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From Place to Territories and Back Again: Centering Storied Land in the discussion of Indigenous Nation-building

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Abstract

This article explores the geopolitical importance of the word “land” to the field of Indigenous studies. Rather than simply take the word “land” as a given and natural element of the world around us, in this article I suggest a closer interrogation of the multiple social and geopolitical meanings that make land a key concept in indigenous political struggle. The processes of colonialism and neo-colonialism resulted in abstracting land as part of making nations that are recognized by the liberal settler nation-states. How have concepts of land changed in this process? How do we make Indigenous spaces that are not based on abstracting land and Indigenous bodies into state spaces, while maintaining political vitality? How are the lived realities of Indigenous peoples impacted by concepts of borders and territories that support the power of the nation-state? I draw on the narrative dimensions of land in the work of Indigenous writers in order to intercede in limiting the meanings of land to those mapped by the state.

Land is a word with much currency often utilized by Native American, First Nations, Pacific Islanders, and Aboriginal scholars to invoke responsibility, rights, sovereignty, and belonging. From the physical homelands of Indigenous peoples stem a production of our social, economical, and political relationships to our community, other tribal Nations, and nation-states. While many keywords in Indigenous Studies could be linked to other minority cultures and statuses, land is what is uniquely pivotal to tribal identity and survivance. In fact, maintaining relationships to the land is at the heart of indigenous peoples struggles. Rather than assume the meaning of this word, in this essay I will ask the following questions which move us beyond an affiliation with land and help move us to arguments with political heft: What do we mean when we talk of land? In what circumstances is the word evoked? When it is used what is it supposed to stand in for? What ideological work does it do? The word land is often conflated in Indigenous studies to mean landscape, place, territory, home, or all or some of these simultaneously. Land in this sense, carries a very important and heavy workload. As such, unpacking and thinking about land, means to understand the physical in relation to the concepts of place, territory, and home, concepts given significant meaning through language. As a literary scholar, I will be examining land as a storied site of human interaction and hope to (re)open its meaning beyond territory, property, or location while retaining its political vitality.

“Land” is a salient term and concept that can weave people together around common understandings and experiences. Land within Indigenous Studies carries a currency beyond a mere reflection of physical landscape or specific location, commonly referred to as the “geographers” concept of space. Rather, Indigenous scholars often invoke land as place. Yi-Fu Tuan’s (1974, 236) understanding of place as having “a history and meaning” is important in this discussion of land and moves us further toward Indigenous autonomy: “Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning.”

In Indigenous Studies we cannot focus enough on place and the processes of making land meaningful. Yes, there is recognition of the important spiritual role, the necessity to protect land from environmental devastation, and a legal narration of its borders and boundaries, but too often we overlook the fundamental role of place making in moving toward cultural sovereignty. N. Scott Momaday (1993, 358) in his landmark essay remarks on the power of language:

"I am interested in the way a man looks at a landscape and takes possession of it in his blood and brain. For this happens, I am certain, in the ordinary motion of life. None of us lives apart from the land entirely; such an isolation is unimaginable." We do not act upon a stagnant landscape, but instead are part of it. Place is created in the process of remembering and telling stories and the ability for the receiver to understand the meanings of place encapsulated in language. Key to both the spiritual and political "aspirations" of Indigenous people are the stories and imaginative acts that are dynamic interfaces, rather than methods of claiming land as a stagnant location."

I begin with land as place because that is at the heart of Indigenous identity, longing, and belonging. Indigenous peoples make place by relating both personal and communal experiences and histories to certain locations and landscapes—maintaining these spatial relationships is one of the most important components of identity. Indigenous Nations claim land through a discursive communal sharing and land is not only given meaning through consensus of claiming territory, but also through narrative practices. It is invested in meaning and identity or identities. Michel Foucault's (1980, 70) comment that scholars largely conceive of space as "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical" is a standard that Indigenous scholars should avoid at all costs. Settler colonialism demands a careful vigilance of land, as with land dispossession the recognition of our personhood would also be denied "under a system of property rights in land" which "rendered their [Native Americans] property rights invisible and justified conquest" (Harris 1993). Denunciation of Indigenous land claims, and I submit Indigenous personhood, under these laws "embedded the fact of white privilege into the very definition of property, marking another stage into the evolution of the property interest in whiteness. Possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for property—was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites" (Harris 1993). The stories and relationship to land that precede settler colonist were subjugated to foreign legal discourses. Turning to cultural geographers who seek to discharge the notion of stagnant or normative colonial space is an important step in beginning the process of decolonizing space in settler states. Storytellers, in all informal and formal forms, make space come alive by imparting a knowledge that travels and connects to other knowledge systems. My aim in this essay is to emphasize how the use of land is a resistance to a conception of fixed space; Indigenous artists, storytellers, word warriors, elders, youth, medicine men and women, and scholars utilize the word land differently with vital and various meanings. With the overlapping roles many Indigenous peoples' undertake, land is also deployed strategically. Deconstructing the discourse of property and reformulating the political vitality of a storied land means reaching back across generations, critically examining our use of the word land in the present, and reaching forward to create a healthier relationship for future generations.

