THE SOVEREIGNTY OF STORY: THE VOICES OF NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN CONTINUING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

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Literary studies has historically focused on texts written by Native Americans as reflecting historical aspects of culture and tradition that serve anthropological research. However, recent scholarship in Native studies is pushing for readings that see Native writers past and present as working to build theories of decolonization that will serve purposes of social recognition and political sovereignty amongst other things. This thesis seeks to disrupt conventions of reading Native texts as “histories” or deviations from “oral tradition” that are based on paradigms of Western theory. Instead, this project argues that Native women, by writing memoirs, are building their own theories of sovereignty and decoloniality through literature.

Deborah Miranda, Ohlone/Coastanoan-Esselen, writes a collective, or tribal, memoir that works toward a theory of storying and ancestral memory that deconstructs the historical narrative surrounding California Missions and contributes to renewed definitions of sovereignty and ways of belonging to land. Louise Erdrich, Ojibwe, teaches a non-Native audience that knowledge can be made and remembered through continued indigenous lifeways and texts. Both women use memoir as a space in which they can address past grievances of colonialism but also actively contribute to a decolonial future that recognizes and honors indigenous knowledge and sovereignty.
To My Grandfather Lee

Because no education is wasted
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INTRODUCTION: RE-MEMBERING INDIGENIST METHODS

I think the first time I remember reading a contemporary text by a Native American author was in a Recent American Literature course as an undergraduate. We read Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel *Ceremony* alongside texts like Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* exploring ways of coping with post-war, post-traumatic stress in a postmodern America. I still appreciate the professor’s approach to the text as not being “just” a “Native history” but as an important piece that reveals aspects of an indigenous worldview, which can bring healing through cultural stories and traditions. While we quickly passed over the book to move to other texts, something about the novel has stuck with me. Story, in Silko’s text, is powerful, and this is what I clung to. Her beautiful narrative was my first (conscious) introduction to Native people writing about and for their communities to continue indigenous ways of making knowledge, forming and defining identity, and acknowledging indigenous ways of subjecthood in (or alongside) a postmodern society. While still unfamiliar with the larger field of Native studies, I wrote a paper for another class critiquing literary scholars who sought to “understand” the ceremonies that Silko storied while ignoring the larger implications of story as ceremony and the power contained therein. Although I did not necessarily know the term at the time, Silko’s *Ceremony* is a story of survivance that continues indigenous relationships to memory, tradition, and land, moving forward into continued Native identities. Even without knowing “the theory,” Silko’s text was enough, the story building its very own theories that listen to the past and re-member it for future survivance.¹ This is the art and the practice of the decolonial storyteller.

¹ I use this word “re-membering” in a similar way to the idea of “re-memory” introduced by African American scholar Toni Morrison. This is different from “remembering” because it indicates a piecing together of history to place previously unheard voices into the historical narrative, thereby altering that narrative to be more holistic. Re-membering shifts the focus from dominant powers to the other members that contribute to a national history.
As I began to understand more about Native theory and indigenous theory-making practices, it became important for me to understand the proper work of research that honors theory as being made by and for indigenous scholars. Native scholar and community researcher Shawn Wilson says that an indigenist research paradigm relies on relationships and commitment to community-building in order to produce effective and collaborative work. In his groundbreaking text *Research is Ceremony*, Wilson demonstrates ways of producing research alongside communities of indigenous peoples using conversations, talking circles, and community feedback to inform and create his own work. While my own research in literature is not “community-based” in the sense that I am speaking to and with multiple members of a local indigenous community, I still consider it a practice in indigenist research as I have spent months building relationships with my own mentor in Native studies as well as with numerous texts written by and for indigenous scholars and community members. In entering into this work, I have stepped into a lively conversation taking place among practicing scholars and active community members such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti), Malea Powell (Eastern Miami), Andrea Riley-Mukavetz (Ojibwe), Scott Richard Lyons (Cherokee), Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), Cherrie Moraga (Chicana), and many more. In citing the voices of indigenous theory-makers, I am putting myself in relationship with people who are crafting knowledge and doing decolonial work. The goal of my work is not to deconstruct or criticize scholarship but to listen to what members of the academic community say and continue the work that they are doing to decolonize theory, ideas of sovereignty, and even story itself. By engaging this conversation in relationship to memoir-like texts by Deborah Miranda and Louise Erdrich, I am working to open up space in literary theory for acknowledging and understanding indigenous ways of reading “texts” of survivance and Native belonging. In doing so, I seek to complicate non-Native
understandings of “Native American Literature” to show story as an ongoing practice with power to challenge and transgress dominant paradigms surrounding research, history, memory, and political structures.

Relationality in research practice also includes principles of reciprocity and feedback that continuously build relationships of trust through mutual knowledge-making. Linda Tuhiwai Smith includes in these reciprocity practices ideas of “reporting back” and “sharing knowledge” in ways that benefit the communities who are making that knowledge (15). I am still working on understanding how to do this in literary analysis; however, it is my hope that in “sharing knowledge” I am opening a space for continued literary conversations that will in turn include further discussions of decoloniality and sovereignty that demonstrate indigenous knowledge as active and relevant. While literary analysis has historically situated text within theoretical and historical paradigms, an indigenous reading of diverse “texts,” like story, land, relationships, history, the body, and memory, broadens our understanding of how “text” is informed by but also forms knowledge and theory-making. Although this seems like a postmodern practice, I will explore in the following chapters ways in which Native thinkers and community members have been reading “texts” in this way long before the advent of Western theory. I encourage you, as the reader, to yourself engage with the works and theorists I will reference here, not as “primary” or “secondary” sources but as important voices in an ongoing conversation about decolonizing practices and indigenous ways of making and sharing knowledge.

The conversations I will contribute to here question and subvert colonial discourses of power which have not just suppressed Native voices but cast indigenous peoples as historical

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2 Here I understand text in the more traditional sense of literary studies as something to be read in order to understand historical memory. However, “text” is anything that contributes to an ongoing practice of making theory and knowledge, particularly within indigenous lifeways and survivance.
artifacts that have disappeared entirely. The act of colonization extends from the taking of land into attempts to force Native peoples and paradigms into conforming to specific roles within social and political structures. We all become complicit in colonization when we allow Western paradigms to override other ways of making knowledge and crafting theory instead of questioning them. As Deborah Miranda herself says, “If you do not examine Native experiences and voices, you agree to live in, and help construct, a culture of erasure, invisibility, lies, disguise” (“What’s Wrong” 334). Personally, it is my role and responsibility to acknowledge my complicity in colonization and listen to other voices so that I can humbly engage processes of decolonization that seek to right these wrongs while never forgetting them, moving forward into new works of subjecthood based on memory and story.

What is decolonization?

In the following chapters, I will argue that authors Deborah Miranda and Louise Erdrich practice decolonization in and through their texts in order to build new and continued indigenous identities. Both authors use collective and individual pieces of memoir, writing in a space where they can tell stories that not only question dominant paradigms but also assert their own theories made and lived by themselves and other indigenous people as active subjects. By creating space in memoir for Native people, Miranda and Erdrich contribute to a work of decolonization that serves to re-historicize and continue indigenous memory in literature, theory, and practice.

Perhaps one of the best places from which to understand decoloniality is from a theoretical term more familiar to literary scholars: postcolonialism. Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls postcolonialism a “convenient invention of Western intellectuals” that leaves the power to define the world in Western (re: Euro American) hands (14). Whereas postcoloniality still situates colonized peoples in relationship to the colonizers, decoloniality allows self-definition through
peoples engaging with their own traditions, memories, and practices, acknowledging colonialism but not necessarily centralizing it in their definitions of identity. My task here is to show some ways in which Miranda and Erdrich reject postcoloniality in favor of decolonial theory and practice that tells indigenous stories and histories affected but not defined by colonial history and powers. At the same time, the decoloniality that Miranda and Erdrich employ is also a call to action, favoring writing as one among many indigenous practices of making that informs decoloniality by continuing to build Native identity and theory.

The decolonial practice of identity-building responds to postmodern theory that has dissociated individual and collective identities from history and tradition. Anthropologist Julie Cruikshank explains how decolonialism comes out of but also diverges from postmodern thought processes:

In the end, postmodernism presents us with certain challenges by forcing us to confront human life as something that seems always to be falling apart. Yet over and over again, ethnography presents us with ways in which humans construct continuity and integration in the face of disorder… We [create an identity that has continuity] by working with those strands of tradition we have at our disposal to produce and reproduce the idea that the world is still continuous. (21)

Decolonial practice, then, has to do with deconstructing dominant narratives about “colonized” peoples and replacing them with stories of survivance that use traditional memory and practice in order to build continuous identities of indigeneity. Indigenous people use traditional memory to

3 Scholars like Walter Mignolo emphasize decolonial practice as a deconstruction of history, replacing dominant narratives with indigenous memory. However, continued decoloniality also uses traditional indigenous ways of knowing to enact new work toward sovereignty that assert Native knowledge and acts of creation as creating important cultural movements.
enact decolonial movements of continuous making. These actions might include practices like beading, traditional basket-making, culinary creations, various genres of music, and many other creative and life-giving practices. For Erdrich and Miranda, the decolonial practice of making comes through writing. Replacing dominant narratives of disappearance with acts of creation allows indigenous communities to assert subjecthood and belonging in spaces of making and practice. These spaces are not only in literary theory but also in social and political paradigms. The stories that unfold in Miranda’s and Erdrich’s memoirs enact this decolonial practice by using personal and tribal narrative to build theories of survivance.

**Which is…?**

Survivance is a term credited to Native theorist Gerald Vizenor and might be broken down into a formula of “survival plus resistance.” Acts of survivance may use dominant practices and discourses to allow for survival in a colonial and “post-colonial” world but also resist those narratives to continue autonomous traditions, practices, politics, literatures, etc. Gerald Vizenor emphasizes in his landmark text *Manifest Manners* that simply surviving colonialism is not enough. Without resistance, native peoples run the risk of living into definitions and stereotypes created by dominant discourses of power and knowledge. Survivance denies the narratives that define native peoples as tragic victims, among other things, and instead works toward tribes and individuals building their own definitions of what it means to be “Indian.”

Malea Powell describes survivance as the ways in which indigenous peoples have resisted a dominant narrative that insists upon their disappearance: “And though our visibility has been repeatedly erased in American discourses of nationhood, we have, just as insistently, refigured ourselves and reappeared. In the Euro American insistence upon our absence we have
become permanently present” (427). Native peoples have used and continue to use rhetorical and literary spaces to demonstrate social movement from object to subject status. Not only do Native people create their own literatures, but they also reappropriate Western genres, such as William Apess’s conversion narrative or Mourning Dove’s western romance, to subvert a narrative of absence and instead assert continued presence. I see Miranda’s and Erdrich’s memoirs as yet another genre space in which Native authors create and reveal narratives of survivance and self-determination.

As scholar in indigenous pedagogies Sandy Grande indicates, this insistence on presence is perhaps one of the most prevalent examples of Native survivance in indigenous literatures. Assertion of presence questions and subverts nationalistic U.S. narratives that insist upon Native absence in order to maintain the appearance of democratic unity. As a result, indigenous literature also challenges conversations about sovereignty, shifting the power of definition from U.S. federal discourse to a Native understanding of identity and belonging. Therefore, it is necessary for Native people to make themselves visible as they work toward establishing indigenous rights to self-define outside of U.S. nationalism. Erdrich and Miranda use storying as a survivance tactic that resists stories told about Indians to instead tell the stories themselves. I will argue that this self-storying also works toward practices of social and political sovereignty that practice Native belonging to land that colonial settlers continue to inhabit.

**Why make story a verb?**

Often scholarship in literary studies that reads Native stories focuses on oral traditions and storytelling as anthropological ways of “understanding” Native cultures, usually cast as in the past or as passing away. Native literary scholars like Mark Rifkin and Craig Womack have worked to disrupt the study of orality as only “tradition” to extend readings of indigenous texts
into realms of political and social movement. Native anthropologist Julie Cruikshank goes so far as to claim that Western scholars like Michael Bakhtin, Walter Benjamin, and Harold Innis sometimes “strand oral tradition on the shores of postmodern relativism when [the traditions] actually address hierarchies of power in very precise ways” (6). Native storying is not constricted to anthropological evidence but also continues practices of creative resistance. I seek here to continue such conversations that place indigenous stories as more complex in the ways that authors use and complicate narrative for purposes of re-membering and continuing Native identity. Native people use stories to hold tradition and memory but also to move forward in acts of survivance, producing social and political change. Along with Rifkin, Womack, Powell, and many others, I will argue that Native people have been using story as survivance for countless generations and continue to do so through creative decolonial work.

Because of the activism enacted and produced through narrative, I use “story” as a verb very intentionally in discussing both Miranda and Erdrich as it highlights the importance of story as decolonial practice. Using stories to make meaning is nothing new in indigenous history, and even making Native theory is tied into telling a story. This process of storying theory comes in part from indigenous research paradigms that see individual and collective identities as contributing to theory and practice. Rather than toting objectivity as a goal in research, indigenist practice values a scholar’s identity and relationships in his or her role as a storyteller. Therefore, storying, like Shawn Wilson’s definition of indigenist research, involves relationality in building theories for living in a continually created indigenous identity. Storying is the practice of continuing to theorize but includes or acknowledges the realities of relationships to ancestors, place, colonialist paradigms, and other knowledge.
Indigenous theory-making or storying continually looks back to ancestral memory and forward to future indigeneity created by and through story. Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) uses story as a verb in his essay “A Postmodern Introduction” to describe the practice of bringing together “narrative wisps,” or pieces of story, history, legend, fragments of memory, etc. in order to create meaning from trickster discourses (207). Malea Powell sees Vizenor’s storying of trickster narratives in *Manifest Manners* as translating simulations, or false stories, of dominance into stories of liberation. In this way, Vizenor and others who use storying as indigenous practice are opening up spaces to “[reimagine] the possibilities for existence and ironic identity within Native communities” while also hearing “the multiplicities in those writings” (Powell 401). I see scholars like Vizenor and Powell building on indigenous practices of storying by challenging dominant narratives and creating their own theories or stories about Native histories and lifeways, or ways of being.

Lee Maracle also brings theory to the conversation of story by seeing theory, history, and story as intimately tied together in order to produce important knowledge: “We humanize theory by fusing humanity’s need for common direction—theory—with story” (9). When theory and story are tied together, the practice of storying becomes a way to make knowledge and think about an individual’s place in a community and in life. Maracle argues that theory needs to be “humanized” with story so it can be used to clarify worldviews. As Cherokee novelist and storyteller Thomas King suggests through Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri, stories that we live by can give our lives important meaning (153). As I will continue to assert in the following chapters, the indigenous practice of storying is a way of not only recognizing knowledge but also of making theory through the decolonial practice of making and re-membering.
The telling of the story is a way for the storyteller to contribute to a narrative that can remain especially relevant to the social conditions of the present while continuing the storied tradition of the past. According to LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), traditional stories remain relevant because they bring together the values of a group of people through many periods of time simultaneously.\textsuperscript{4} By storying, or passing stories as legacy, cultural values are maintained and remain relevant not only historically but in the present and the future. I hope to show how Miranda uses the stories of her ancestors to piece together her own Native identity while Erdrich passes indigenous identity to her future relatives. Both authors also reveal this decolonial practice to a non-Native audience in a further act of survivance that works to assert indigenous ways of sovereignty. By demonstrating these varied practices of story that all work towards indigenous identity-making, I will show how a literary analysis needs to look deeper into Native literature and practice for multiple ways of making meaning in and through story. This practice of ongoing decoloniality through narrative, then, holds important implications for defining native sovereignty that is made up of ongoing relationships to history, the future, land, people, and more.

