-centered, and paradigmatic world of traditional oral literatures, try as he or

she may, the Native American novelist can never step back into the collective anonymity of the tribal storyteller” (11)

Owens points out that the novel cannot return the novelist to an Indigenous collective anonymity, but this statement focuses on the loss of pre-contact conditions of storytelling. Many of the writers explored within this project have stepped into the role of storyteller in an effort to undermine the focus on what has been lost. These writers reinvent the English language and convey hopeful messages of endurance and survival. *Other Destinies* highlighted the important and unique aspects of Indigenous literatures of North America and predicted that there would be “major evolutions” in these literatures (31). One of the ways in which literatures have changed is in moving away from notions of a hybridized identity or the need to find self. The women in this project illustrate living and vibrant cultures, which have taken the loss and turned it into beauty.

The foundation of this study can be traced to the work of Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo/Sioux/Lebanese) and her work *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986). Allen’s book was one of the first and foremost explorations of Native women’s contributions to their communities and nations. Allen’s work established a site for discussing issues particular to Native women and developed the first scholarship devoted to Native women’s literatures. Throughout *The Sacred Hoop*, Allen spoke to the growing force of women in Native communities and the importance of their voices and contributions. In the opening section of the book, “The Ways of Grandmothers,” Allen writes:

Of course the ravages of colonization have taken their toll; there are orphans in Indian country now, and abandoned, brutalized old folks; there are even illegitimate children, though the very concept still strikes me as absurd. There are battered children and neglected children, and there are battered wives and women who have been raped by Indian men. Proximity to the “civilizing” effects of white Christians has not improved the moral quality of life in Indian country, though each group, Indian and white, explains the situation differently. Nor is there much yet in the oral tradition that can enable us to adapt to these inhuman changes. But a force is growing in that direction, and it is helping Indian women reclaim their lives. Their power, their sense of direction and of self will soon be visible. It is the force of the women who speak and work and write, and it is formidable. (50)

Allen predicted the surge of Native women who would bring healing and hope to their communities. The women explored in this project are visible, and they are reclaiming their lives and their communities. At the same time, these women are shaping the voices of the next generation by moving beyond the focus on loss and pain. Allen points to the importance of these gestures, and their significance to the future: “Indian control of the image-making and information-disseminating process is crucial, and the contemporary prose and poetry of American Indian writers, particularly of women-centered writers, is a major part of Indian resistance to cultural and spiritual genocide” (42). Through these women and their voices, images of Native peoples are no longer informed by stereotypes

and myths, and Native peoples across North America can experience stories of survival, healing, and endurance.

Another way in which these women have moved beyond previous conventions of Native American literatures is through their validation of the importance of memory and story. It should come as no surprise that these women have been influenced by the importance of storytelling within their families and communities. As storytellers, these women understand how they can contribute to the vitality of language and cultural traditions. In many notable ways, the literature explored in this project reflects the enduring importance of oral traditions and storytelling within tribal communities. Rather than strictly translate oral stories from the past, these women celebrate the vitality of their voices and their cultures and speak to the continued power of storytelling. They have been informed by the post-contact cultural histories of their communities and provide the stories for future generations. Each time a story is told, the storyteller passes on the histories and traditions of his or her community, and these women are no exception.

In these publications, memory and storytelling are the key ingredients needed for healing to take place, which are both vital components of oral traditions. In “A Critical Approach to American Indian Literature,” Elaine Jahner notes, “Oral literature maintains its continuity even though it exists only in forms that accept, absorb, and organically transform new influences. It preserves traditions while it assimilates outside influences” (213). I would argue that the literature explored in this project operates in a similar manner. These novels and poems demonstrate the ways in which English literature has been adapted to suit the needs and desires of the authors. Even though these texts are

written, they integrate and “organically transform new influences” (213). These authors incorporate their individual and tribal influences into their writing. For example, by taking their protagonists on a symbolic journey of healing, Robinson and Bell use fiction to heal intergenerational traumas within their communities and families. Healing for these protagonists is influenced by the collective memories of their communities and stories from the past. Blaeser, Belin, and Miranda expose the painful realities of displacement through their poetry, while also emphasizing the enduring importance of their cultural histories. These poets write about the pain within their lives and use the genre to tell the stories of their families and communities. In choosing to use writing in these ways, the authors validate the importance of memory and storytelling.

Undoubtedly, these women have been influenced by Leslie Marmon Silko and her groundbreaking novel, *Ceremony* (1977). Silko’s novel inspired the exploration of new elements within the confines of English literary genres. In this novel, the oral tradition of the Laguna Pueblo people is interwoven throughout the story of the protagonist, Tayo. Silko opens the novel with a poem that exemplifies the power of words and the oral tradition. She writes:

Ts’its’tsi’nako, Thought-Woman,

is sitting in her room

and whatever she thinks about

appears.