The dialectical of stories in the past and present break from the uni-directional, progressive narrative found in the narratives of manifest destiny. Indigenous conceptions of land are literally and figuratively the placeholder that moves through time and situates Indigenous knowledges. Conceiving of space as a node, rather than linear time construct marked by supposed shifting ownerships, is a powerful mechanism in resisting imperial geographies that order time and space in hierarchies that erase and bury Indigenous connections to place and anesthetizes settler-colonial histories. Indigenous scholars must continue to think of space or the function of land as more than a site *upon* which humans make history or as a location that accumulates history. For Foucault (1986, 22) history holds such power because of "its themes of development and suspension, of crisis and cycles, themes of ever-accumulating past". Unfortunately, the need for Indigenous Nations to legitimate land claims in a Western court system creates a focus on "accumula[tions]" of past rather than a focus on a living land that is imagined and held in Indigenous philosophies. In other words, land claims argue from a place of precedence and must "prove" or legitimate the length of our occupation *on* the land, rather than the importance of land *to* us. While this is a strategic move for indigenous peoples, it is imperative not to be caught in this statist ideology.

There are many examples of the ways in which Indigenous people make place through stories. Relationships between land and people are complex and nuanced and shaped from our personal interactions with our environment as well as through collected communal memories. Recent community projects have focused on methods of indigenous mapping that relate a storied land (Fair 1997). These maps serve multiple functions: they teach the future generations about their peoples intimate relationship

to the land, they act as a mnemonic device in which a past story, memory, or communal memories are recalled, and they are important to political processes. The importance of naming the land from a tribal collective memory is one of the most important political and social tools to tie people together in a shared story. Land in this moment is living and layered memory.

Experiences of space become expressions of self, and, through the shared experience of naming, connections to others are formed. Keith Basso's landmark work, *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996), acknowledges the convergence of time/space in his study of the Western Apache. For the Western Apache, a name has the ability to evoke images that connect individuals to the past. All places have voices that keep the landscape firmly in the realm of the symbolic as well as the real, through the stories it recalls. The land acts as mnemonic device in many ways, by being the site of stories, which create cohesive understandings of longing and belonging. As Basso (1996, 107), working with Heidegger's concept of dwelling, states:

Places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become. And that is not all. Place-based thoughts about the self lead commonly to thoughts of other things—other places, other people, other times, whole networks of associations that ramify unaccountably within the expanding spheres of awareness that they themselves engender. The experience of sensing places, then, is thus both thoroughly reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic.

The meaning that the term land evokes, then, are more “dynamic” than the meanings conveyed through contemporary political boundaries. Everywhere in the Americas, New Zealand, and Australia there is an overlap with indigenous space or with those who learned to live in place for thousands of years. For, “even in total stillness, places may seem to speak” (Basso 1996, 107-108).

Yet, what do we hear and how do we begin to listen through a barrage of geopolitical tactics set up to erase those very voices? Basso fails to address how colonial spatial restructuring of land through colonial, imperial, and neocolonial policies have affected these specific sets of relationships. Aboriginal scholar Irene Watson is acutely aware of this spatial restructuring and in a series of questioning the settled and unsettled spaces of Australia asks “Are we free to roam?” and if so, “Do I remain the unsettled native, left to unsettle the settled spaces of empire? (Watson 2007, 15). By intimately binding together the figurative roaming of the mind with that of roaming the literal land, and unsettled bodies with unsettled outcomes of empire—Watson takes back possession of her indigenous personhood and looks “beyond the limited horizon”. The inability to bind land to settler societies or expunge Indigenous sense of place is the anxiety producing thorn in the side of nation-states. Through the intimacy of tellings and retellings, whether it be through indigenous languages or reinvention of the enemy's language (Harjo and Bird 1997), the identities of these places are formed and its translation of experience into a public sphere generates indigenous community belonging and holds back settling transgressors.