**Sovereignty:**

According to Scott Richard Lyons, there can be no true discussion of indigeneity without a discussion of sovereignty. Lyons calls sovereignty “the guiding story in [the Native] pursuit of self-determination, the general strategy by which we aim to best recover our losses from the ravages of colonization: our lands, our languages, our cultures, our self-respect” (449). It follows, therefore, that my own discussion of Miranda and Erdrich must include the work they

\textsuperscript{4} Howe calls the oral narrative process, which might include a storyteller’s people, and land in the past, present, as well as future “tribalography” (42).
are doing toward replacing a Western conception of sovereignty with a Native one. As we will see in the next chapters, sovereignty is more than “arguments for tax-exempt status or the right to build and operate casinos” (Lyons 449). Where dominant, Euro-American understandings of sovereignty are about power and political hierarchy, an indigenous paradigm of sovereignty is a highly complex strategy of self-determination, which includes connections to history, land, culture, and memory. Decolonial practices of making use these connections to continuously create Native art that asserts memory as on-going, working towards sovereignty by establishing continued presence. As I will explore in the following chapters, Miranda does work toward political sovereignty within a dominant system, but both authors also work toward an understanding of indigenous knowledge and political paradigms that challenge U.S. nationalistic definitions of belonging. Miranda and Erdrich work within a decolonial paradigm to create through writing but maintain traditional knowledge and life-ways, which demonstrates Native lives as continuous and deserving of indigenous sovereignty practices.

To write about Native sovereignty is a necessary but tricky task. First, we must understand that the very idea of “political” sovereignty is a colonialist construction made necessary by Western politics. We might go so far as to imagine that if colonization had not “happened,” indigenous peoples would not be forced to “prove” Native status and their “right” to govern through the U.S. government’s established political processes. As I will elaborate on in chapter two, instead of working toward indigenous practices of sovereignty, the U.S. government has used treaties and treaty-making processes to maintain a nationalistic objective of federal top-down power and politics. Native people like Miranda and Erdrich complicate and question this structure through story by showing that indigenous belonging and presence has always belonged to settled land and continues to do so, regardless of Western governments. However, colonialism
has made it necessary to publicize and fight for these truths. As Sandy Grande points out in her text *Red Pedagogy*, even using the language of “rights” in Native rhetoric is problematic because individual “rights” are a capitalist concept. Whereas most indigenous cultures are built on communal ideologies of equality rather than individualized power structures, “rights” indicates a need to capitulate to democratic structures of individuality and governance granted by those “higher up” in the power hierarchy. A “right” to sovereignty, therefore, becomes not an accepted truth of existence but a colonialist political argument.

A number of Native scholars and holders of community knowledge explore the complicated politics that arise from differing definitions of sovereignty. I find Mark Rifkin and Scott Richard Lyons particularly useful for understanding the issue of sovereignty as one that involves a difference in Euro-American and indigenous definitions and practices. Rifkin argues that U.S. Indian policy claims exclusive right to define legitimacy and what counts as viable legal formation. This negates Native peoples’ authority to “determine or adjudicate” for themselves (91). As a result, the U.S. biopolitical body gets to determine who does and does not exist as political entities while the people themselves remain objects of state control (93). Lyons sees this as a difference in understanding the meaning of “sovereignty” between dominant U.S. political culture and indigenous communities. According to Lyons, indigenous claims to sovereignty are attempts to “survive and flourish as a people,” and self-determination is vital to recovering and reclaiming land, language, culture, and self-respect (449). This means that sovereignty is not only about political recognition but is also important to autonomy in determining how a community functions on cultural and social levels.5 However, sovereignty in

5 Lisa Brooks explains some of the communal aspects of sovereignty in her book *The Common Pot* as she explores what sovereignty means for the sharing of land and resources for the good of the whole community.
the Western sense depends on recognition, and dominant culture says that for this to happen, power must be locatable and recognizable (450). Indigenous scholars and storytellers like Miranda and Erdrich challenge these power structures by using methods of story and knowledge that have been passed through generations. At the same time, they are also re-imagining indigenous knowledge-making in decolonial practice to challenge existing paradigms that surround the varying notions of sovereignty. Instead of understanding sovereignty as power, scholars and community members are arguing for sovereignty as a communal process of decision-making.

Both Rifkin and Lyons recognize the inherent problem in locating power “from above,” a uniquely American idea suggesting that a federal power can determine who makes up independent political communities (Lyons 452). However, Lyons, referencing Native scholars and policy-makers Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle and their text *The Nations Within*, argues that federal determination of power is an act of individualistic sovereignty whereas indigenous peoples see the formation of nationhood as a communal process: “The sovereignty of individuals and the privileging of procedure are less important in the logic of a nation-people, which takes as its supreme charge the sovereignty of the group through a privileging of its traditions and culture and continuity” (Lyons 454, 455). This means that an indigenous work toward sovereignty has to do with preserving tradition and culture rather than proving political continuance to a higher power. This does not mean that the maintenance of culture is not political but that community, family, stories, traditions, and many other things are tied up in the practice of the entire indigenous nation as a political or autonomous decision-making, body.  

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6 When I use the word “political” in reference to indigenous sovereignty, it has less to do with the power of U.S. politics but reaches beyond that to encompass Native politics as collective identity and decision-making that maintains the balance and wholeness of the community.
I see myself as working somewhere between these capitalist rhetorics of power and Native rhetorics of communal governance, which I find momentarily necessary for the work of decolonization. While capitalist or Euro-American rhetorics of dominance should be decolonized, Native people at present are still caught in the bind of needing to work within those existing structures while also looking to dismantle them. For someone like Miranda, this is especially evident in her tribe’s land claims, as I will explore further in chapter two. While her relationship to place comes through indigenous ways of knowing and remembering, in order to physically return to the land, her people are required by dominant systems to prove their existence and “right” to belong. With both Miranda and Erdrich, we will see that storying becomes a way for them to assert indigenous ways of sovereignty in the sense that they make visible ancestral ways of knowledge and recognize communal relationships to history and space.

This work of “validation” is part of the process of decolonization in that it challenges Euro-American paradigms to demonstrate Native knowledge as holding important space in theoretical and practical discourse.

In closing:

In a sense, the chapters that follow can be seen as decolonizing the “past, present, and future,” although the work of decolonization is certainly more complex in regards to time, and the distinctions are not exactly linear. By structuring the chapters in this way, I hope to demonstrate some of the complexity of decolonization as the practice must account for the colonization of history as well as current social and political practice in order to open space for a hopeful future of decoloniality. This space will allow Native peoples to continue practices of indigenous knowledge and theory-making to assert new (but not-new) ways of maintaining autonomy and tribal political structures.
However, in keeping with an indigenist research paradigm, I cannot maintain clear distinctions between “eras” as history will always influence the work of decolonization and decoloniality that includes future creative practice. History and story must be continuously decolonized in order to build indigenous sovereignty for the present and the future. With this organization, I hope to walk the line between Western traditions of linear knowledge and indigenous practices which attach knowledge to place and practice rather than time.

Finally, I want to say that this project is only a beginning and to thank my adviser and mentor Dr. Andrea Riley-Mukavetz for not only starting me on this path but for seeing me through to this point. Shawn Wilson says in a lecture on research that “If you do your actions in the right way with a good heart, you will be lead towards the truth.” I hope that I have done so and that I have landed somewhere close to the truth. I consider this project my opening to the conversations surrounding indigenist research paradigms, sovereignty, and decoloniality in the academy and community. I come to this conversation not seeking to co-opt indigenous ways but, hopefully, as a good ally to native researchers and peoples with respect, humility, and a willingness to learn from those who see and understand more than I.
CHAPTER ONE: ANTIDOTE TO LIES: RELATIONAL STORYING IN DEBORAH MIRANDA’S BAD INDIANS

In her book *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, Deborah Miranda begins to build a theory of survival and resistance in a poem called “Lies My Ancestors Told Me”:

Shame your grandchildren / when they run around / barefoot, what are you, / an Indian?

and stand / silent, approving, when *Digger*7 / becomes their favorite / slur to hurl at the youngest, / the awkward, the slow, / the dark. Don’t tell them / you still speak Chumash / with their mother. That’s a lie / your descendants will hate you for / but lie anyway, / so they’ll be alive / to complain. (excerpt 39)

This story is about lies: the lies of Miranda’s ancestors as they kept culture, traditions, and other important stories hidden from their children and therefore Miranda and her relatives. These lies are the reason she must rebuild identity for herself and for her community shattered by colonization. But lies like these are temporary for a people who resist and survive:

Tell the lies now and maybe later / your descendants will dig / for the truth in libraries, / field notes, museums, / wax cylinder recordings, newspaper reports of massacres / and relocations, clues you left behind / when you forgot / to lie / lie lie lie. (40)

The lies of Miranda’s ancestors are necessary in the missionized world they are forced to inhabit. They are essential to life and for eventual survivance in the form of continuing indigenous stories and lifeways that resist colonization and craft Native identities.8 Miranda resists erasure by acknowledging the need to hide stories temporarily but also by refusing to eliminate them

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7 “Digger” is a derogatory term somewhat akin to the racial slur “nigger.” The word “referred mostly to Northern California Indians” who had not been missionized (and thereby remained “uncivilized”) but endured war and genocide of their own (Miranda 45).

8 As I explored in the introduction, “survivance” should be understood as “survival + resistance” as defined by Gerald Vizenor.
entirely. She stories Native theory and identity by being a descendant who digs for the truth, using it to uncover the lies of dominant narratives and reveal Native continuance.

Cherokee thinker, teacher, and storyteller Thomas King tells us that “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (153). King sees stories as living and influential; once a story is “loose in the world” it takes on power to change or maintain cultures and individuals. At the end of every chapter in his book *The Truth About Stories*, King shifts the responsibility of holding a story from himself to his reader, saying that you might forget it, share it, or allow it to change you, but you cannot stay the same because now you have heard a new story, a new way of looking at the world. King quotes Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri about how we live by and through stories:

One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives. (153)

Both Miranda and King dwell in the space of indigenous lifeways or worldviews that say stories make meaning, are meaning, and hold meaning through generations. When certain stories are hidden, as they are in Miranda’s poem, this does not mean that they disappear entirely as they do not stop holding meaning for relations who may uncover and use the stories at a later time. When relatives like Miranda do learn the true stories of their ancestors, they hold the perhaps dangerous potential to continue knowledge and correct the lies of another narrative by shifting current and future ways of knowing, surviving, and healing. When she creates and re-narrates stories, Miranda holds the power to reorient herself and her relations within social history, thereby creating and remembering theories of social identity and practice. Miranda can also use the
stories to create new decolonial narratives that subvert colonial ways of knowing history and denying Native presence.

The colonial lies that Miranda uncovers in *Bad Indians* are those created by what she calls a “Mission Mythology.” These are the lies remembered by dominant historical narratives, which tell the world that Miranda’s ancestors died out; that they were the last ones; that they were deserving of mission life; that mission life was a redeeming act of conversion and assimilation to rescue a “savage” people. These lies must be dismantled piece by piece and replaced with the gathered memories of California’s Native peoples to reconstruct indigenous identities of subjecthood and belonging. Miranda indigenizes the historical narrative to recreate individual and communal identities, which are essential to survivance that reclaims not only history but the future. Memoir offers a crucial space for Miranda to enact these theories of reclamation, but she complicates this usually individualized space of memoir by using communal memory and ancestral stories in a decolonizing act that deconstructs and rebuilds a historical narrative. Using the stories allows Miranda to work within indigenous paradigms of ancestral and communal knowledge to re-member and move towards survivance. To rebuild and continually create identity, Miranda returns to stories, because stories are all that she has and all that she is.

As is the case in many indigenous literatures, Miranda’s stories function outside Western (i.e. “conventional”) ideas of linear time. Instead, her stories work to connect the past and present while looking forward to future generations who will create their own ways of knowing and living through the continuity of stories. Survivance, then, now, and in the future, is not just about the survival of a people but also involves their resistance to dominant narratives that threaten to “disappear” or alter the indigenous identities. This combination of survival and
resistance maintains personhood by asserting self-identification. Indigenous peoples push back against the violent narrative of colonialism, which seeks to define Native people within dominant power structures and erase autonomous memory.

Part of the reason decolonial artists and writers like Miranda are so important is because they make Native people visible in a culture that does not wish to recognize their real existence. Writer and scholar Malea Powell (Miami, Eastern Shawnee) invokes Richard Drinnon’s *Facing West* to explore the possibility that U.S. empire-building was predicated upon erasing memory, making the “Indian” a figure of the past that “must disappear so that ‘America’ can live” (402). Indigenous scholars, storytellers, and communities push back against this narrative of disappearance by telling their own stories of remembrance and presence throughout history. This storying is a rhetorical move that was happening in the 19th century and even earlier through orators such as William Apess (New England) and Andrew Blackbird (Michigan). Miranda continues this practice by using multiple voices and stories to acknowledge the dispossession of place and identity through colonization, but she does not accept the idea that she and her ancestors are a “lost race.” As she emphasizes in her introduction, taking back the narrative of history is essential to rebuilding community, which includes individual identity in “selfhood” but also a communal identity of “nationhood.” Miranda uses the difficult pieces of history and the hidden pieces of culture, teasing them out of the margins and putting them together to start a work of wholeness through reclamation.

In order to question stereotypes and preconceived ideas about Indians while asserting a continued presence, it is important that Native listeners demand to know *who* is telling the story about themselves (Miranda, *Bad Indians* xvi). Miranda argues that true indigenous culture cannot
be maintained when someone else is narrating stories about Native peoples, specifically California Mission Indians:

Culture is ultimately lost when we stop telling the stories of who we are, where we have been, how we arrived here, what we once knew, what we wish we knew; when we stop our retelling of the past, our imagining of the future, and the long, long task of inventing an identity every second of our lives.⁹ (xiv)

Clearly Miranda is practicing self-representation and forming her own identity by telling her own narrative, but she is also using the space of recollection in memoir to re-narrate history from multiple perspectives. These voices include those of her family, her ancestors, herself, and her future relatives. My focus in this chapter is on exploring some of the ways in which Miranda stories a multi-voiced memoir to resist and replace the dominant mission narrative with that of survivance. We must see “storying” as a practice that continues to re-narrate and decolonize history and colonial perceptions surrounding the California Missions. To do so, I will identify some ways in which Miranda complicates the space of memoir by using it for both individual and tribal remembrance. She brings a relational approach to memoir with the indigenous practice of storying that allows her to re-build identity for and with her people in a decolonizing act of creation and re-creation. This decolonial practice is strategic in the way that Miranda brings indigenous paradigms and lifeways to her work. She employs these paradigms to reveal the important role of stories in deconstructing a dominant narrative and replacing it with one of survivance that continually re-forms theories of healing and remembrance.

⁹ “Culture” here is about more than a people’s customs, traditions, and practices. Indigenous culture includes continued ways of knowing that are bound up in ancestral memory and future knowledge-making practices. Traditions and customs may inform culture, but as a whole, indigenous culture is a combination of lifeways and worldviews that contribute to how people relate to the earth, to life, and to each other.
The Practice of Storying:

In order to show how Miranda uses memoir to deconstruct dominant narratives indigenize history, we must first understand “storying.” Storying is not a concept that is old or new, nor is it a theoretical term that can be pinned to one particular person. I understand the indigenous practice of storying as a communal one that has been (and is) performed in oral storytelling and continues in the practice of writing. Storying is more than storytelling, however. Where storytelling implies a moment of relaying particular events, storying is a continuous practice of using stories, history, ancestral memories, personal memories, and communal knowledge to make new knowledge and to craft identity in relationship to land, family, and community. Storying involves both individual and communal practices of piecing together past, present, and future narratives that will re-member and continually create identity. As King indicates, stories are ultimately tied to indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing, going beyond “memory” to construct who the story-holders were and who their relatives are. Miranda continues this indigenous practice by using stories to understand history and build a future, storying new theories of identity and identity-building.

The practice of storying differs from the Western idea of memoir in part because “individual” in the indigenous sense does not mean the same thing that it does in Western knowledge. Individuals and communities are not separate entities in the practice of storying; instead, one person draws on the knowledge of ancestors and her community to create an identity incorporates and defines her own contribution to that same community. Writer, poet, and orator Lee Maracle explains that words “represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples” (3). Telling stories is an action and social interaction, “the
most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people” (3). Therefore, identity-building through storying engages both individual character and corporeal identity in a reciprocal relationship that uses past, present, and future relationships to inform decolonial practice.