...

She is sitting in her room

thinking of a story now

I'm telling you the story

she is thinking. (Silko)

Silko frames her novel with Thought-Woman, a central figure in the Laguna Pueblo culture and oral tradition. Furthermore, this figure is of even more critical importance, because she communicates the power of words, not in either an oral or written sense, but just in their very nature as words – words that can be oral, written, or even just invoked in thought. Thought-Woman is not writing the story or communicating the story orally, but rather in her thinking of the story her words come alive. By referring to the importance of words without focusing on either their oral or written status, Silko points to the power of words outside the conventions of written genres. Silko transforms the conventions of the novel to accommodate her story, rather than compromise her story so that it would fit within accepted standards of fiction. As a result of Silko's influence, the Native women in this project are also transforming and reinventing the English language.

Literatures by contemporary Native women demonstrate the ways Native communities and individuals have dealt with the colonization of North America, while also articulating the enduring importance of cultural and family traditions. I hope this project has the potential to start critical discussion of Native women poets/novelists in extensive ways. The voices and perspectives of Indigenous women writers of North America are revealing the soul wounds within Indigenous families and communities. At the same time, these women are collectively redefining literary forms to communicate the

urgent and common needs of Indigenous peoples across North America. These authors and their literature are important to activism and community improvement, because they create a nation of people within a nation. They are telling the truth and creating a national chorus of voices, while simultaneously providing sites of healing for other Native peoples. Once the truth is told, literatures by Native women can continue to move beyond the pain within their families and communities, and explore the incredible beauty of their lives.

## VII. NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The Soroptimist Society was founded in 1921 and is dedicated to helping women and children. The Society is an international organization that has local clubs comprised of business and professional women who are interested in improving their local communities. For more information, see <[www.soroptimist.org](http://www.soroptimist.org)>.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Owens refers to Mourning Dove as the first Native American female novelist in his 1992 publication of *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. However, S. Alice Callahan's novel *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* was originally published in 1891, over 30 years before *Cogewea*.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see Linda Karell's "'This Story I Am Telling You Is True': Collaboration and Literary Authority in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*." Published in *American Indian Quarterly* 19.4 (1995): 451-466.

<sup>4</sup> A few examples: Mary Jemison's (Seneca) life story was published in 1824, but was written and edited by James E. Seaver who listened to her life story when she was 80 years old. Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (Ojibwe) published a great deal of literature in the mid-nineteenth-century, but under pseudonyms and from a distinct European literary tradition. Sarah Winnemucca (Paiute) had to deal with government representatives and elected officials who tried to prevent her from lecturing, fearing that she would gain public support.

<sup>5</sup> Many other Native women writers could be included in this analysis, including Evelina Zuni Lucero's (Isleta/San Juan Pueblo) *Night Sky, Morning Star* (2000),

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Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's *Aurelia: A Crow Creek Trilogy* (1999), and Janet Campbell Hale's *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* (1987).

<sup>6</sup> For more information, read Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran's *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*, Yael Danieli's *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, or Charles Portney's "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma: An Introduction for the Clinician" found in *Psychiatric Times*, April 2003, Volume XX, Issue 4.

<sup>7</sup> Many other Native women writers could be included in this analysis, including Evelina Zuni Lucero's (Isleta/San Juan Pueblo) *Night Sky, Morning Star* (2000), Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's *Aurelia: A Crow Creek Trilogy* (1999), and Janet Campbell Hale's *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* (1987).

<sup>8</sup> On an important side note, *Traplines* contains four short stories, two of which have inspired Robinson's recent novels. *Monkey Beach* parallels the story "Queen of the North," and *Blood Sports* (2006) has origins in "Contact Sports."

<sup>9</sup> *Tales of the Kitamaat* has only a few printings and is difficult to locate. It is a source that I hope to consult in the future.

<sup>10</sup> The date coincides with changing governmental practices toward First Nation's peoples in Western Canada, which is discussed shortly.

<sup>11</sup> Hamori-Torok, "Haisla" 308.

<sup>12</sup> Hamori-Torok provides a balanced account of Haisla history by taking into consideration the contradictions in the various accounts of the Haisla sociopolitical structure. He also cites Gordon Robinson as one of his sources, Eden Robinson's uncle

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and chief councilor in the 1950s. In 1956, Gordon Robinson published *Tales of Kitamaat*, a book that details the cultural traditions of the Haisla through storytelling and deeply influences *Monkey Beach* and even current sources about the Haisla people.

<sup>13</sup> For more information, see Ronald L. Olson's "The Social Organization of the Haisla," published in *Anthropological Records* 2.5 (1940): 169-200.