Topophilia, or “the affective bond between people and place” (Tuan 1974b, 4) discussed above is one of the more positive functions and understanding of land. However, we also must deal with imperial geographies that order and organize land through mapping and stories of erasure. James Thomas Stevens' (Mohawk) contemporary poem (*dis*)*Orient*, poignantly reminds us “How quickly we prescribe/ the shape of all things” (2005, 4). Throughout this book length poem, he plays with the early voices of colonization, often quoting passages from the noted documents of the *Jesuit Relations*. For generations, scholars have employed this source to gain an understanding of the early Americas, yet what it seeks to do is map the lands around them. Residing within in the text is feeling of deep alienation as the priest struggle to make meaning of this indigenous world. Yet, as Stevens proceeds throughout the poem we are all implicated in the prescribing of land, and bodies onto the land. Language “shape[s]” the meaning of physical space as well as our interaction with it, and in doing so has material effects. The narrative processes that “prescribe” meaning to land stem from a multitude of historical sources and Stevens' poem begins to address possibilities in dismantling the prescribed colonial geographies rooted in European metaphors of crosses, distances, and separation. He writes of the image of the world created through language, “Each image projected/ through my experience of you,/ with you,/ bounced off your bias and/ tender aesthetic” (2005, 14). The denigration of indigenous culture to inferior status by the “tender aesthetic[s]” of settler colonist is used to justify dispossession and conquest of indigenous bodies and land in the language of the law (Harris 1993).

Prescribing the shape of land in colonial history was largely done with intent to claim land and make it

readable as property; colonial landscaping is concerned with creating familiar environments. This perhaps, is why it is one of the key words in Indigenous scholarship or any scholarship on indigenous peoples. Necessary to decolonization is reclaiming land physically and ideologically. Property, as has been argued by Indigenous scholars and their allies, is distinctly a European notion that locks together labor, land, and conquest. John Locke's (1690) work on the connection between labour and land as the two main components of property is particularly explored in Indigenous Studies. Without labour to tame the land, it is closely assigned the designation as nature or wilderness. As such, property is not just a material, but also constructed through social relationships.

What has often been overlooked is the influence of discourses of property and territory in the imagining of Indigenous peoples that continues today. Stevens' poem plays with Edward Said's (1979,1-5) concept of Orientalism, or his founding work with the discourses of colonialism: "a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'" Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poet, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on. . . . the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient... despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient". Stevens uses Said's important intervention to comment on the priests' propensity to mark or name the Indigenous based on a different value system and to undo the processes by which Settlers have come to "know" and "claim" the Americas. The dispossession of land is linked to the violence done to indigenous bodies. In the following stanzas Stevens (2005, 2) disorients the reader, both through poetic structure and by revealing resistance to a "prescribe[ed]" "plan":

Your desire
to know periphery,
the jagged coast
of your container.

Mapped by echo and story.
A cry returned by crosses
along the strand
does not imply acceptance
of your plan, your shape.

Echo, mirror, story.
Each bent to serve.
Do not listen to me
But yourself listening to me.

The inability to see past a familiar worldview closed down possibilities of hearing the voices of Indigenous people or the possibilities land has to offer. The early discovery discourses continue to the present day to shape understandings of land and its function in relationship to communities. As Indigenous scholars, it is important to unbury the source of these "tales, all error and conjecture reflected" and recognize the images as illusions. Our representations of land and socio-scapes that are produced as a result inform everyday realities, yet within tribally situated stories the possibilities for change abound. It is narrative that brings into being meanings around the concept of land and it is the meanings we choose to believe that effect change communally and individually.