Miranda contributes to the larger conversation of storying and indigenous practices but also to her own relationships and community as she uses story to rebuild a past and look to a future. The unique structure of her text varies from a “traditional” understanding of memoir as re-constructing and analyzing past events. Miranda moves through communal stories of history in order to story a decolonial future. In fact, the first three of four sections in the book are not “Miranda’s story” at all but instead use other people’s stories to cover periods of “Missionization,” “Post-secularization,” and “Reinvention.” These sections correct the “mission mythology,” review a long history of discrimination and racism, and tell her grandfather’s stories about trying to return to the land of his people. The last section, “Teheyapami Achiska: Home” is subtitled as covering 1961 to the present, and it is here that Miranda includes a narrative of her own childhood informed by violence and displacement. However, even in this section Miranda’s story is not necessarily “central” as she moves into new stories of survivance and a decolonial future for her relatives. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the stories of missionization, her grandfather’s narratives, and her own story all inform this future-making through connection to land. By including all of these voices and histories, Miranda does not rely on her own living experience for personal memoir but rather collects pieces of a broken past to build a new mosaic: “human beings constructed of multiple sources of beauty, pieces that alone are merely incomplete but which, when set into a new design together, complement the shards around us, bring wholeness to the world and ourselves” (136). Miranda uses pieces of her personal narrative
and pieces of history in order to look forward to new methods of survivance, thereby creating theory that contributes to identity-making practices.

In continually making story that is informed but not determined by history, authors like Miranda build on indigenous practices of storying that challenge dominant narratives. As we see storying as theory-making and theory as story, one of the decolonial projects taking place is in re-telling dominant narratives of history from indigenous perspectives that challenge colonial paradigms and bring to light other angles of “known” history. Lisa Brooks demonstrates this re-telling of history in her book *The Common Pot* when she pulls back the curtain on indigenous uses of the written word for powerful negotiation in 18th century treaty-making. By re-narrating a history of European/Native negotiations, Brooks opens a door for seeing history from an indigenous perspective. In doing so, she is storying alternative ways of remembering and acknowledging shared space in the national narrative. Miranda enacts a similar practice in collective memoir as she brings together multiple perspectives to re-narrate a specific aspect of California history. According to Nägti scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “A critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts” (28). Smith goes on to discuss ways in which writing has been used as both a colonizing and decolonizing tool through the narration of history. Both Smith and Brooks reveal important ways in which Native scholars and communities, both past and present, are deconstructing colonial histories to replace them with decolonizing paradigms. Indigenous scholars and community members like Miranda decolonize writing when they use it toward storying practices that highlight the roles of indigenous peoples in dominantly held historical narratives. Using stories to make theory, and vice versa, is an opportunity for indigenous peoples
to tie their worldviews to social existence and turn communal knowledge into social practice. At the same time, it allows for Native peoples to continually craft individual and corporate identities based on tradition, memory, and ancestral knowledge.

As she uses story to build theories of identity, Miranda is also re-telling a history that dismantles the California Mission narrative and replaces it with indigenous voices. In this practice, she demonstrates story as continual, adding her own and future narratives to the voices of her ancestors to enact survivance. She practices continued resistance to the historical narrative that enacts violence on Native peoples in California. In the rest of this chapter, I will show how Miranda uses the voices and stories of her ancestors, adds her own story, and envisions future story to work toward individual and communal identity while simultaneously re-narrating and decolonizing history. In doing so, we will see how Miranda enacts an indigenous practice of tying story to theory in order to create and continue both new and old methods of survivance from a mission narrative that requires continued decolonization.

**Dismantling History:**

Part of Miranda’s task as a decolonial storyteller and theorist is to practice self-determination and cultural identity through survivance rather than capitulate to the dominant discourse that “[allows] the pieces of [her] culture to lie scattered in the dust of history, trampled on by racism and grief” (135). Miranda draws from indigenous storying practices to assert Native presence in a continued historical narrative. Chicana scholar Emma Pérez similarly urges her audience to interrupt dominant power relations with a decolonial imaginary that will allow colonized peoples to move from the mainstream, colonial view of history into self-determined identities (124). Pérez calls for a re-vision of, or a new way of seeing, history that will question and even break the power of dominant discourses to replace them with Native perspectives.
Miranda begins to provide this re-vision in the way that she intertwines her own history with that of racism and violence experienced by her ancestors and a larger collectivity of “California Indians.” She asks herself, “Who am I, if my community can no longer function as a community?” (136). By bringing back together pieces of history and using the voices of her ancestors, Miranda is able to re-member community and builds a new narrative. This story crafts a new identity diverging from the colonial history of separation and disappearance. Miranda maintains indigenous ways of storying including narratives told by her ancestors in order to challenge the dominant ways of knowing and remembering history. She does not work entirely outside of the dominant narrative but instead uses storying from within in order to fit herself and her people into a self-determined truth surrounding missionization.

This restructuring of the dominant narrative is especially evident in Part I of Miranda’s text: “The End of the World: Missionization.” In this section, Miranda uses stories from the Spanish mission at Carmel that have been passed down through her ancestors. Miranda re-situates the stories to re-imagine a mission history from a Californian fourth-grader’s textbook, playing on the structure of this educational “tool” to reveal some of the pain and bitterness that results from the truth behind California missions. One way that she plays with the genre is by crafting instructional “recipes” for mission practices, like building bricks. Miranda employs patronizing words like “smelly” while working through detailed instructions on how to “use” the Mission Indians:

Tell them to dig a big round basin in the ground, soak it well with water, throw everything in… Now, when it’s all mixed they’ll start the rhythm of scoop and slap.

Scoop up that mud, slap it into a wooden form. Pack it in good and tight. Repeat till the form is full, move on to the next. (7)
Miranda is not just re-narrating history but also questioning and complicating dominant ways of telling it to a schoolchild by using playful language but infusing it with bitterness. The instructions Miranda narrates are not all positive but include aspects of essential racist doctrines that say Indians do not mind the smell of mud, that they have the “dancing muscles” for carrying water, that their skill at weaving baskets enables them to craft and use tools for mission work, etc. This honesty in the telling is a decolonial practice of survivance as Miranda re-narrates a colonization story from an Indigenous perspective, thereby showing that Native voices are relevant and animate in the structure and narration of history.

As Miranda reports from a pseudo-pedagogical and colonial perspective of history, she does so in a bitterly playful tone reminiscent of the lesson a fourth grade student might receive. Miranda calls this the fourth grade “mission project” that she never completed (xvii). She provides letters, charts, and other pedagogical figures that might be found in a child’s history text, explaining how the missions were built, the tools used, the societies found there, and more. Miranda supplements her stories with images, as though she is pasting together a sort of historical scrapbook, gathering pieces to re-situate the evidence in the practice of storying. In her “glossary,” Miranda includes the image of a letter written in Spanish with a sketch of a “corma,” which she defines as “a hobbling device for misbehaving neophytes” (14). This sketch, along with the definitions serves to “instruct” but also illuminates harsh methods of surveillance and punishment in mission society that a fourth grade student would not necessarily be aware of. She uses the instructional tone of an encyclopedia or textbook that is familiar to the reader, but she adds a new, bitter angle to re-story the dominant “history” by incorporating ancestral memories of violence within that narrative.
Miranda begins her book with a chart. The “Genealogy of Violence” attributes cultural problems like incarceration and suicide rates to the murders and floggings employed by the Spanish soldiers (2). In this “family tree,” she sees poverty as the descendant of the Catholic Church through a line of land-theft and secularization (2). This section immediately reveals the present as resulting from the true mission narrative tracing violence through history. Miranda then creates a “Mission Glossary,” redefining terms that are considered “typical” of history but also including additional terms that add to the perspective of violence in missionization. For example, as she carefully spells out in her glossary term “Floggings,” “Tools” are not just for work but for punishment. Miranda describes the uses and the history of a cudgel, a corma, and the cat-o’-nine tails: “Also known in Spanish as azotes (stripes), floggings were usually administered by alcaldes...or soldiers, and sometimes by the padres personally” (13). While floggings would obviously not be described to a fourth grader in a typical history lesson, Miranda uses this structure to emphasize the necessity of addressing realities that are present in ancestral memory. Miranda also employs sarcasm, revealing truths through exaggerated lies and thereby emphasizing the lies told by imagined history: “[The padres] had no way of knowing that the cat-o’-nine tails was a breeding ground for disease and pestilence, or that the sores on Indians’ bodies would become badly infected. Honest” (14). By appearing to perpetuate the lies but actually revealing truths, Miranda forces responsibility onto a dominant narrative of mission history not only for violence but for the silencing of reality.

Miranda goes on to describe the mission as a “Massive Conversion Factory,” playing with Marxist theory by saying that the Mission would “melt [Indians] down into generic workers instilled with Catholicism” (16). By reappropriating this Western theoretical language, she maintains her pedagogical play but uses it to serve her own reinterpretation and re-storying of
history and Western knowledge. In this way, Miranda follows in the footsteps of indigenous orators and storytellers like William Apess and Mourning Dove who have appropriated dominant rhetorics to question dominant narratives of colonization. She also quotes anthropologists to emphasize that if historians did see the extermination of Native peoples as a problem, it was an economic one: “In the words of anthropologist and historian Robert Heizer. ‘The Franciscan missions in California were ill-equipped, badly managed places...To continue to feed the furnace would have required a [Spanish] military force of much greater power than was available’” (17). Using the given narratives of anthropologists allows Miranda to subvert questionable goals of anthropological research to reveal an indigenous perspective of personhood. Miranda closes the section by stating the lesson of knowing “limitations imposed by fuel availability,” again emphasizing the economic role of missionized Indians while simultaneously asserting her personhood and that of her ancestors by highlighting the preposterous notion of people as fuel (17). While Miranda appears to perpetuate the economic quality of dominant history, her bitter tone makes it glaringly obvious that something vital is missing from these “historic” accounts, something that she adds through her own narration pulled from ancestral memory and the storying practices of her relations.

Miranda closes the “history” section by describing what it now means to be converted to Christianity before she shifts to the more specific accounts of her ancestors and then, eventually, to her own story. She provides her reader with an extensive list of the kind of Christian she and her ancestors can be: drunken, poor, diseased, landless, etc. (20). Miranda uses this section to

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10 William Apess used the conversion narratives of the 19th century to turn the language of “savagery” back on the Christian settlers who committed violence toward Native peoples. Mourning Dove was an early 20th century writer who employed the genre of the Western Romance to question the roles of full and “half-breed” indigenous peoples in the national narrative of western expansion.
emphasize that conversion in this style of mission abuse means little more than adding “Christian” to the stereotypes (as well as very real problems) that Natives would be stuck with for many, many generations to come. Miranda mocks the narrative that says the missions saved or rescued savages from the fires of hell by describing the mission as hell itself. She then reveals Christianity as one more aspect of colonization, adding it to the list of problems that will extend into her personal family narrative. While Miranda will go on to describe these problems in her own family, she also resists the Catholicizing assimilation narrative by insisting on a future of survivance for her and her relatives when she continues story in the rest of her book.

Retelling history as Miranda does in *Bad Indians* is itself a decolonial practice. As scholar Andrea Smith points out, “Colonialists saw the cultural assimilation and missionization processes as part of the same project” (52). Boarding school and mission abuses of religion remain largely unaddressed in dominant, white society, and, according to Smith, continue to inflict trauma on Native communities through narratives of shame and self-blame (52). When Miranda shifts that narrative to emphasize and place blame on the processes of inflicting religion through Mission violence, she denies the shaming of Native peoples for their problems. Miranda takes on a narrative that blames Native peoples for ignorance, which white Europeans regarded as savage infidelity, to instead assert Christianity as enacting a long, traumatic history of dominance and death.

Miranda also draws this story of violence through her own narrative, demonstrating it in her father’s life, her own life, and hoping for restoration for future relatives. Like Lee Maracle, she explores some of the ways in which storying practices can contribute to life values and whole histories of a people. In this case, Miranda contributes to a communal and relational worldview as she takes on the pain and anger of her ancestors to deconstruct and rebuild an indigenized
narrative. As she says in her introduction, these stories begin to open a space “where voices can speak after long and often violently imposed silence.” Miranda calls the voices in the stories “the antidote for lies” (xx) and begins to deconstruct the lies of the mission narrative while also taking on the bodily knowledge of pain and destruction, which both the false and true narratives have produced.

**Storying Herself:**

Storying practice is both communal and relational, as we see when writers like Miranda use the stories of others to inform individual identity. If Thomas King’s claim that we are made of stories is true, then Miranda must listen to the storying of her ancestors when seeking to understand her individual role within a communal history. This means that in telling her own memoir, she can incorporate the stories shared by her ancestors to more fully understand history, trauma, the connection between these things and her own identity as shared with her broader community. In understanding these connections, Miranda can also story theory that will work toward her and future relatives healing from social and historical trauma and rebuilding a community of survivance. One way that this takes place in her text is when she deals with the history and ongoing problem of sexual violence. While she also takes up stories of gender violence enacted on two-spirited individuals, my concern here is with her account of sexual violence directed toward women’s bodies.11 Miranda gives her reader the story of sexual violence inflicted on a girl named Vicenta in the Carmel Mission as told to anthropologist J.P.

11 “Two-spirited” is a complex indigenous term for a certain gender identity in indigenous communities. While explanation of this term alone could take pages, for our purposes here it might be understood as individuals embodying both male and female sexualities and/or gender roles. K.L. Walters, T. Evans-Campbell, J.M. Simoni, T. Ronquillo, and R. Bhuyan have written a collaborative article called “My Spirit in My Heart” that incorporates a community of voices to work towards defining this term. Alex Wilson, a two-spirit woman activist and educator, says that “Two-spirit identity affirms the interrelatedness of all aspects of identity, including sexuality, gender, culture, community, and spirituality” (627).
Harrington by her ancestor Isabel Meadows. The telling of this story with that of her own first experience of sexual predation is not a “compare and contrast” but rather runs parallel, demonstrating the continued history of sexual violence that requires continued methods of survivance and healing. At the same time, by using the voices of her ancestors Vicenta and Isabel along with her own story, Miranda shows how storying is fluid across relationships and generations through time and place to continue ways of survivance, as I will explore more in the next section.

Isabel Meadows narrates many stories about life in the missions that have been passed down from the relatives who lived through it. One story that Isabel salvages and passes on is that of Vicenta Gutierrez, a young girl raped by a padre at the Carmel mission. Vicenta told this story to her family and community who continued to tell it so that the story was later relayed through Isabel:

The priest had an appointed hour to go there. When he got to the nunnery [monjerio] all were in bed in the big dormitory. The priest would pass by the bed of the superior [maestra] and tap her on the shoulder, and she would commence singing. All of the girls would join in...when the singing was going on, the priest would have time to select the girl he wanted, carry out his desires...in this way the priest had sex with all of them, from the superior all the way down the line...the priest’s will was law. Indians would lie right down if the priest said so. (Isabel Meadows as told to J.P. Harrington in Miranda 23, 24)

When Isabel Meadows tells this story, she credits it to Vicenta but also adds her own brief interpretations, showing the continuity of the story’s relevance. In her own telling of the story,

12 I use Isabel and Vicenta’s first names not for lack of respect but because this is how Miranda names them as real, dynamic women and valued relatives.
Miranda writes directly to the girl: “Vicenta, I keep thinking of how you ran home, telling everyone what had happened. I have to tell you, girl, that was brave. I didn’t tell for years and years” (24). Miranda recognizes the importance of the girl telling this story as an act of resistance in the way that Vicenta screamed her survival to her community and denied the “purity” of the priests who held the power. Miranda emphasizes the rarity of such a voice in a world where “priests were gods”: “Who would believe you? Who would care? Who would give you justice?” (24). Miranda addresses Vicenta directly to reveal the story as presently important. She maintains Vicenta’s voice through generations so it could be referenced again and continue to provoke strong feelings in future relatives through the practice of storying.

While Miranda questions the possibility of justice, she also acknowledges the importance of a voice and the survival of a story. She emphasizes Isabel’s immediacy and anger in the telling: “She told it like it happened yesterday. And she was mad. She used Spanish and a brutal English to make sure Harrington understood” (24). Isabel does not just “tell” the story to the anthropologist but wants him to record the emotion behind the event and the reason she tells it. Miranda goes on to explain that Isabel used the priest’s name and Vicenta’s name. Naming places responsibility and maintains personhood in the event, breaking the rule of silence imposed on these acts of violence in mission history. Isabel gives agency to Vicenta in a story that can continue into Miranda’s own:

And if no one did any of that [comforting] for you, I hold onto this: Isabel remembered your story, and she told it to Harrington, and he told it to me, and I’m telling it to everyone I can find.