<sup>14</sup> Hamori-Torok, "Haisla" 308. The title would pass to a younger brother, a sister's daughter, or a sister if the nephew was not available.

<sup>15</sup> Jacinto Caamaño raised the first cross on the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1792. His expedition met with difficulties, and he reportedly met with George Vancouver, aiding Vancouver's explorations of the area. See "The Journal of Don Jacinto Caamaño" in *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 2 (3):189-222; 2 (4):265-301, 1938.

<sup>16</sup> Hamori-Torok, "Haisla" 310.

<sup>17</sup> George Vancouver was an English navigator who completed the first major European survey of the Pacific Coast of North America from 1792 to 1794. "Vancouver, George" *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 5 Feb. 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9074789>>.

<sup>18</sup> The city Kitamaat has approximately 12,000 residents, and the village of Kitamaat has around 700 Haisla residents.

<sup>19</sup> Olson, "Social Organization of the Haisla of British Columbia."

<sup>20</sup> See David Wallace Adams' *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), particularly the "Institution" chapter and the role of discipline.

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<sup>21</sup> According to Charles Hamori-Torok, the Haisla had one set of ritual performances called the Cannibal Dance “in which the novice ate (or appeared to eat), human flesh. This was restricted to the highest ranking chiefs” (309).

<sup>22</sup> Robinson also writes about Haisla views on drowning in another one of Lisa’s memories. In this other memory, Lisa recalls her mother talking about a near-drowning experience: “Mom said that during those few seconds that she was thinking they were goners, she saw porpoises playing around the punt and knew they were going to be all right. But for a moment, she said, the porpoises looked like people, and she screamed” (123).

<sup>23</sup> Ba-ba-oo is Lisa’s grandfather, Sherman Hill. Her grandmother, Ma-ma-oo is Agnes Hill.

<sup>24</sup> Ma-ma-oo and Ba-ba-oo are related to what Olson recorded for the Haisla word for grandparent in the 1930s, mama’hawah and baba’huh or baba’hawah (Olson 184).

<sup>25</sup> Oxasuli is also known as Hellebore. In the novel, Lisa describes Oxasuli as, “tall...with broad, smooth leaves that branched off the stalk like tulip’s leaves. It was topped with tiny, white flowers” (151). It is also discussed by Olson, “A plant called o’xsulih is used variously: as a poultice; to make an infusion which is drunk; to make a powder which is snuffed to cure colds; or the core is swallowed green. Merely its presence or use keeps away illness and evil, and scares ghosts. An overdose can cause death” (199).

<sup>26</sup> Thank you to Dr. Franci Washburn for this insight.

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<sup>27</sup> There are currently 50 volumes in the series, and include works by Louis Owens, Diane Glancy, Gerald Vizenor, and other notable authors.

<sup>28</sup> In order to get at a fuller understanding of Gracie's attempts at assimilation, I would suggest examining Frantz Fanon or Homi Bhabha's notions of mimicry as spelled out in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. Gracie's attempts at assimilation can be seen as actually emphasizing her difference from the dominant culture.

<sup>29</sup> Bell's placement of J.D. as a supply sergeant at Fort Sill is a small but important element in the narrative. Fort Sill was built during the Indian Wars in 1868 and became the reservation for the Kiowa and Comanche (Utley 175). Fort Sill also became the site of Quanah Parker's surrender in 1875, who is another small but important figure in Lucie's story.

<sup>30</sup> The Anishinabe are the most populous Indigenous people north of Mexico, but are the third largest in the United States, surpassed by the Cherokee and Navajo.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed introduction to survivance consult *Gerald Vizenor's Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> In the future, I hope to ask Blaeser about the significance of her format.

<sup>33</sup> The Sun Tracks series has published work by highly influential writers, including Simon Ortiz, Luci Tapahonso, Carter Revard, Wendy Rose, Craig Womack, Janice Gould, and others.

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<sup>34</sup> The Sherman Institute opened in 1902 and is referenced in David Wallace Adams' *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. In the mid 1960s, the school received a negative review during a United States Senate hearing on the state of Indian education and has since experienced drastic reforms. The school has transformed from an institute focused on assimilation to one that now embraces Native American histories and cultures. For more information, see the Sherman Indian High School website at: <http://www.sihhs.net/history.htm> for more information.

<sup>35</sup> The Institute of American Indian Arts is a four-year fine arts college. The mission statement of IAIA states: "The Institute of American Indian Arts is a multi-tribal center of higher education dedicated to the preservation, study, creative application, and contemporary expression of American Indian and Alaska Native arts and cultures." For more information, see: <http://www.iaiancad.org/index.php>.

<sup>3636</sup> The other missions were San Buenaventura (1782), Santa Barbara (1786), La Purísima Concepción (1787), and Santa Ynez (1804) (Grant 505).

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