In addressing colonial constructions of space it is necessary to address the notion of property and territory not just as material places, but also as discursive constructions. Former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, Wilma Mankiller, speaks to devastating Indian policy that led to the fragmentation of her people:

What happened to us at the turn of the century with the loss of land, when our land was divided out in individual allotments, had a profound irreversible effect on our people, more profound than the closing of schools or courthouses or anything. When we *stopped viewing land ownership in common and viewing ourselves in relation to owning the land in common*, it profoundly altered our sense of community and our

social structure. And that had a tremendous impact on our people and we can never go back. [Emphasis mine] (Bordeau et al., 1994)

Mankiller may be speaking primarily of the Cherokee Nation but the experience of breaking up communal lands continues unabated in white settler nations such as Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia. In South America, Central America, and Mexico, Native land is also always in danger of theft by empires and nation-states that seek to subjugate indigenous bodies and their land to colonial rule. The intimate link between racial discourses and colonial discourses reveals itself in the dispossession and “desire” of indigenous land.

The romanticism of the lands in these “New Worlds” were enveloped in the reading of the Indigenous body as, Tracey Bunda (Geonpul and Waka Waka) states, “breeder of womba children, easy sexual territory and unworthy space” (Bunda 2007, 81); these were the bodies and generations that needed to be contained, erased, and annihilated from the land. The colonizer was “Aware of the empirical/and angered by the infidels, who blur all distinction/between actual, lived space and imaginary, idealized space” (Stevens 2005). The poem accentuates the “lived” and “imaginary” as connected by setting them off through commas, whereas the “actual” and “idealized” exist apart. The resiliency to (dis)orient is crucial to Indigenous scholarship on land. Stevens follows his distinction by pointing towards the political implications of such positioning: “Linking the lived to the imagined, I recall only the silent pause/between harsh words—the reconciliation/not the wrongdoing” (Stevens 2005). I recall Watson’s questioning of the Post-Mabo era of Australian politics, in which she asks if reconciliation changed the “capacity to roam the lands of our ancestors”, and later in her essay, “Or have we witnessed merely the illusion of change?” (Watson 2007,17). These are important questions posed by both a Mohawk and a Tanganeke/Meintang scholar who still live on occupied lands and within unsettled bodies. While priority in Indigenous Studies and communities is rightly given to the reclaiming and protection of material land, it is also important to reclaim the narrative connections to places as well—or to repair our relationships with the land and each other. The land remains in place so to speak. It is our narrative relationship to the land that has been impacted through the “echoes” of colonial discourse which romantically pictured, in Steven’s words, a “geomantic space” (Stevens 2005) rather than the lived and imagined space of indigenous peoples.

These rooted connections are a result of a relationship between land and people—they are not sacred because they are there, but rather they are imagined into being and spoken from generation to generation. They are carefully attended to through words and reconnected to through story, just as in the earlier discussion of place-making. It is the passing down of this relationship through story which has defied some of the linear processes of ownership, a type of ownership that changes, (whether through treaties, deeds, or sales), as points on a single line that only moves forward in time, accumulating as it proceeds. All that matters in this formulation is an imperial geographer’s sense of space in a sense— or who has the legal power at the moment. *This obfuscates the power of land to possess us.* I recall Silko’s comment at a talk I attended, where she reminded us that the earth pushes through the pavement in the city of L.A., a urban and material landscape where no sacred sites are thought to exist, and a sacred stream may still trickle waiting to heal again.

Unfortunately, it is the lines, or invisible boundaries, which have become the marker’s we are fighting over albeit with different intent. Silko’s (1997, 85) ruminations on land and people are important to note:

The people and the land are inseparable, but at first I did not understand. I used to think there were exact boundaries that constituted “the homeland,” because I grew up in an age of invisible lines designating ownership. In the old days there had been no boundaries between the people and the land; there had been mutual respect for the land that others were actively using. This respect extended to all living beings, especially to the plants and the animals.

In the process of making land rights visible to the colonizer, however, we have worked with concepts of property; concepts which are, according to Aboriginal scholar Dale Turner (2006, 24), “the cornerstone not only of liberal theories of justice but also of Western European economies.” Turner continues with asserting that Indigenous peoples “continue to assert a unique form of ownership over their homelands.” In order to remain Indigenous in this process it is important to remember the consequences of, as Mankiller stated, “stopping viewing land ownership in common and viewing ourselves in relation to owning the land in common” (Borden et al. 1994). As the juxtaposition of justice and land ownership coincide, it is also pivotal to remember that justice is always embodied and the consequences of this restructuring of space affect numerous tribal members.