You told first.
Maybe that’s why Isabel felt, of all the stories she knew about violation and invasion and loss, your story was the one to tell Harrington. She was proud of you. She respected you for refusing to shut up. She liked that you weren’t a good Mission Indian. Maybe she even thought future Indian women could learn from you. (25)

In this excerpt, Miranda theorizes the act of storying and what it can do for history and the future of Native women. Vicenta may not have found her own justice after the event, but her story does not end with her rape or even her eventual death. Instead, the story is passed down through her ancestors to give someone like Miranda hope that she can assert her own voice to tell a similar story. Miranda has hope that her story of missionization will change something; that it will be important if only because it belongs to her and to her ancestors, including Isabel and Vicenta. She continues a decolonizing act that subverts the silencing narrative of dominance. In showing Vicenta’s own act of subversion by voicing her story, Miranda reveals a continuity in survivance narratives that allows us as her audience to dwell in that indigenous perspective of the past and future. History is not just “past” but present in understanding Miranda’s personal memoir and continued violence or displacement enacted on Native peoples.

Miranda’s personal story of sexual violence happens when she is seven and her mom leaves her and another girl with her “friend” Buddy. Miranda describes the gifts that Buddy gives her, including “a few minutes of that special attention, that tenderness human beings crave and do not get” (111). But when Miranda and her friend Hannah spend a night with Buddy and his wife, Miranda’s first personal experience of violation takes place:

Buddy’s wife sleeps hard, goes shopping the next day. It is here, in his house that night, and in the orchard next morning, that Buddy finally rapes me. I don’t know this is rape; I do know I can’t tell. Does he say that to me, “Don’t tell”? No, he doesn’t need threats. I
can’t tell because at seven years old I don’t have the words to describe the pain thrusting into my vagina--a hand around my throat--sound of a man’s ragged breath next to my ear. I can’t tell because I never said “no” to anything Buddy ever gave me. I can’t tell because I didn’t stop him when he did it to Hannah, too. Most of all, I can’t tell because there is nobody who wants to hear. (112)

Miranda does not compare this story to Vicenta’s or even theorize it as a violation of Native women’s bodies in particular. And yet, situating her own rape within the history of missionization includes herself in that heritage of violence and presence of power structures that enact involuntary silencing. Miranda does not claim the same bravery of voice that she so admires in Vicenta. Instead, she highlights violations of both body and speech as Miranda has no words to describe the rape and no one to describe it to. When the telling is also violated, Miranda’s story is silenced, just like a colonial narrative that disappears national violence toward indigenous Californians through the mission system. At the same time, Miranda demonstrates the danger of another story: the narrative that says she should see rape as her own guilt and also take responsibility for Hannah’s. This shame narrative carries shades of mission history which, from the dominant narrative’s perspective, says Natives deserved what came with missionization because they did not say “no” to the “positive” aspects. Miranda uses this victim-blaming trauma narrative to reflect dominant history that justifies a progression from “gifts” to violence and violation.

However, as she tells the story now, Miranda is angry, and her own anger parallels that of Isabel when she tells Vicenta’s story. Miranda says that instead of forgetting this trauma, as some people do, she hates it: “My problem is that I can’t forget. Instead of growing dull and faint, my anger gets sharper and sharper. Like a knife” (112). In telling this story and describing
her anger surrounding it, she uses story to theorize violence and what it takes to heal from its trauma. Just as Miranda’s rape damages her personally, so too does a historical missionization narrative that denies rape and the theft of land hurt indigenous communities. Both narratives hold hurt, silence, anger. But Miranda continues storying other aspects of her childhood, her ancestors’ stories, and the future of her community to piece together a new story that might work towards some sort of healing that looks like continued survivance.

While Miranda tells the stories of rape to correct history and reveal the perspective of indigenous women, she is also continuing communal storying practices. By couching stories of rape in missionization and colonization, Miranda condemns the violence of both, but she also offers a bridge to indigenous women who continue to suffer from a narrative that says their bodies deserve violence more than white bodies. These kinds of decolonizing acts are continued in grassroots movements such as Walking With Our Sisters, a memorial of hand-crafted moccasins that honors the dead and missing indigenous girls and women in the United States and Canada. Miranda and the contributors to WWOS reject a silencing of violence in favor of communal telling and decoloniality. Miranda does so through the voices of her ancestors while the women of WWOS have used social media and other platforms to involve countless women with ties across tribal and national communities in a relational story of survivance. The very voicing of the story is an act of resistance to a narrative that says Native women’s bodies deserve violation. As I will demonstrate in the next and final section of this chapter, Miranda also enacts survivance by continuing storying practices that look towards the future of indigenous peoples—a decolonial future that holds colonizers responsible for rape and neglect.
Looking to the Future:

Even as Miranda theorizes decolonization and decolonizes history through storying, she does not claim to have one “solution” or fix for the dismembering of community and silencing of indigenous voices that colonialism has wrought. However, in the space of the memoir and the practice of storying, we can see her begin to look towards possibilities of continued decolonization and theories of survivance when she starts to reconnect with her sisters and community. One place this survivance narrative is happening is when Miranda writes about her friendship with her half-sister Louise, who shares some of Miranda’s own trauma from her father’s violence. As she reconnects with Louise, Miranda continues to demonstrate the importance of relationships and shared history in the decolonizing act. Her relationship with her sister is a strengthening bond that helps build her individual and collective identity-making.

Miranda’s renewed closeness with her sister is enacted somewhat through tribal recovery practices that they share as they meet at community events that seek to recover aspects of California’s indigenous cultures. Louise is especially gifted in the learning and recovering of Chumash, the language spoken by Miranda’s ancestors and nearly eradicated by the history of missionization, assimilation, and the following racism. Like Miranda, Louise is tireless in researching important pieces of their ancestors’ stories, songs, traditions, and words. Also like Miranda, Louise is intimately acquainted with a legacy of violence inherited through colonization and explains the true reason for their father’s, Al’s, sentence served in San Quentin, a prison in central California.

According to Louise, Al’s conviction was not for “rape” as Miranda understood it based on his telling: a consensual relationship with an underage woman who eventually became vindictive. Louise reveals a truer and more violent historical narrative:
Al was in a bar, Deby, and got stinking drunk, the way he always did. And there was a
waitress there that he wanted, and he told her so, and she said no. You know what that
bastard did? He waited out in the parking lot until it was dark, and she left work to go
home. He attacked her in that parking lot and he beat her, Deby, he broke her jaw, he cut
her face, he broke her ribs. Then he raped her. And just left her. (Louise quoted by
Miranda 171)
While this story shocks and grieves Miranda, she says that it also “[opens] a door to the conflict
at the center of this struggle to reunite a fragmented tribe” (171). Al is Miranda’s link to the
Esselen families taken to the Carmel mission, but there is a conflict in her legacy through Al as
someone who has taken on the actions of violence and abuse from the colonizer. Miranda’s
personal experience of violence has come through men, and she sees her people as enduring
trauma through a male-dominated legacy of rape and subdual. While the patriarchal
missionization process nearly eradicated her ancestors, she is also connected to the fragments
that remain through the legacy of maleness in the embodiment of her violent father. She
struggles with the idea that it is her father who connects her to the work of decolonization and
storying that she has undertaken:

It is his blood that gives our bid for federal recognition real teeth, authority that the
government can’t deny. It is our father who remembers family names, stories, clues we
are desperate to record. It is our father whose body is the source of the most precious part
of our identity, and the most damning legacies of our history. (172)
In understanding this legacy and the struggle inherent therein, Miranda begins to draw
connections from the storying of violence. She wonders if the only methods of survival available
had meant becoming destroyers like the padres and soldiers who enacted violence in the first
place. She says that “This is the first time I really understood, in my bones, the unimaginable, savage splintering that my ancestors—and my father, my sisters, my brother, my self—had endured” (172). This final story about her father, before commemorating his death, causes a bodily reaction in Miranda that connects her to the violence that has been the legacy of her ancestors and relatives. Just as Miranda loves and hates her father and feels she cannot fully comprehend a clear image of who he was, so is her people’s history splintered into stories that are nearly impossible to piece together and understand as clear markers of identity. The act of storying to re-form identity and deconstruct dominant narratives becomes both more difficult and more necessary as Miranda is able to fully depict the legacy of mission violence through her family. By seeing her experience of violence as something that has been experienced by nearly all of her ancestors allows Miranda to theorize ways of survivance that resist violence by surviving and looking toward a decolonized future.

However, in storying this narrative of violence throughout her tribal memoir, Miranda comes to realize something. She understands and reveals that this work of putting the pieces of history back together is still an important one. Re-building an indigenous narrative that has been fragmented by violence is hard work because it first requires that she dismantle the dominant narratives that have scabbed over the raw history of missionization. This work of re-articulating and indigenizing the historical narrative is as painful as it is difficult. However, decolonization does not come without hope for continued survival and the elimination of violence as a Californian Indian inheritance. With her sisters and other community members, Miranda resists colonial violence to rebuild cultural elements of language, relationality, and movement back toward the land.
Conclusion:

As Miranda uses indigenous storying practices to deconstruct and rebuild the historical narrative, she opens a door for a larger community of Native women to continue acts of survivance. Miranda demonstrates in the space of memoir some of the ways in which individual and communal storying relies on ancestral knowledge and survivance to build a continuing identity as an indigenous person. In her text, Miranda constantly returns to practices of making in both theory and story that reflect indigenous relationships and worldviews. Miranda shows a close relationship to her ancestors, their stories, and her future relatives as she also produces her own personal narrative in relation to that community. In doing so, she challenges dominant narratives of disappearance, demonstrating that California Indians not only survive but thrive with autonomous ways of knowing and making knowledge through decolonial works of creation and restoration.

In the next chapter, we will explore more about the hope of decolonization in the restoration of place that comes through Miranda’s storying of her ancestors and their belonging to land in their own right. This possibility of restoring a connection to land is a vital one as it continues an indigenous narrative that looks toward a future of restoring a relationship to place. Yes, Miranda’s work is painful, and it is difficult. But in order for the restoration and survivance of decolonization to take place, Miranda must story the truth of colonization and missionization. The act of restoring her people to their ancestral land and memory is, in part, embodied in the work toward political and social sovereignty that I will explore in the next section. Not only do Miranda’s relationships to her ancestors and their stories work towards a larger narrative of decoloniality, but her connection to a dispossessed land base is also vital to a complete act of storying her people’s history and identity. This work continues to require a dismantling of the
dominant narrative as Miranda must use story to subvert dominant ways of understanding sovereignty, instead advocating for an indigenous understanding of policy-making.
CHAPTER 2: A RENEWED SOVEREIGNTY: DEBORAH MIRANDA STORYING ANCESTRAL CONNECTIONS TO LAND

In a theory-making story published elsewhere and addressed to fellow academics, Miranda asks a question about locating herself in the ivory tower. She wonders how she can reach back into a history of “erasure, invisibility, lies, disguise” and pull from the dominant narrative an Indian identity that is empowered and autonomous (“What’s Wrong” 334). She struggles to find the “Indigenous voices that [know] the paradox, pain, and deceit of a colonized homeland” (335). She wants to respond to this history with herself—with her mind, body, and her “Indianness.” But passion and vulnerability are not academic enough for the ivory tower. In the classroom, Miranda finds herself “unable to perform that surgical separation of body from mind, culture from intellect” (341). However, she doesn’t give up finding a location where these things can happen: “[There is] a place and a time when, as an Indian woman, I have to go on and take care of the work left to do anyway—not instead of feeling the pain, not instead of grieving, but with the important ways that pain informs and creates me” (346). Ten years later, she publishes her tribal memoir. I see *Bad Indians* as the location for that work that uses passion and identity to make theory. In memoir, Miranda is able to position herself as woman, Esselen, Chumash, scholar, and more. She locates the story of her homeland as another piece of her history, personhood, and future autonomy. For Miranda, memoir works in service of a larger project of history in which she can be present while looking toward decolonization for her future relatives.13

13 Here I am drawing on theorists like Walter Mignolo to see decolonization as a theoretical and practical process used by indigenous scholars and community members. Mignolo sees decolonial practice as narrating an indigenous understanding of history and thereby questioning colonial ways of knowing and making knowledge.
In the introduction to *Bad Indians*, Miranda calls California a story—many stories. California tells Miranda’s personal story and that of her relationship with her parents and heritage, but it also tells a larger story about missionization, violence, and displacement. These stories are how Miranda understands her existence: “Human beings have no other way of knowing that we exist, or what we have survived, except through the vehicle of story” (xi). Miranda uses her book to narrate a variety of voices, piecing together a whole story of survival and resistance. She starts by dismantling the dominant history of missionization and incorporating the pain of trauma indicated by indigenous voices, as I explored in chapter one. She continues with stories of “Post-Secularization,” or the survival of racism after the missions. She then moves into a section called “The Light from the Carrisa Plains: Reinvention,” made up of her grandfather’s stories that show a continued longing to return to a place taken away in missionization. In the last section of her book, “Teheyapami Achiska: Home,” Miranda stories a decolonial future that looks toward the hope of restoration: restoration of belonging, land, nationhood, and identity. Throughout all the stories run various narratives of survival and resistance, which form new understandings of sovereignty. This narrative claims indigeneity, remembers stories of belonging, and projects those stories onto the present and the future.

Miranda uses the narrative space within her memoir to maintain an indigenous connection to land in and near Monterey, California and along the Santa Ynez River. Through this continued relationship to land, she is able to claim sovereign belonging to place. In doing so, Miranda re-narrates and makes visible indigenous knowledge and memory-making practices for the Ohlone/Coastanoan-Eselen people as she works toward a sovereignty of self-determination. She also extends this practice to other indigenous communities fighting for political rights to the communal sovereignty that Scott Richard Lyons and others define. Miranda continues to theorize
ways of determining nationhood and sovereignty, building on scholars like Mark Rifkin and Craig Womack through her own practice of telling the stories of her community and ancestors. At the same time, her practice extends to a non-Native audience who may buy into the American definition of sovereignty that includes top-down policy-making. Miranda shows us another way of determining political and social recognition and asserts blood-memory as a continued way of knowing. At the same time, she re-narrates “historical” stories about land and re-imagines future connections through sovereignty and recognition, which can be made possible through the indigenous ways of knowing that she demonstrates.

Craig Womack recognizes the importance of people like Miranda writing new literatures in order to “[assert] the right to explicate [literature to] constitute a move toward nationhood” (14). Womack defines nationhood as “a people’s idea of themselves, their imaginings of who they are” and the “ongoing expression of a tribal voice” (14). This ongoing imagining and expression keeps sovereignty alive in Lyon’s sense of a people defining their own practices of making and telling knowledge, creating meaning that is “defined within the tribe rather than by external sources” (Womack 14). Miranda’s location in literature and memoir allows her to self-define, but as we have explored in the previous chapter, she uses a multiplicity of voices to do so, maintaining the practice of relationality and decoloniality in making knowledge and art. Here I will explore the ways in which Miranda continues to use those voices to narrate an existing and ongoing connection to land. She maintains indigenous ways of understanding her relationship with place by storying through memory, continuing a re-narration of history connected to land, and by imagining a future of political sovereignty and self-defined nationhood. Miranda continues this conversation about what creates sovereignty by using story and ancestral memory
to connect herself to a land base while also contributing decolonial work towards political sovereignty through an act of creation.

**Two Types of Sovereignty:**

To understand the role of land in establishing political sovereignty and an identity of nationhood for Miranda, we must further understand the specific history of U.S. policy toward the Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation to which Miranda belongs. According to historian Philip Laverty, “missionalized” Indians like the Esselen were overlooked during the treaty-making of the mid-1800s because they were already deemed “[domesticated] due in large part to their incorporation into the dominant economic order” (41). In addition, the language employed by U.S. policy “portrayed Native American tribes as adopted or orphaned children in need of paternalistic protection” (Sheffer 133). Rather than recognizing a policy of Native tribes as having an independent ability to make treaties, the government could claim tribal lands in the name of guardianship (Sheffer 133). However, under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), the U.S. is required to “identify lands owned by Indians deeded under Spanish and Mexican rule” and return them (Laverty 49). In spite of this law, and as a result of poor documentation and government neglect, the Esselen Nation’s ancestors do not legally have an inalienable land base and therefore cannot be an acknowledged tribe according to the top-down recognition of U.S. sovereignty. Furthermore, the Indian Service Bureau’s failure to re-establish Esselen lands has made it difficult for the Esselen to maintain a tribal community, which is essential to establishing themselves as a recognizable tribe within the dominant political system that refuses to account for the assimilation and state-sponsored violence of dispossession (Laverty 41, 42). While sovereignty means more than recognition, without that status it becomes nearly impossible
to recover Esselen land bases. These requirements make up Miranda’s struggle to return to Esselen ancestral land and work toward the establishment of an Esselen nation.

Government policy that keeps indigenous peoples from their land creates a complex story of national power and space that artists like Miranda strive to subvert. Because the government relies on a top-down practice of determining sovereignty, questioning this process of federal recognition is not only a challenge to power but also to nation as place. To recognize individual tribes and tribal governments as claiming sovereignty in their own right might pose a threat to national space. The thought of Natives defining their own “right” to place produces a “fear that the space of the nation might somehow be(come) alien to itself, an elsewhere to which U.S. jurisdiction explicitly is “denied” by the Indigenous inhabitants” (Rifkin 100). When authors like Miranda reassert a connection to place and land through stories and, even more importantly, begin to form a sense of nationhood, they threaten U.S. federal identity as a singular “nation” with sovereignty over Indian “people” because they begin to reveal the possibilities of self-governance by and for Indigenous peoples. This revival of selfhood (and thus nationhood) displaces federal paternalism in favor of self-governance and an indigenous definition of sovereignty. If writers and activists are able to change the myth that sovereignty can only be gained through documentation rather than through indigenous practices that maintain collective memory and policy-making, U.S. jurisdiction is further threatened by an altered manner of determining what and who makes history and legislation.

According to scholars like Scott Richard Lyons, indigenous claims to sovereignty like the one that Miranda makes are attempts to “survive and flourish as a people,” and self-determination is vital to recovering and reclaiming land, language, culture, and self-respect (449). This means that sovereignty is not only about political recognition but is also important to
autonomy that determines how a community functions on cultural and social levels.\textsuperscript{14} However, sovereignty in the Western sense depends upon recognition, and dominant culture says that for this to happen, power must also be locatable and recognizable (450). Indigenous scholars and storytellers like Miranda challenge dominant power structures by using methods of story and knowledge that have been passed through generations to assert subj ecthood. At the same time, they are also re-imagining indigenous knowledge-making to challenge existing paradigms that surround the varying notions of sovereignty. Instead of understanding sovereignty as power, scholars and community members are arguing for sovereignty as a communal process of decision-making.

Miranda continues working to re-member history and asserts belonging to place through ancestral memory and communal knowledge. When Miranda stories a connection to place, she works toward an indigenous definition of sovereignty and thereby questions the standards of federal recognition. Connecting herself and her people to land is a continued act of survivance as it resists the narrative saying the Esselen people do not exist as a sovereign nation.\textsuperscript{15} Instead, Miranda uses story to renew relationships between her ancestors, her future relatives, herself and the land through memory as continuance, an act of survivance through belonging. In theorizing this connection, Miranda asserts a type of communal and continued sovereignty which, while not necessarily recognized by the federal government, can be useful in fostering a feeling of nationhood and validity as a people for the Esselen nation. This re-building of community may,

\textsuperscript{14} Lisa Brooks explains some of the communal aspects of sovereignty in her book \textit{The Common Pot} as she explores what sovereignty means for the sharing of land and resources for the good of the whole community.

\textsuperscript{15} As we will explore later in the chapter, the Esselen Nation’s struggle to regain federal acknowledgment is complicated by the fact that the federal acknowledgment process requires communities to show proof of a tribal land base. However, this becomes impossible when indigenous peoples have been dispossessed of those lands, usually without record. As historian Philip Laverty states, “These demands [to show evidence of Native existence] are [ironic] given the fact that after years of discrimination and assimilationist policies, the government asks for proof of what it has attempted to destroy” (70).
in turn, help establish the Esselen nation as a unified political force that can then move toward federal recognition within dominant power structures. At the same time, stories like Miranda’s challenge those power structures to re-define sovereignty for the benefit of the larger indigenous community. Miranda counters the dominant narratives about sovereignty with notions of ancestral memory that look toward a self-determination of Californian indigeneity through autonomous relationship to land and place.

**Blood-memory:**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, locating herself in a “tribal memoir” has allowed Miranda to use multiple voices to re-narrate a mission history and acknowledges the trauma and violence inflicted upon Native peoples. While her stories about land continue to reflect on and challenge historical narratives, Miranda also questions dominant political paradigms as she reconnects her identity and Esselen nationhood to place through blood-memory.16 Miranda uses stories that she still feels based on history throughout the lives of her ancestors. In connecting herself and her people to land on Central California’s Pacific coast, Miranda continues to locate herself in a tribal memoir and story voices from her ancestors in order to maintain a form of knowledge that ties her to ancestral memory. As I will explore in more depth later, Miranda tells stories about places of emergence and memories of the Carmel area that tie together her ancestors’ belonging to place before dispossession, her grandfather’s desire to return to the area, and her own longing and success in finding this homeland again. Miranda hopes to reconnect to place through the history of belonging that will also help rebuild

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16 As I understand the idea of “blood-memory” in indigenous practice, it has to do with theory and story that is tied up in the body. An indigenous worldview sees memory as coming from generations of ancestors but also as intimately tied to place and land. Therefore, “blood-memory” is a memory of place passed through relatives but also a bodily feeling or draw towards a place.
her community. This practice allows her to demonstrate nationhood by showing that ancestral ways of knowing are relevant to continuing political practice. Like Womack, Lisa Brooks explores the relevance of memory when she shows how activism and community can be combined in Native writing to “[link] land and people within the concept of community, reflecting the spatial orientation of Native peoples” (Weaver qtd. in Brooks). Similarly Miranda uses this idea that community and land are intimately tied together in identity-building as she employs ancestral blood-memory to solidify her own ties to land that can work toward self-determination.

As Miranda argues in the last subsection of her book, “To Make Story Again in the World,” fighting a one-dimensional story about California Indians is a communal process that invites communal healing. She says that to make the stories whole and subvert the narrative of conquest and subjugation requires a “multilayered web of community reaching backward in time and forward in dream, questing deeply into the country of unknown memory” (194). As part of the Esselen and Chumash (California Indian) peoples, Miranda relies on ancestral connections and the stories of others to build an alternative narrative for the future. She reconstructs and recreates memory to insist on indigenous ways of forming national identity through collective memoir that questions the dominant voices of history. Miranda also uses those ancestral memories to further a connection to land and places of emergence, storying them in order to weave a new (but also not-new) national identity for Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen people. Listening to and telling stories is a way of piecing together identity from the past while also continuing it for the future. While the identity is a “new” one that is constantly forming, it is also

17 In this quote, Jace Weaver is building on Robert Allen Warrior’s argument that Native practices of writing are vital to activism in the sense of indigenous sovereignty in nation-building that we will explore more later in the chapter.
“not-new” in the way that storying has been used through generations to determine individual and communal identity and relationships

By storying blood-memory, Miranda narrates her pull to place, which is intimately tied up in a similar draw toward a homeland that persists in familial memory. Miranda describes her grandfather’s yearning towards the place of his roots near El Potrero and then her own longing for this same homeland. Miranda’s paternal grandfather gives her a box that contains recordings of himself telling stories about his own life in a sort of audio journal. One story that catches her attention is about a light that her grandfather sees:

In [the recording of] “The Light from the Carrisa Plains,” my grandfather narrates his experience about being drawn toward a mysterious light while working as a vaquero18 far from his birthplace in Monterey. His yearning toward this light started Tom on a journey around California’s landscape that took most of his life. (194)

This light comes from the top of Mt. Diablo, three hundred miles away, and draws Tom to leave the Carrisa plains and instead to head towards the light, toward home:

Mt. Diablo, at the upper end of the San Joaquin Valley, and Big Sur’s Pico Blanco are both considered places of emergence, places where the world began after a great flood, by local Indian peoples—including some of my ancestors, whose community at the Carmel mission was artificially created by the cramming together of Ohlone, Costanoan, Salinan, and other tribes from the general area. (194)

As Tom Miranda stories his draw to this light, Deborah Miranda explains that the place he is drawn to is a place of beginnings. A place of emergence is a sacred place. As Miranda says, “Who we are is where we are from. Where we are from is who we are” (194). The draw towards

18 cattle driver
the mountain is a blood-memory because it continues through the ancestors who have been violently displaced and yet still long for this land base of beginnings. Emergence and identity are deeply intertwined in her grandfather’s connection to Mt. Diablo, and by storying those things Miranda is asserting a similar connection between the two while creating a new identity of nationhood tied to place. Memory through bodily longing is not recognized by dominant discourses of knowing, but Miranda stories the continual feeling as an act of survivance that resists the separation of body and knowledge. However, Miranda also recognizes an important dichotomy in what draws her grandfather to that light on the mountain.

On the one hand, Miranda says, one can see her grandfather’s pull toward the unknown light at the top of Mt. Diablo as a blood-memory connection: his body telling him to come home to a “place of emergence” (194). On the other hand, the light is simply explained as an airport, a colonizing force placed on Indigenous land (194-195). The mountain is occupied by someone other than his ancestors, therefore making it visible to Miranda’s grandfather. However, the Truth, or most meaningful aspect, of the story lies in the interpretation. As Miranda says, “I’d rather keep the mythological fantasy of some blood-memory of the connection between indigeneity and land, and not see the blood of genocide pooling around that airplane beacon” (195). Miranda recognizes that the interpretation of this land-memory, and others, has to be a simultaneous view of both colonialism/genocide and origins: “We can look at both interpretations simultaneously: the consuming mystery that draws a man back to his origins, the brutal loss of that which is sacred to him” (196). The violation that makes the mountain visible does not change it as the source of home in memory or present identity, but it is indicative of a continued need to resist colonizing forces so as to recognize indigenous belonging to history and the possible formation of a political body.
Miranda sees the history of violent removal and genocide in the beacon on the mountain but asserts a familial connection to the place. She recalls cultural identity through land, which remains present in her decolonizing practice of storying. Miranda works within the colonial system but also asserts the building of nationhood by choosing to recognize this land as belonging to her through ancestral blood-memory. While federal recognition processes say that a nation must prove ancestral belonging to land through documentation and deeds, what Miranda does here is assert her feeling of belonging through memory. Not only does this decolonize the historical narrative by arguing for another way of remembering, but it also allows for a definition of sovereignty that privileges an indigenous worldview. Rather than dwell on the official, or documented, loss of land, she accepts it as part of history and begins a sovereign healing process that gives the land additional meaning beyond that given by the colonizer. In doing so, Miranda not only re-tells her family’s story in the context of her own connection to place but also suggests that her attachment to this land goes beyond treaties and “agreements.” Instead, Miranda takes as fact her grandfather’s bodily feeling of longing as well as her own. She sees it as signaling a valid connection to place as a way of knowing that interrupts dominant discourses of who “belongs” to a place through legislation and documentation thereby complicating colonizer notions of sovereignty.

Retelling Place as History:

While bodily familiarity with place through the stories of her grandfather is important, Miranda also extends her grandfather’s story to re-narrate history. As we explored in the previous chapter, Miranda uses the location of memoir to not only narrate her own history but

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19 I intentionally use the verbiage of “re-narrating” and “re-telling” history because Miranda takes a dominant narrative of history and writes over it to add indigenous perspectives. While she is also narrating and creating, she chooses to act within a held discourse and change it from the inside, out.
also as a space in which she is able to situate her ancestors’ stories into a new historical narrative. Re-storying the history surrounding the missions allows Miranda to assert her ancestors’ voices as valid in the making and telling of history, which in turn allows her to build a sense of nationhood from storying practices. Miranda also uses her memoir to re-imagine untold histories surrounding place, as she continues to do with her grandfather’s stories about Mt. Diablo.

Miranda continues her grandfather’s narrative with her own “myth” that shows a relationship to land in the context of a reimagined collective memory. Her new story questions established historical narratives, in this case held by Spanish colonizers. She gives her audience the origin of the mountain’s Spanish name, “Diablo,” or “Devil” (196). In this story, Spanish soldiers hunt some runaway Mission Indians and think they have the runaways surrounded but lose the fugitives in the mountains:

But in the morning the Indians are gone. The cliff with the impossibly steep drop to the Carquinez Strait is still there, the woods are still there, the soldiers are still there. But the Indians have miraculously disappeared.

Of course, to the soldiers, this is far from a miracle. This is a disaster. The padres will be furious, crops will go untended, the relentless slaughter of cattle and grinding of corn will be slowed. Without these Indian neophytes and their labor, soldiers might find themselves hauling logs and mixing adobe in the sun. No, this mountain is an evil place, with an evil spirit that the Indians have long worshipped—ay, el Diablo! It must be the devil helping them, those pagan animals! Yes, they must have called on the Devil himself, and he answered. (196-197)
The Spanish soldiers see the mountain as dangerous and treacherous, saying that the Indians escaped by calling on el Diablo in this evil place. Without the Indians to complete the work of the mission, the soldiers’ own work and reputation is at stake; therefore, they create a narrative that attributes their loss to Indian paganism, a story maybe more likely to accepted by the religious padres as placing blame on the Indians. This is the narrative of the colonizer—the story that says Indian disappearance and “difference” is connected to their spiritual relationships, which are assumed by the colonizer to be evil and “other.” Miranda acknowledges this history by narrating the perspective of the soldiers, but in doing so, she also opens a space to imagine for herself the story in another, indigenous memory.

Miranda re-imagines the same story of the mountain to assert a different memory of place. She uses her communal knowledge, or stories passed down through her ancestors and her grandfather, about connection to land as sacred to create the story that the runaways see. In this story the mountain is a place of refuge and safety; perhaps the runaways use their connection to the place to find a cave to hide in or a route to safety unknown to the soldiers:

The mountain is a being, infused with the power of creation, from root to cloud. The rocks, soil, meadows, streams, trees, sun—all sacred, sacred, sacred, sacred.

Onto this luminous landscape you [runaways] come, a group of fugitive Indians from Mission San Jose, tired, perpetually hungry, with nowhere left to call home, all on foot while the Spanish soldiers and mercenaries pursue on horseback. In a moment like that, what thoughts, what impassioned prayers, come to your lips? What deep memories do you scour for the refuge of a canyon, a cave, a passage where you cannot be followed? What ancestors do you call on, what old medicine from your childhood, what stories, songs? (197)
In this re-storying of the same event, the runaway Mission Indians are not calling on the Devil but on stories and memories of place that will help them use the land to escape to safety. There is a bodily and ancestral connection to the land that allows the runaways to use its provision in a way that the Spanish soldiers do not understand. Where the soldiers see only danger, the Natives are able to recall ancestral stories about the land that will allow them to use it for safety. By storying this place in this way, Miranda creates a moment in her memoir that allows her people to shift dominant meaning and instead create their own rhetoric about this place using established ancestral memory.

In both stories, the mountain is powerful, but in one it is an unknown place of danger, and in the other it is a welcoming landscape of refuge. Miranda calls this indigenized version of the story one worth remembering and tells us the true name of the mountain, Tuyshtak, “at the day” (197, 198). This name is a reference to the beginnings of the Esselen people; the mountain remembers creation and rescues the people who emerged from this place. Just as in the first story, a place of emergence is also a place of homecoming and refuge. This story of the mountain happens long before Miranda’s grandfather is drawn to the homeland, but in both stories the connection to land is life-giving, whether literal or spiritual. The true name of the mountain is an act of remembering: remembering the land, and the land remembering its people:

You [runaways] turn and follow that knowledge. Lead your people—perhaps a husband, children, beloved friends—up, up, onto the flanks of this Mother. “Protect us,” you pray.

“We have no tobacco, no sage, no feathers. We can make no offering. Hide us, Mother.