Property in the forms of leases, jurisdiction, fee simple and numerous other ways of prescribing land have had a profound material significance on Indigenous people—at times it has been a matter of life and death. In her article “Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference,” geographer Ruth Gilmore (2002, 15) speaks about “the range of kinds of places—as intimate as the body, and as abstract as a productive region or a nation-state.” The body experiences its relationship to the land, where as the nation-state abstracts this experience through the language of the state. Although writing about the prison industrial complex, Gilmore’s address of legislated contained space proves useful to an analysis of changing narrations of land. Gilmore (2002, 15-16) states later in her article, “if justice is embodied, it is then therefore always spatial, which is to say, part of the process of making place.” Boarding schools were part of the colonial making of place—they were instrumental in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. They were deeply concerned with disciplining bodies, distancing Indigenous people from land, and destroying the cultural ways that nurtured relationship to land and their communities. Boarding schools link with prisons is that of containing and the surveillance of aberrant bodies. The connection between prisons and boarding schools take a more direct path, such as with Ft. Marion and the education of plains warriors in the United States. It would later give Pratt the capital and ability to extend this system as a new means of subjugating and erasing Indigenous peoples from the landscape. The travelling of this “successful” program to other countries speaks to the tremendous damage colonial schools caused through deracination, destruction of Indigenous languages, and dislocation from community. It is important to remember that many reservations were set up as places of containment, some even requiring passes to leave and other “landless” Natives were arrested (Lomawaima 1994; Ross 1998; Watson 2007). It is place told through story that continue to hold fragile, complex, and important relationships of place together for Indigenous people, not merely borders, jurisdiction and the law.

Colonial constructions of the reservation pictured the reservation system as a panoptic space from which to watch the restless Native, ration resources, and discipline bodies. Luana Ross (1998) historicizes the process of land theft to loss of personal freedom through incarceration. Of course, Indigenous people have made much more of this abstracted space; through language, reservations have become the land of Nations through a storied sense of community, continuity, and growth. Although directly focusing on Montana, Ross’s study of racism, land, and Montana Indians can be extended to examine the criminalization of Indigenous men and women in settler-colonial society. Removal through incarceration and separation from land and community are one of the leading issues we must come to terms with in Indigenous studies. In settler nation-states, the imprisonment of Indigenous men and women is a strategy of dispossession (Ross 1998; Watson 2007). They suffer disproportionate rates of incarceration compared with the rest of the settler political body.

Many prison’s are placed on historical sites of confrontation, though the Indigenous narratives, stories and land are buried, such as the Hopi incarcerated at Alcatraz or the site of the oldest maximum security prison in Auburn, NY (1817) which is raised at the site of a burned Seneca village. In fact, this historical element is monumentalized and claimed by the state through signage that marks it as an historical site and through the post of a colonial soldier upon the spire of the large cement structure of Mt Auburn. He still stands in surveillance of “captured land and incarcerated people.” Tuscorora scholar, Vera Palmer’s insights regarding Mt. Auburn prison are crucial to understanding how we need to decolonize our imaginations to decolonize the lived spaces we occupy. She worked for several months with Native Prisoners, many of whom were Haudenosaunee or from nations in the Iroquois Confederacy to which Seneca belongs to. She began the prison project that continues today at Cornell, the site of Cayuga land. Her experience culminated in an art show at Cornell University in which the main themes of their work, according to Palmer, related to the lack of access to the outside and access to spiritual elements. Both those elements correlate to forgiveness. For Palmer, an important point in the dialogues came through a recognition that they were connected with the Native land under the layers of cement. They were able to roam through the bars of imprisonment by recognizing a new horizon—that the land beneath them was Indigenous land and connected them with others.

Building the spaces of the nation, from the individual citizen to the borders that demarcate it, required creating its own national creation myths. Indians are a significant factor in settler-colonial myths and creation stories. Rather than define themselves in relation to the land they lived on, the definition of American for instance, became entrapped in producing abstractions of difference. Historical and spatialized practices have “placed” the Indian in a certain time frame, geographical location, and social hierarchy. Modernity’s conquest of space was driven by the trajectory of taxonomic descriptions of people, plants, animals; symbolic and physical violence; geographical “truisms”; and a separation of histories (time) and space. Indigenous peoples came to occupy certain physical and imaginative spaces

in the colonial mindset that existed within strict gender and racial hierarchies. Indigenous subjects became and become subsumed in these differences.