Take us back into your womb.” (197)

Miranda’s relationship to the mountain and her grandfather’s relationship to land share a common history that cannot be erased by the colonizing narrative of fear. Even as a place that is
stolen, the land can be returned to; its existence and history do not change. By reconnecting to it through her ancestral memoir, she begins to rebuild a sense of belonging that will translate to a stronger national identity. Recognizing her kinship to the land as a place of safety again brings sovereign meaning to land defined by Esselen history and bodily feeling, or blood-memory, rather than the colonizing forces of legislation. In this way, Miranda moves away from colonial ways of knowing towards the decolonial option that allows indigenous peoples confidence in their own belonging to land.20

Miranda stories the loss of “home” or land as a longing for and building of nationhood that demonstrates a return to the history that surrounds the land of her ancestors. At the same time, she asserts an emotional connection to land that ought to translate into more literal belonging. Craig Womack says that “Politics, land, and story are deeply intertwined entities” and suggests that the theft of land is also a theft of culture as it is shifted from communal to individual (colonial) ownership (58). As we have explored, this naming of land ownership and sovereignty by dominant power structures precludes indigenous sovereignty that defines relationship to that land. In order to regain a sense of nationhood that will allow for sovereignty in the form of federal recognition, the land must be re-membered as part of an inheritance and continued attachment, even when it cannot be inhabited at present. Miranda engages remembrance by re-narrating sovereign connections to land in the form of stories that build memory from place rather than from dominant discourses that determine who uses it. The story Miranda tells about the runaways is not “true” in the sense that it is recorded, but it demonstrates sovereignty in the way that she confidently theorizes her ancestors’ belonging to and relationship

20 Walter Mignolo, in his book The Darker Side of Western Modernity, discusses a decolonial practice and worldview as a theoretical “option” that “de-links” from colonial ways of knowing. Decoloniality is one “lens” through which we can view things like sovereignty, history, belonging, etc.
with the mountain. This confidence in re-storied history provides a base for a recognized identity of nationhood in the memoir that will then allow Miranda to continue a narrative of survivance, looking toward the future of political (federally recognized) sovereignty for the Esselen peoples.

**The Future of Sovereignty:**

As she leads her audience through the stories and research regarding mission history, anthropological work, trickster tales, her family, and her own childhood, Miranda is carrying herself and her audience toward the hopeful part of decolonialism: the rediscovery of her homeland. While she stories her ancestors’ connection to place and her own blood-memory, Miranda’s draw to the memory of the land turns into a discovery that she may be able to more literally and physically find the land that belonged to her family.

Miranda’s great-great-great-great-great-grandparents, Fructuoso and Yginia, were two of the few Indians who were “granted land as promised in the original plan by Spanish priests” (199). Fructuoso and Yginia received a small parcel of land in 1835 and petitioned to add more to form a ranchero, El Potrero de San Carlos, not far from the site of the Carmel Mission and the site of Echilat, the village from which Fructuoso’s family came. According to Miranda, “Fructuoso was not ‘putting down roots.’ He was deepening his ancient attachment to a place whose minerals and elements ran in his blood” (200). In this statement, Miranda continues the narrative that says blood-memory and family attachments to place remain important and viable through generations and in spite of displacement. Although Fructuoso’s connection to land was broken when his family was forced to move to the Carmel mission, he fought to return, as Miranda is doing now.

Eventually, however, Fructuoso and Yginia’s daughter lost the land to Bradley Sargent, an American known for violently occupying land until Indians were forced to abandon it (200).
In spite of resistance from people like Isabel Meadows and her family “the justice system ignored these and most other thefts of property” (201). However, Miranda’s grandfather’s longing toward Mt. Diablo and his homeland and her own connection to the stories about land draw her to search for this place: “the stories still exist, and testify that our connections to the land live on beneath the surfaces of our lives...The stories call us back” (203). In looking through the stories, Miranda eventually is able to piece together enough information to locate the ranchero:

  In my own fascination with these stories, I pored over maps and historical land records until I could locate El Potrero on a contemporary map of California. My whole body leapt forward, the palms of my hands tingled with a rush of blood, when I learned that El Potrero, the last Esselen-owned land in California, home to my immediate ancestors Fructuoso, Yginia, and Estefana and her children, and once the village of Echilat where many of my ancestors originated, might still exist. (203)

Miranda has a bodily reaction to knowing that she may have found the land of her ancestors; a reaction brought on by blood-memory and a knowledge of nationhood and belonging that has continued through stories. She finds that the land of El Potrero is part of the Santa Lucia Preserve and, miraculously, mostly undeveloped.

  While there is excitement about finding the land, there is sadness too. Miranda says, “Still, I know the truth: despite the miracle of this land’s existence, El Potrero and the other Indian ranchos and rancherias have not been, and will never be, turned back over to the descendants of tribes from that area” (204). While Miranda is storying and re-crafting nationhood from pieces of history, the dominant sources of power continue to hold the definition of sovereignty and ownership. Because the land is officially federal and private property,
Miranda and her people have few options for reclamation without their own documentation in a culture that values certain ways of knowing and belonging. However, there is hope in Miranda’s work of decolonization as an act of survivance. Miranda continues the Esselen narrative through cultural redefinition as she says that “another truth exists beside that harsh one: there is a pathway open to me—to my tribe, our families—to return to a place which formed us” (204). Miranda hopes that the descendants of the land and those who survived the Carmel mission can “open up a dialogue about making the land of Santa Lucia Preserve more accessible” as a sacred place (204). There is hope that survivance will continue to happen through a re-connection to place even if it is in relation to dominant powers. When she finds the land of her ancestors, Miranda begins to define sovereignty in the indigenous sense of a communal connection. While this connection to the land may look different from actually inhabiting it as home, survivance as resistance creates new ways of connecting to and continuing memories with that homeland as a long-term practice of identity-building and reclamation of space. Furthermore, the practice of decolonization works within given parameters to renew indigenous connections to place that foster a creation of decolonial nationhood.

Miranda continues the narrative of her bodily blood-memory of place when she dreams of returning to the land of her ancestors with her sister, encountering the place, the mountains, the soil, the river. She says that in the dream “[her] hands began to ache as if the very earth outside were calling to them” (205). Her emotion for the place is an overwhelming urge for a connection and return to the relationship that her family members had with the land. The longing is not only spiritual but also bodily. When the dream ends, Miranda relates: “I woke up full of tears and wonder and pure joy, lay there for a few minutes awash in those images; then my alarm went off. I leapt up and started writing” (207). In this act of writing, Miranda solidifies her
imagined encounter with home, connecting to the place as though she were really there. Just like
the story she tells of her grandfather’s longing toward a homeland, Miranda herself demonstrates
a similar blood-memory in the way she longs to be returned to this place not only out of a
connection to her ancestors but also out of a physical and spiritual desire that “proves” her own
indigeneity. By connecting her own desire to that of her ancestors, Miranda starts to piece
together the past and the future and re-imagine a return to place that will bring healing from the
colonial violence that happened there. In addition, she takes this longing seriously as a true
blood-connection to the land and thereby demonstrates the reality of her relationship to place.
This practice of deconstructing ways of belonging to reconstruct her own is vital to a decolonial
practice of healing as Miranda builds on indigenous worldviews of belonging and therefore,
sovereignty.

Miranda calls the loss of land for the Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen people a sort of soul-
wound: an “intergenerational trauma with the accompanying loss of self-respect and self-esteem”
(202). She is surprised to find that the land still exists amidst so much disappeared history, and
yet her feelings for the land remain (203). Andrea Smith tells us that disconnecting Native
spiritual practices from their land bases “undermines Native peoples’ claims that the protection
of the land base is integral to the survival of Native peoples and hence undermines their claims to
sovereignty” (122). We might understand this spiritual connection to land as being another
aspect of blood-memory that connects land to identity as a people with roots in place and history.
It is important, therefore, that Miranda closes her memoir with the reconnection to land because
it shows that there is a way for her people to regain the sovereignty that is the full culture of their
history and future: “there is a pathway open to me—to my tribe, our families—to return to a
place which formed us...What was stolen from us hasn’t exactly been returned, but then, we
aren’t exactly our ancestors either” (204). Miranda acknowledges the need for growth and change instead of a full return to the past, but her entire narrative directs the reader toward understanding that the truth and feeling of that past is still important. In this sense, she is “re-narrating” history in a hopeful act of decolonization that includes Native voices in a narrative that connects indigenous knowledge and survivance to place. This connection is not a new one but a continuance of indigeneity that says Miranda and her relatives, past and present, belong to the land that has been taken from them. The land has not been returned legislatively, but this doesn’t stop Miranda from continuing the stories of connection and belonging. As she says in her introduction, “Those who will not change do not survive; but who are we, when we have survived?” (xiv). When she returns to the land, Miranda begins to see who she is in the time and place of her people’s history, but she also recognizes the work before her and her sisters: storying a past that will restore nationhood and place to their community.

Conclusion:

The loss of land along with the other traumas of colonization brings great pain to Miranda, her relatives, and indeed all indigenous people working toward decolonization in their belonging to place. However, by piecing together stories and fragments of stories that are connected to land, Miranda enacts survivance by resisting the narrative that says a loss of federally recognized land is a loss of belonging. Indigenous sovereignty uses the community to story ongoing practices and traditions that allow peoples to define their own knowledge and processes of knowledge-making. Miranda is continuing this theory and practice by using pieces of history and the voices of her ancestors to reconnect herself to her homeland, though it is no longer inhabited by her family. This practice is decolonial as well in the way that Miranda looks toward the possibility of reconnecting to that land in a more literal sense, even if that connection
is deeply affected by colonialism. Just as the light on Mt. Diablo was a sign of settlers but also a
draw toward home, the Santa Lucia Preserve has literally preserved the land of Miranda’s
ancestors as it simultaneously blocks her people from full reclamation.

Miranda uses her ancestors’ narratives to create a space in story-making that builds
sovereignty through indigenous practice. This communal making of sovereignty is not new, but
Miranda is able to locate it in memoir to show an indigenous audience that the practice is
ongoing survivance: survival and resistance. At the same time, a non-Native audience gathers a
full picture of Esselen continuance and a strong presence of identity that is both continuing from
history and continuously being built and storied. By interweaving these voices of past, present,
future, and continuance, Miranda enacts a strong practice of sovereignty by claiming her space in
literature, in history, in land, and in identity amongst other practices.

We will see Louise Erdrich enact something similar in her travel memoir *Books &
Islands in Ojibwe Country*, but Erdrich speaks primarily to a non-Native audience to show an
indigenous presence in knowledge-making. In some ways, Erdrich seems to assume the re-
narration of history as “complete,” whereas Miranda must spend a lot of time inserting an
indigenous voice into the historical narrative of California missions. This isn’t to say that Erdrich
does not acknowledge the work of re-historicizing and re-politicizing dominant discourses with
indigeneity, but her work largely looks toward future survivance, particularly in and through
language that is connected to sovereignty and land. In the next chapter, we will explore the
continuance of Ojibwe ways of knowing as Erdrich stories spoken and recorded acts of language
in her own act of survivance and decolonization.
CHAPTER 3: KNOWLEDGE SURVIVANCE: LOUISE ERDRICH AND NATIVE KNOWLEDGE-MAKING FOR NON-NATIVE READERS

Coming from Deborah Miranda to Louise Erdrich, as readers, our own relationship to place must shift slightly. First, we move from dwelling with the Costanoan-Esselen people in California to Ojibwe space, from the coastal mountains of the Monterey Bay to the rocky islands of lake country in the borderlands between the settled U.S. Midwest and Canada. At the same time, we are no longer looking at a space that is closed to Native peoples following violent displacement. Instead, Erdrich visits a homeland where the Ojibwe people have dwelled through time and continue to live, though in reduced numbers. While the histories and relationships to land differ somewhat between these two authors, there are similarities in their practices. Both women use story in the space of memoir to practice ways of making indigenous knowledge and theory using relationship to land and re-membering the teachings of place.

Their differing relationships to space also come through in the ways both women use their text, both to serve decoloniality but for different audiences. Whereas Miranda deconstructs history (chapter one) in order to open up social space for indigenous work toward sovereignty (chapter two), Erdrich uses her text to teach a non-Native audience about the possibilities of indigenous future-making and survivance through continued cultural practice. While Miranda works to re-discover the land of her ancestors, Erdrich invites the reader to temporarily dwell in ancestral land with her. Indeed, there is a rich history not unaffected by colonization that Erdrich acknowledges; however, throughout her text she makes visible decolonial work toward making knowledge by restoring and using Ojibwe language, relationships, and ways of remembering. Erdrich demonstrates to a non-Native audience the continuous and relevant nature of indigenous knowledge-making practices that work toward decolonization. In some ways, Miranda speaks to
a Native audience that already takes these practices as given, but Erdrich extends that truth to non-Native readers. She opens a space for a broad understanding of history that takes indigenous knowledge as existing always—from the beginning of time, into the present, and for always. In making such a claim, Erdrich does more than “include” Natives in literary or theoretical discourse to instead acknowledge an indigenous dialogue of story and theory all its own.

Erdrich begins this story of continuous knowledge with a map of the land of lakes that contributes to and holds much of the narrative. On this map, Lake of the Woods crosses dotted boundaries between Minnesota and Ontario, filled with tiny islands, 14,000 of them according to Erdrich. Right away, Erdrich blends together the islands and books as processes of gathering knowledge:

Some of [the islands] are painted islands, the rocks bearing signs ranging from a few hundred to more than a thousand years old. So these islands, which I’m longing to read, are books in themselves. And then there is a special island on Rainy Lake that is home to thousands of rare books. (1)

Erdrich immediately fosters in the reader a shared affection for the islands as “texts” that don’t only reflect their “authors” but are blended with continuing knowledge past, present, and future. She then begins to offer Ojibwe words to her audience. In doing so, she invites the reader to connect with the lakes, land, islands, and rocks by exploring knowledge-making in language, from paintings to birchbark scrolls, to oral history, to books. Erdrich uses these same decolonizing practices and creations to connect to Ojibwe knowledge to living language and explore the land with her daughter’s father. The range of knowledges that Erdrich blends together practices a theory of survivance that includes many forms of memory and future indigeneity. As she enacts this herself in the written word, Erdrich invites a non-Native audience
to see knowledge-making through a number of avenues, showing ways in which all of these things will continue to be important to indigeneity. In bringing the continuity of indigenous knowledge and knowledge-making to a non-Native audience, Erdrich extends the conversation of sovereignty beyond the Native community. Much like Miranda does, she challenges Western paradigms of who makes and holds knowledge, thereby working toward continued conversations of self-determination and self-identification through survivance and the decolonial practice of making.

Throughout *Books & Islands*, Erdrich tells a survivance story of living Ojibwe people, worldviews, and literacy. Erdrich insists that the Anishinaabe people have been writing books in some form since at least 2000 B.C., whether that means the painting of islands, the biting of birchbark, or something else. Not only have the books been written, but they continue to be read:

> Since the writing or drawings that those ancient people left still makes sense to people living in the Lake of the Woods today, one must conclude that they weren’t the ancestors of the modern Ojibwe. They were and are the modern Ojibwe. (3)

In this chapter, I will explore some of the ways in which Erdrich interweaves Ojibwe/Anishinaabe knowledge-making and keeping practices to demonstrate survivance as ongoing work that uses past knowledge but especially looks toward the future of indigeneity. Erdrich enacts decoloniality by refusing to push Ojibwe culture to a narrative of “the past” but instead asserting ongoing knowledge, language, and spiritual tradition as viable spaces for nationbuilding and the making of indigenous identity. By showing Native and non-Native readers relationships to the islands as knowledge, the land, its people, and language, Erdrich invites the reader to see ongoing practices of decolonial knowledge-making. Erdrich resists putting indigeneity in the past but instead insists on knowledge survivance for and through future
relatives. Furthermore, by making this ongoing indigeneity visible to a non-Native audience, Erdrich asserts the presence of Native people in critical thinking fields.

In the previous two chapters, we see Miranda re-narrate the history surrounding California Mission Indians in order to assert an indigenous understanding of sovereignty in connection to the land. While Miranda’s decoloniality inherently produces a future, Erdrich’s text focuses more directly on leaving knowledge for future relatives, like her daughter Kiizhikok, but also for non-Native audiences. According to Native scholar Lisa Brooks, “The recovery of indigenous voices and indigenous knowledge is instrumental not only to the adaptation and survival of Native nations but to a deeper and more complex engagement with the past, present, and future landscape of America, however we might define it” (xxix). By showing indigenous, Ojibwe knowledge as continuous and relevant, Erdrich opens a space for Native sovereignty in knowledge-making practices that demonstrates the importance of indigeneity for the future “landscape of America.”