By examining the geography of these differences we can create a better understanding of how the relationship between the individual and land have changed with abstracting land as a space which governments control or act upon.

Pile and Thrift (1993, 340), in their conclusion to the anthology on *Mapping the Subject*, discuss the dangers in “assuming that space is in-different, that it acts as a fluid medium in which mobile subjects dwell.” I believe that Keith and Pile work with the concept of place, space, and the subject in very useful ways for Indigenous Studies. By placing politics at the front of conceptualizing what they term “politics of place and a spatialized politics of identity,” Keith and Pile (2003, 20) accommodate the contradictions of place-making and identity formation. In a warning much needed within the field of Indigenous Studies, they argue:

Politically there is a reactionary vocabulary of both identity politics of place and a spatialized politics of identity grounded in particular notions of space. It is rhetoric of origins, of exclusion, of boundary-marking, of invasion and succession, of purity and contamination; the glossary of ethnic cleansing. But there are also more progressive formulations which become meaningless deprived of the metaphors of spatiality.

In the use of land as a word that has significant meaning, it is important to disavow “reactionary vocabulary”. J. Kehaulani Kauanui (Kanaka Maoli) provides an historical example of deracination, or uprooting, of Native Hawaiian people and the shifting racial categories that correspond to dispossession of land and indigenous personhood. The confinement to place and its authenticity belie a history of Native Hawaiian travel and the connections that are maintained even while away from home. This is made even more difficult by the fact that the deracination of Indigenous peoples in settler-colonial societies is coupled with white possession of indigenous identities and “rightful” claims to land (Harris 1993; Moreton-Robinson 2003). She contends that the historic discourses of scientific racism, miscegenation, hybridization, and diversity “can be seen as an attempt to “undo” the Native body politic—once recognized as sovereign—and reconstitute it as a new, assimilable body, a diverse amalgam of citizens” (Kauanui 2007, 149-150).

Instead of a reactionary politics of place, in the words of Kimberly Blaeser (1993, 5), there are alternative voices that “redraw” and “repeat” and “revive.” Blaeser utilizes the Cartesian axis to retool empirical understandings of land but her poetic meanings derive from Ojibway “metaphors of spatiality”:

people animals and stories
flung across land and time
return boomerang
back to beginnings

birds redraw flight angles
stars repeat sky patterns
and we revive tellings
all chanting renewal

Blaeser invokes the power of Ojibwe metaphor in this moment to return to land, in the communal, experiential, and physical sense. Spatial metaphors and spatial constructs are often employed within Indigenous Studies and communities to define a complex difference, and, more importantly, complex connections. This is exemplified in the lack of commas between “people”, “animals”, and their narration through “stories”. It is important to address and examine the forms of spatial metaphors that invoke generations of knowledge: “place anchors/hold generations/evolutions of face/and history/spinning/spinning on land axis” (1993, 5). She directly refers to the Cartesian axis through the repetition of spinning, but rewrites the meaning as the four points become “place”, “generations”, “evolutions”, and “history”. While each section of the poem, “Of Landscape and Narrative,” is located in different geographical locations, Blaeser uses the knowledge gained through communal memory and tellings to place herself and make connections with the past and the present as well as the here and the there. Rather than differentiate a passive space as a mobile subject, she sees land as active and connective. Even more so, she sees herself as part of the life occurring around her.

Silko (1997, 133) too refuses the hierarchies created by the language of the state and instead turns to “the Laguna Pueblos [who] go on producing their own rich and continuously developing body of oral and occasionally written stories that reject any decisive conclusion in favor of ever increasing possibilities...No thing or location on the earth is of greater or lesser value than another. And this means that any location can potentially become a sacred spot.” This inclusive way of thinking about land, and those who are part of it, must be considered in a discussion of land and its meaning to Indigenous people. Watson makes this point in her analogy to the story of the frog who stands in for enormous greed and power that steals the water from all those connected to it and the land. In doing so it ruins the world around it and must be destroyed for the sake of the land and humanity. In this case, the Australian state (or the frog) who wants to deal in “pragmatic’ response[s]” to Aboriginal people must be transformed. Watson learns from this story of connection and inclusivity, (and contends whole communities should turn towards it as well), that to “unsettle spaces held by the powerful...[would] resettle the future of millions of peoples globally in their access to good food and clean drinking”. First, however, we must deal with the “largesse of its [the ancient frog] own oneness” or the privilege of whiteness that separates itself from Others and supports the colonial state (Watson 2007, 32).