At the same time, Erdrich adds to a conversation of “authenticity” that, in dominant discourses, has too often focused on culture that is closest to “precontact” as being the most “authentic.” However, Brooks, in conversation with Maureen Konkle, insists that this type of “authenticity” is based on a temporal understanding of history that limits identity to constraints of time rather than place.21 As a result, dominant U.S. nationalistic discourses are able to look at Native “histories” and position indigenous peoples in the past without acknowledging continuous knowledge or cultural survivance. Instead, authentic indigeneity “like anything that is alive and ‘engaged,’ must grow and change, must take its own course” (Brooks xxxi). More recently in

21 Whereas Western religions and paradigms emphasize the importance of time and “when things happened,” indigenous epistemologies value land and place as having higher meaning (Vine Deloria Jr. qtd. in Grande).
Native studies, critics like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Robert Allen Warrior, Craig Womack, and Jace Weaver insist on “[examining] the traditional knowledge of particular tribes, the history of their struggle against colonialism, and above all the future integrity of Indian nations and the role of literature and intellectual production in that future” (Konkle 34). This understanding of Native literatures as ongoing is vital to recognizing the role of indigenous peoples in future practices of nationhood and sovereignty while decolonizing practices of knowledge and memory. Erdrich practices survivance through continuity by teaching Kiizhikok but also by extending this discussion to new non-Native audiences, thereby making visible what Konkle calls the “future integrity of Indian nations” (34). In addition, Erdrich aligns “past” knowledge with present and future work toward sovereignty, calling for ongoing practices of self-determination through indigenous ways of making knowledge and forming relationships.

As I explored in the second chapter, according to scholars like Scott Richard Lyons sovereignty is a holistic preservation of native peoples involving both “the power to self-govern and the affirmation of peoplehood” (456). This view of sovereignty shifts the role of hierarchical power to a discourse about the right of Native peoples to communally self-define and determine what makes up “authentic” indigeneity. These definitions are not confined to the past but instead insist on a continuing future; Lyons calls the pursuit of sovereignty “an attempt to revive not our past, but our possibilities” (449). In this sense, sovereignty works beyond western ways of understanding historical treaties and ownership of land and instead extends into future knowledge-making practices and ways of indigenous self-definition. In order for these terms of sovereignty to work in a Euro-American, democratic culture, indigenous practices of knowledge
must be understood and allowed to make new knowledge.\footnote{Some may see this work as one of “validation.” However, one of the problems Native studies deals with is that Western theory has forced indigenous knowledge to be “proved,” not dissimilar from proof of belonging to a land base that political recognition requires of Native tribes. Part of the work of decolonization is to deconstruct those calls for “proof” and replace them with indigenous sovereignty and knowledge that has existed long before and during colonization and will continue to do so.} While this is perhaps a simplistic understanding of a very complex issue, we can see authors like Erdrich producing work that begins to make visible indigenous knowledge-making practices in a Eurocentric paradigm, which in turn can work toward a renewed definition of sovereignty. Someone like Erdrich begins to revive the possibilities of indigenous knowledge by reaching a non-Native audience with ongoing Native practices of memory and connection to land.

In order to enact this understanding of sovereignty, non-Native people and scholars will also need to learn about and acknowledge indigenous practices of knowledge-making and self-definition. According to an indigenist research paradigm as described by Shawn Wilson, relationships are key to an indigenous perspective of the world. In a sense, Erdrich is extending to and building a relationship with a non-Native readership in order to open up a space for indigenous knowledge for a wider audience of literature. Erdrich uses her own identity to invite the reader to this space as she comes from both German and Ojibwe ancestry. In fact, her background in both cultures complicates Erdrich’s own concepts of indigenous practices, such as that of laying tobacco for the spirits of places she will visit:

There was a time when I wondered—do I really believe all of this? I’m half German. Rational! Does this make any sense? After a while such questions stopped mattering. Believing or not believing, it was all the same. I found myself compelled to behave
toward the world as if it contained sentient spiritual beings. The question whether or not they actually existed became irrelevant. (12)23

Her mixed heritage allows Erdrich the perfect position from which to work toward decoloniality that includes the non-Native scholar. Erdrich acknowledges ingrained paradigms and “Western” ways of thinking but also opens up space to imagine a new, decolonial way that includes indigeneity.

In this way of inviting the non-Native reader, Erdrich differs slightly from Miranda in the work of decoloniality that takes place. While Erdrich still does some work of acknowledging and healing from colonization, her practice of decolonization looks toward a future work with non-Native peoples to indigenize ways of making and remembering knowledge. As Erdrich takes her readers “through the land of her ancestors,” she demonstrates ways of making and remembering indigenous knowledge through such forms as rock paintings, relationships to the land, personal memory, and in written books. In these varying forms of knowledge is a theme of Ojibwe survivance through continued cultural practices that honor the history of traditions. At the same time, Erdrich looks toward a future of continued knowledge practices that both use and build on those held by the ancestors and the land. I demonstrate in the sections that follow the ways in which Erdrich shows indigenous knowledge-making as an ongoing practice that continually opens avenues for understanding sovereignty and indigeneity through connection to the land, history, the future, and other relationships.

23 As Erdrich explains, the practice of laying tobacco is for the spirits who sustain Ojibwe life. She says, “Tobaccos offerings are made before every important request, to spirits or to other humans… Perhaps spirits like tobacco because they like the fragrance of its smoke, or because people like tobacco and they appreciate thoughtfulness” (11).
Continuity of the rock paintings:

Throughout her narrative, Erdrich asks the question: “Books. Why?” In this question Erdrich wonders about the connection between her fascinations with books and the islands as texts. At one point she poses one possible answer: “So we can talk to [the reader] even though we are dead. Here we are, the writer and I, regarding each other” (43). In this case, Erdrich regards a figure painted on a rock and deciphers its meaning for Ojibwe people both past and present. She offers an interpretation for her non-Native reader, describing the horned figure and the cross that it holds as “probably [signifying] the degree that the painter had reached in the hierarchy of knowledge that composes the formal structure of the Ojibwe religion, the Midewiwin” (44). At the same time as she acquaints the reader with Ojibwe religious practices, Erdrich deconstructs and discredits the Christian interpretation that might condemn the figure as a “devil” throwing away the Christian cross in an act of infidel defiance (43). By re-articulating the spiritual notion of the figure in Ojibwe terms, Erdrich “reads” the painting for her audience and credits it with ongoing significance. She is able to know the author of the painting by viewing it and can produce an ongoing story about spiritual communication in Ojibwe culture.

This same painting also allows Erdrich to open space for a non-Native audience to better understand the importance of place in Ojibwe spiritual practice:

When this rock was painted on a cliff, the water below was not a channel but a small lake that probably flooded periodically, allowing fish to exit and enter. Perhaps it was a camping or a teaching place, or possibly even a productive wild rice bed. Very likely it was a place where the Mide lodge was built… The painter may have been a Mide teacher, eager to leave instructions and to tell people about the activities that took place here. (44, 45)
By speculating about the meaning of this place, Erdrich stories the importance of spirituality and the land (or lake). The fish (sturgeon) and wild rice are both vital to Ojibwe lifeways in this region, and she includes these beings in her speculations about the image’s importance. Erdrich reads spiritual practices in the painting and is able to assume the possible presence of a spiritual Mide lodge and spiritual practices taking place here. She also ties those spiritual practices to lifeways that come from the land by interpreting spirituality alongside the possible presence of sturgeon and/or wild rice. Erdrich demonstrates her theory of living Ojibwe culture as she is able to “read” the painting and find significance in its interpretation. At the same time, she extends that interpretation to a non-Native reader to highlight this place as a living space of Ojibwe culture and spiritual practice. Erdrich’s “reading” of the “text” is different from a Western literary reading because she includes emotional, bodily, and ancestral knowledges in her understanding of what the paintings are saying. She sees the rocks as fluid, continuous texts rather than playing into dominant discourses that would relegate specific native history to historical context and “past” practices. She finds significance in an ancient painting that stories lifeways of the Ojibwe people as continual. Her own spiritual (re)connection to this painting and this place is not “less-than” because she is “modern” but instead allows her to continue ancestral memory through the rock as a living “text” that is also more than text because it is a part of land, history, memory, and knowledge.

Erdrich closes this section, “The Horned Man,” by extending her knowledge of the painting to contemporary and future lifeways. She interprets the line between the figure and the bear in the painting as a connection to the sky world. She calls the line a “sign of power and

24 A Mide lodge is where Ojibwe spiritual practices would be centered, including the Midewiwin, or the Grand Medicine teachings, that “formed the moral and social center of the community” and “made sense of the beauties and hardships of Ojibwe existence” (Erdrich 26, 28).
communication...sound, speech, song.” She then tells her reader the significance of the lines in Ojibwe art and spiritual practice:

The lines drawn between things in Ojibwe pictographs are extremely important, for they express relationships, usually between a human and a supernatural being. Wavy lines are most impressive, for they signify direct visionary information, talk from spirit to spirit.

(45)

Erdrich connects these meanings to contemporary Ojibwe artists like Joe Geshick, Blake Debassige, and Norval Morrisseau, saying that “the line is still used to signify spiritual interaction” (45). In highlighting these specific decolonizing artists, Erdrich extends the meaning of the ancient rock painting to a continued practice of spirituality in living native art. She says, “Contemporary native art is not just influenced by the conventions invented by the rock painters, it is a continuation, evidence of the vitality of Ojibwe art” (45). In this statement, Erdrich very clearly asserts Ojibwe art and spirituality as a continued practice, not as reflecting history but as ongoing story in itself. While such knowledge might seem “natural” to indigenous peoples, she opens this continuance to a non-Native audience as well in order to demonstrate the importance of indigeneity in contemporary ways of life. This continued representation is an act of survivance as Erdrich, like Miranda, resists the narrative that disappears Native peoples to assert not only the survival of personhood but of spiritual practices and lifeways that continue to be connected to land and ancestral knowledge. By referencing other artists, she also shows her audience that spiritual practice remains relevant to new knowledge and decolonial activism. As Vizenor says in his description of survivance, telling the stories is about moving beyond narratives of “victimry” or “tragedy” to instead enact ongoing narratives of everyday practices that continue indigenous lifeways. Erdrich challenges non-Native audiences to question tragic paradigms and instead to
see the indigeneity that continues to survive and grow. Where Miranda insists on this survivance for Native peoples, Erdrich makes it visible to non-Native audiences to assert indigenous presence and subjeucthood.

There are other paintings, too, that point to the survival tactics of the past and a future of decolonial work. One painting that Erdrich describes is of the sturgeon, the fish she calls “the buffalo of the Ojibwe” (63). These fish were a way of life for the Ojibwe until overfishing by non-Native people decimated the population.25 Erdrich describes an ancient ceremony that kept the fish thriving, a ceremony that involves mixing the eggs and sperm of the fish with an eagle feather to repopulate the lakes and continue this life-giving species. Now, a conservation program in Winnebago Lake, Wisconsin seeks to do something similar by restricting fishing and looking for stocks to repopulate other lakes (63, 64). In describing these two processes, Erdrich draws an obvious parallel between ancient indigenous practices and “new” practices of conservation, demonstrating how Ojibwe ceremonies and lifeways contribute to the maintenance of place and productivity.

The specific sturgeon painting that Erdrich points to indicates “a divining tent, a place where Ojibwe people have always gone to learn the wishes of the spirits and to gain comfort from their teachings” (64). In this place, Erdrich seems to make her own wish: “Someday perhaps Kiizhikok’s [Erdrich’s daughter] children will find the sturgeon vaulting from the water around Big Island a common sight” (64). In this hope, Erdrich assumes the survivance of her future relatives and their connection to this same place and its continuing lifeways. The painting and the history of the sturgeon will remain meaningful to the Ojibwe people and could even

25 Erdrich specifically attributes over-fishing to white people here; however, other scholars, such as David Treuer have also implicated Native people in not protecting specie populations such as the Walleye Pike in Red Lake, Wisconsin.
contribute to the growing restoration of indigenous practices through decolonial activism and reform.

Erdrich demonstrates this hope for continued survivance and indigeneity throughout her journey through the Lake of the Woods as she lays tobacco as an offering, thanking ancestors for their knowledge but also looking towards continued survivance. When Erdrich is getting ready to leave the islands and continue the second leg of her trip, she becomes aware of something important:

I am almost asleep when I realize that I have seen all that is depicted in the first rock painting, the one that I marveled over, the one that glowed from the rock in all of its complexity. I saw the wild rice, which is the spirit of the wild rice, I saw the bear, I saw the deer, and I saw the name. (66)

Erdrich leaves an offering of food and a ribbon shirt with this rock painting, and after her leave-taking, she says that she feels a “confusing nostalgia” or a “growing love” (66). She understands this love as coming through her baby’s namesake coming from this place but also her own ancestors who lived here generations ago. She goes on to describe some of her Ojibwe ancestry and their names, including Baupayakiingikwe, Striped Earth Woman, and Kwasenchiwin, Acts like A Boy. Erdrich places herself and her daughter in this line of women:

I can’t help but imagine that these two women, whose names my mother and sister have searched out of old tribal histories, walked where I’ve walked, saw what I’ve seen, perhaps traced these rock paintings. Perhaps even painted them. (67)

Erdrich connects herself to her ancestors through reading the rock paintings and thereby becoming more intimately familiar with the land, showing a relationship that continues through the knowledge held in the rock paintings and in her relatives. By also introducing her daughter to
this place, Erdrich hopes for continued decolonial re-connection to the rock paintings, validating them as survivance stories of knowledge-making: “So we can talk to you even though we are dead. Here we are, the writer and I, regarding each other” (43). Erdrich can regard her own ancestors through these rock paintings, and she leaves her own legacy of writing and theory-making through story for her daughters to enact similar continuance.

**Language as Relationality and Knowledge-making:**

Before exploring any specific books or islands, Erdrich offers her reader the Ojibwemowin, or Anishinaabemowin, word for books: “mazina’iganan. The word for “rock paintings” is “mazinapikiniganan” (2). Erdrich explains that the root “mazin” is “the root for dozens of words all concerned with made images and with the substances upon which the images are put, mainly paper and screens” (2, 3). Ojibwemowin words for television, movies, and photographs also include this root word. By introducing her reader to the Ojibwe language, Erdrich opens a space for both Native and non-Native audiences to see the importance of language in connection with indigenous land, relationships, and knowledge. In the root “mazin” we see that the written or depicted language is not a “new” thing in Ojibwe knowledge but rather something that has existed for millennia in a number of forms that all do essentially similar things in keeping and making knowledge. As she and other activists work to recover and continue Ojibwemowin, Erdrich demonstrates this aspect of culture as living practice that remains important in connecting Ojibwe people to each other and to the land.

In a section of her book titled “Ojibwemowin,” Erdrich carefully opens up her language and her own experience with it to her reader, highlighting two important aspects: Ojibwemowin as relational, and Ojibwemowin as ongoing. As she first encounters the language and practices it for herself, she begins by listening to recorded tapes. However, she soon tires of the tapes and
“[longs] for real community” (69). She explains the difficulty in learning Ojibwemowin as being in the “manifold use of verbs” in a “language of action” difficult to learn on one’s own (69). Erdrich relates the active nature of the language to the cultural practice of Ojibwe people who would often move around, not being weighed down by nouns, or things. She calls Ojibwemowin “a language of human relationships,” emphasizing a community aspect:

Two-thirds of the words are verbs, and for each verb, there are countless forms. This sounds impossible, until you realize that the verb forms not only have to do with the relationships among the people conducting the action, but the precise way the action is conducted and even under what physical conditions. (69)

The action in Ojibwemowin demonstrates it as a language of living relationships that are constantly forming and changing. Perhaps this movement within language is what has allowed it to survive through periods of assimilation and genocide. By understanding Ojibwemowin as part of ongoing and active relationships, Erdrich connects practice to her own current knowledge, again demonstrating Ojibwe survivance and movement into decolonial work.

Tobasonakwut, the father of Erdrich’s youngest daughter and her guide in the Lake of the Woods, is a fluent speaker of Ojibwemowin, in spite of attempts by Catholic priests to literally beat the language out of him during the boarding school years. Erdrich says that “Tobasonakwut spoke no English when he first went to school and although he now speaks [English] like an Ivy League professor if he wants to, he stubbornly kept his Ojibwemowin” (70). According to Erdrich, when Tobasonakwut speaks of his love for the language he “clutches his heart, as if the language is lodged there” (70). This love for language reflects, in some ways, the reading of the rock paintings as ongoing spiritual practices:
To native speakers like Tobasonakwut, the language is a deeply loved entity. A spirit or an originating genius belongs to each word. Before attempting to speak this language, students petition these spirits with gifts of cloth, tobacco, and food. ...to engage in the language is to engage the spirit of the words. And the words are everything around us, and all that we are, learning Ojibwemowin is a lifetime pursuit that might be described as living a religion. (73, 74)

Seeing language as an animate being allows Erdrich to demonstrate the importance of remembering and knowing Ojibwemowin in order to connect to history as well as ongoing relationships. Like the rock paintings, understanding this Ojibwe lifeway helps Erdrich to relate more deeply to her own ancestors while also associating with a living people. Language is survivance because it is a spiritual and social practice that has resisted assimilation and not only continues but thrives. By sharing her own relationship to the language with her non-Native readers, Erdrich reveals an important practice that continues to exist and help Ojibwe people to define themselves within the terms of their own history and knowledge practices.

Also like the rock-paintings, the language is intimately tied to indigenous land and lifeways. While Ojibwemowin is largely made of verbs, the nouns that do exist are not designated by gender but by animate or inanimate, “though what is alive and dead doesn’t correspond at all to what an English speaker might imagine” (Erdrich 72). Erdrich offers the example of the word for stone, asin, as animate. She says the noun is designated as such because of Ojibwe religious narratives that say the world’s preexistence was a conversation between stones, and people still thank the stones in healing practices as grandmothers and grandfathers (72). These practices and this word changed Erdrich’s entire perspective on stones and their relationship to life and existence. Similarly to the rock paintings, language designates Ojibwe
relationships to land and the importance of land to spiritual practice. The paintings, the language, the land: none of them can be separated from an Ojibwe worldview and all contribute to relationships that make up indigenous identity and knowledge. Instead of a language that only translates thought, Ojibwe is a living being and animate piece of indigenous lifeways. Looking at Ojibwemowin and language restoration practices challenges non-Native readers and academics to reconsider the role of language in making not only knowledge but also identity and arguments for sovereignty.

Because of the language’s intimate connection to the land, Erdrich suggests that every person living in this space, indigenous or non-indigenous, should have at least some knowledge of Ojibwemowin:

Ojibwemowin is one of the few surviving languages that evolved to the present here in North America. For an American writer, it seems crucial to at least have a passing familiarity with the language, which is adapted to the land as no other language can possibly be. (71)

In this statement, Erdrich again opens space for her non-Native audience and invites their participation in knowing Ojibwe history and connecting to the land that they inhabit. By interacting with indigenous space through the language, the non-Native reader is enabled to see knowledge as a spiritual practice of survivance and relationship. Knowing the language is vital to making an individual connection to the land that indigenous peoples have continually inhabited. Erdrich suggests that this language of people who were here long before European settlers remains relevant to a relationship with space and place:

Its philosophy is bound up in northern earth, lakes, rivers, forests, and plains. Its origins pertain to the animals and their particular habits, to the shades of meaning in the very
placement of stones. Many of the names and songs associated with these places were
revealed to people in dreams and songs—it is a language that most directly reflects a
human involvement with the spirit of the land itself. (71)

Like the rock paintings, the language indicates a history with land and continues that relationship
into the present and the future. Rather than the progression of language moving past time,
Ojibwemowin takes into account the history of indigeneity and connections to place that, in turn,
grow and inform language.

However, Ojibwemowin is not stagnant or vanishing due to its ancient connections to
land. On the contrary, the language consistently adapts to account for the introduction of new
concepts and things. Erdrich uses the example of the word wiindibaanens, or computer, which
literally translates to “little brain machine” (72). According to Erdrich, “the best speakers are the
most inventive, and come up with new words all of the time” (69). She indicates that since most
speakers today are bilingual, the language also includes many puns on both English and
Ojibwemowin, many of which comment on American habits and behavior (68). In fact, Erdrich’s
own desire to learn the language comes in part from a longing to understand the creative puns,
irony, and prayers that continue to come from and inform Ojibwemowin (68). This growth and
continuity in the language is an important show of not only relationality but also the vitality of
language as working toward the future. Language-renewal activists like Erdrich are renewing the
knowledge of language and then passing it on to future generations. They also maintain and learn
Ojibwemowin connections to the past are enacting decolonization and survivance by continuing
indigenous practices. In sharing this progression and some of the particulars of the language with
a non-Native audience, Erdrich also opens up a space for understanding Native lifeways that
hold continuous importance in relationships with land and cultural practice.
Indigenous Knowledge and Books:

As I explored in the previous chapter, indigenous definitions of sovereignty are about more than government and land ownership. Scholars like Scott Richard Lyons, Andrea Smith, Malea Powell and many others explore the meaning of sovereignty as native peoples’ right and ability to define what it means to be indigenous and how those definitions can allow Native peoples to self-determine cultural identity and political practice. As we have seen in chapter two, part of this process of self-determination comes from controlling the discourse of knowledge-making and the practice of indigeneity. Miranda explores indigenous ways of understanding history and connections to the land in order to demonstrate theories of belonging and survivance to Native peoples. Erdrich does similar things with land and Native audiences, but she also speaks to ways of remembering and making knowledge through the practice of record-keeping and books. By aligning the island rock paintings with a more “Western” knowledge of paper books, Erdrich asserts indigenous ways of knowledge-making and knowledge-keeping as being just as important (and visible) as those accepted by a non-Native audience. Erdrich does not diminish her love for books but instead discusses them as a natural progression from indigenous ways of keeping knowledge through practices of orality, rock paintings, ancestral memory, birchbark-biting, land, etc. By indicating similar spiritual or emotional connections to the islands and to books, Erdrich weaves together indigenous and “Western” practices of knowledge to demonstrate to a non-Native audience the sovereignty of indigenous ways of knowing, remembering, and communicating.

After taking leave of Tobasonakwut, Erdrich returns to Minnesota to visit another island on Rainy Lake and rendezvous with the Lac Court Oreilles Ojibwe Language Society. On this island are housed thousands of books that belonged to Ernest Oberholtzer, 19th century scholar
and friend to the Ojibwe people who explored and mapped much of Ojibwe country (86, 87). On this island, Erdrich can experience the relationship to language that she desires as she works in community with others working to learn Ojibwemowin in an act of decolonial restoration. In this context, Erdrich experiences feelings of home and belonging. She says that “Because Ernest Oberholtzer was a close friend to the Ojibwe, the [Oberholtzer] foundation honors that relationship by allowing teachers and serious students of the language, as well as one or two Ojibwe writers, to visit on retreats” (86). The work of language-restoration in this place that belonged to an ally of Ojibwe people creates a sort of energy that Erdrich calls “Oberholtzerian—“a combination of erudition, conservationism, nativism, and exuberant eccentricity” (86). She credits this energy to the mixing of German and Ojibwe people, which reminds of her own European and Native family heritage (86). In describing place in this way, Erdrich invites a non-Native audience to be open to the idea of Ojibwe and Euro-American peoples working alongside each other to continue and produce knowledge.

Erdrich moves into the next section with a description of Ernest Oberholtzer and his work, describing some of his efforts toward ecological conservation and political protection of Ojibwe lands. By inhabiting space with the Ojibwe, Oberholtzer demonstrates an allied relationship that, rather than exploiting Native peoples, comes alongside to acknowledge their right of sovereign belonging. In sharing this relationship with Oberholtzer as a friend to the Ojibwe, Erdrich allows a non-Native audience to also inhabit the space. Where we see Miranda asserting a historical connection to land and mourning the fact that the land now either “belongs” to the federal government or is settled and developed, Erdrich is looking toward a different kind of decolonization. In Erdrich’s connection to land, the indigenous inhabitants teach preservation
and share space, provided the non-Native inhabitants are also respectful of Native land, knowledge, and sovereignty.

By storying Oberholtzer’s relationship to the Ojibwe land and people before describing her love for the books, Erdrich is already melding together Native and non-Native cultures and ways of knowing to show a decolonial cross-pollination of knowledge-making and connection to land. Instead of colonizing information, Oberholtzer employs Ojibwe awareness of space to map the land and create new ways of knowing and remembering the space without discounting existing knowledge. Ancestral or indigenous knowledge practices do not discount continued knowledge-making, just as survivance does not discount the past. Human desire for and use of knowledge becomes decolonial in the way that Erdrich employs both historical and present, Native and non-Native, practices of memory and knowing. Literature is not consigned to the past or even just to the written word but is both an old and new practice in its continuous knowledge.

In a similar way, Erdrich begins to describe her relationships to books on the island. She tells the reader the history of the island and her own affectionate relationship with it:

Mary [the caretaker] tells me that Ober had left no will regarding the island and his books and cabins, so that ten years passed while all of the legalese was sorted out. During those years, the books were alone. I brood on this. The books. Alone in the cold and through the humid summers, alone in the cabins for ten years as roofs collapsed, alone as squirrels invaded and dismantled eighteenth-century bindings to line their nests with rare pages. I am afflicted with such melancholy at the thought of the books all alone on the island that I have to walk back to Ober’s house, to nap with Kiizhikok, to settle my mind. This whole island, filled with books, and no one to care for them! (103)
Erdrich’s distress over the thought of books without the people to enjoy them reflects her reason for visiting the painted islands with Tobasonakwut. Books and rock paintings exist as important holders of knowledge only if there are people available to read them. Erdrich expects her reading audience to share a similar affection for books, therefore connecting the reader to the importance and living vitality of both indigenous and Western knowledge.

In a similar way, the rock paintings are living knowledge because there are living Ojibwe people to read their memories of history and tradition. Erdrich’s reaction to the books being alone echoes an episode on the Lake of the Woods when Tobasonakwut spots a man placing tobacco before a rock painting. Tobasonakwut chases down the man who made the offering to find that the man has come out of his way to visit the painting and acknowledge its importance: “This makes Tobasonakwut extremely happy, as do all the offerings that we will see as we visit the other paintings. It is evidence to him that the spiritual life of his people is in the process of recovery” (40). Just as books hold history and knowledge and memory, the rock paintings keep the knowledge and culture of Ojibwe ancestors. However, the life of this information, in some way, requires someone not only to read it but also to love it enough to find the knowledge continuously important. The love Erdrich holds for books and shares with her reader is the same love that Tobagnasuwuk has for the rock paintings and stories of the islands. All of the relationships to memory and knowing—the islands, the paintings, the ancestral memories, the bodily feelings, the language, the land—they all contribute to knowledge, and that knowledge is made out of love. Erdrich relates to books in a way that her reader has also felt, thereby encouraging decolonial practice in acknowledging other forms of remembered and continuous knowledge-making that invite relationality.
As Erdrich leaves Oberholtzer’s island, she reflects on what the books mean to his personal history: “Other than the actual writing, the books a person leaves behind reflect most accurately the cast of that person’s mind… For his assemblage does reflect his character, as the best collections do” (105). In observing that the collection of books reflects Oberholtzer’s own life and devotions, Erdrich echoes her statement about the painter of the horned figure: “As I stand before the painting, I come to believe that the horned figure is a self-portrait of the artist” (44). By drawing this parallel, Erdrich equates Ojibwe knowledge from the rock paintings to the books that she also loves. Indigenous and Western cultures are not viewed as mutually exclusive or hierarchical but rather both include ways of keeping memory that reflect history and look toward the future of knowledge-making and keeping.

**Conclusion:**

Throughout her text, Erdrich does not directly narrate connections between rock paintings and books as related to indigenous and “western” knowledge. Instead, she tells a story. This story is about her own intimacy with the land of her ancestors and passing that relationship to her daughter, who also comes from this place. As she stories her journey, Erdrich builds a theory of knowledge-making, but she does not name it as such. Instead, she allows the reader, Native or not, to draw connections on his or her own. She expects that a reader will share her love for books, and she then invites that audience to also read the land with her. While Erdrich is careful to acknowledge a past of colonialism and refuses to capitalize on her people’s most sacred traditions or spiritual practices, she opens up space for her audience to better understand certain indigenous lifeways in connection with land and perhaps unfamiliar ways of making and recording knowledge.
As I explored in the first chapter, storying is a vital practice for indigenous memory and invites relational knowing through things like ancestral knowledge and recognizing previously silenced voices of history. For Miranda, storying is an important practice that deconstructs and decolonizes historical narratives, replacing colonialist voices with those of indigenous relations who experienced missionization and its after-effects. Erdrich continues to use story to build theories of decoloniality but does so by narrating her own journey and looking toward the future of indigeneity continued through her daughters and better understood by a non-Native audience.
EPILOGUE: HOLDING SPACES

Decoloniality and the Native practice of storying are about creating spaces for re-vision and re-memory to challenge held paradigms of sovereignty and belonging. Miranda and Erdrich both use ancestral and individual memoir to open up spaces for making theory, re-membering identity, moving forward, defining indigeneity, and many other practices. It is important to note, however, that while they are opening spaces, both women are firmly rooted in theories and feelings of place. The stories we have here are both historical and forward-looking, but they are centered on the land that has produced the ancestors and the stories, which continue to contribute to the authors’ indigenous identities.

Neither Miranda nor Erdrich lives on what they deem the land of their ancestors, but their identities and feelings of belonging are still created by the land that formed the stories and the knowledge that make their individual and tribal identities. For myself, it is this insistence on place that opens the stories to whole realms of "space" in terms of re-membering and creating in an act of survivance. Because the stories come out of belonging to land, these two writers contribute to activist work of decoloniality as indigenous women affected but not defined by colonial actions and paradigms. Like the people, the stories and the land are deeply, intimately, violently affected by conquest and colonialism. However, there are aspects of the land, the people, and the stories that cannot and do not change.

This active insistence on survivance, survival and resistance, by Native artists, thinkers, and community members is what can and will alter fields like literary studies, provided we listen to the voices that are doing the important work of decolonization. Dian Million says in her essay “Felt Theory” that current conceptions of “trauma theory” call for participants to “draw upon the past in order to adjudicate present grievances” (268). Unfortunately, as she points out, colonial
history is anything but “past.” However, we see that Native theory-making can work to produce healing and decolonial movement into the future for Native peoples in social and political realms. Story produces personhood, intimately connected to land, which in turn leads to the important work of sovereignty. Million calls this theory of connection “felt action”: “actions informed by experience and analysis” (268). The feelings implicated in and provoked by storying are not just story or just theory. All of these things work together to produce active change and survivance, as indigenous peoples, particularly women, have done for generations and will continue to do.

Story is not just about sovereignty as a theme but can actively work to produce it. Miranda connects sovereignty land through memory as she shares indigenous ways of relating to place, forming and new theories of belonging through ancestral ways of knowing. She practices felt theory because the memory of place produces feelings that are valid forms of belonging. This is an important assertion for indigenous audiences to recognize as they are reminded and enabled to see ancestral relationships to land and stories about land as important memory-making practices that hold political value. While there is much work to be done to question Western notions of sovereignty, felt theory and Miranda’s storying hold potential for sovereignty rights in the western political sense in the meantime. Miranda’s tribe continues to seek federal recognition through connections to land bases, even if those connections are not necessarily through individual ownership but instead produced through ancestral memory and storying. Storying produces new theories of belonging and sovereignty that can produce political (decolonial) change in non-Native politics, but it also continues a social sovereignty by reminding indigenous peoples to hold and fight for their own definitions of nationhood and indigeneity.
Erdrich’s work toward sovereignty is also tied to knowledge-making practices that are connected to land. However, her storying extends to challenge colonially held notions of knowledge-keeping, particularly for non-Native readers. In reading the rock paintings of the islands, Erdrich asserts sovereignty in knowledge, asserting the rocks and land as active texts that keep memory just as books do. She also opens up space to non-Native readers to better understand this bond through some of the Ojibwe language, demonstrating its historical connection to the paintings as books and some ways in which it builds intimacy with the land. Furthermore, practices of language use and recovery demonstrate indigenous culture and practice as ongoing and vital to continued decoloniality. While Miranda’s decolonial work encourages indigenous peoples to use storying to maintain indigenous spaces for identity-building, Erdrich’s work invites non-Native allies into similar spaces to alter political and social paradigms.

It is my job here and in future work to also hold spaces for decolonial work while working toward decolonization of text and theory. Non-Native literary theorists, historians, and other scholars have a responsibility to question colonial ways of understanding knowledge and identity while recognizing indigenous activism toward renewed definitions of sovereignty. All forms of knowledge, political and social, must be carefully questioned to deconstruct colonial paradigms that do not allow for indigenous practices of theory, memory, and knowledge-making but instead consigns Native “culture” to the past. Only by engaging living indigenous peoples in conversations about theory and practice with respect and humility can we hope to honor the spaces we inhabit and work toward positive decolonial change.
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