Mistranslations of Indigenous notions of space, implementation of European binaries to define space, and the erasure of Indigenous practices of making place existed since contact with European countries. Noenoe K. Silva’s book (2004), *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*, examines how the translation of the *ali’i* system into a European notion of land tenure in Hawaii had devastating effects on community relationships. Through the Hawaiian language and historical research, she delves into the meanings of *pono*, *ali’i*, *mo’i*, *auhau*, and *maka’ainana* and how their translation into leader, nobility, taxes and serfs, respectively, did not capture the interdependency of the people and land, nor the complexity of Hawaiian spiritual relationships. Rather the translations served to render land into the hands of a few *ali’i* and many, many foreigners (Silva 2004, 39-43). Silva’s book delves further into the mistranslations of Native Hawaiian political history and, uniquely and boldly, uses language to resituate Hawaiian understandings of land. It is her use of language, which creates a relationship between place and people, that provides sustenance to the *Kanaka Maoli* (Silva 2004, 238). She not only “participate[s] in the larger intellectual marketplace of human ideas, and influence[s] the legal and political practices that are used to define indigenous rights, sovereignty, and nationhood” (Turner 2006,120), but she also recalls and privileges generations of epistemology regarding land and the people. This understanding of land, *as well as sea*, and people’s relationships to it, when contextualized within Hawaiian language, expand outwards and open up. In early treaties, water was still part of the consciousness as necessary to live as a community and was negotiated in forms of fishing rights for instance. Property and its relationship to land, however, have obfuscated the importance of waterways and its connection to land and Indigenous peoples way of life. Land in this instance camouflages other forms of state power employing technology and law to make water the domain and resource of the nation-state. Storied relationships to waterways in Indigenous Studies continue to be under explored in critical studies. The use of Indigenous languages, which connect land seas, oceans and river systems in a language other than that of the state are important to be conscious of in our dialogue.

Indigenous scholarship must constantly be aware of the problem of, according to J.C. Scott (1998) “seeing like a state” and the geopolitical translation of meanings of place. Scott’s discusses state organizing of land and people, or citizens, as necessary to make it “readable” and “controllable” in the most efficient manner. Instead Indigenous scholarship also needs to focus on seeing like a community built on storied land and relationships. Language perhaps plays a large role in how we have simplified the meaning of land. In many language systems there are various words for land, and each word conveys meaning and evokes a different set of social relationships and responsibilities, as noted in Silva’s text. In addressing representations created from within American Indian communities, it is equally important to address how space, place, race, and gender are being constructed and constituted by changing social perceptions of space. Decolonization and post-coloniality have often implied landscaping and prescribing authentic, untainted, independent, and hermetically sealed places and home-identities. Autonomy over the land, however, is not just a matter of reestablishing another nation-state with autonomy over resources and economic development or writing a “true” version of the reservation; rather the struggle for autonomy is about self-determining how communities are made and function.

Making place and marking property are often at odds in Indigenous Studies. Colonial spatial constructs, such as that of borders or private/public land for instance, materially impact daily lives by constructing a lived reality. From tribal jurisdiction to access to healthcare by off-rez individuals, the language of borders

demarcates space by enclosing land and excluding bodies. Borders also, as many living on demarcated Indigenous land would attest, controls the flow of resources and economics. Kauanui in fact contributes this control of lands to the deracination of Native Hawaiians-- as do many Indigenous people who see the relocation of Native bodies into areas where they can support themselves and their families financially (Kauanui 2007). By examining the controlled narrative of the state and the narratives erased or eroded, we can at least recognize the processes of the States abstractions and the historical mental and physical fragmentation of people from land.

The bond between community and land is very different than the association between citizen and territory. The word "citizen" is closely related to the spatial discourse of property and territory. To be a citizen, according to Derek Heater (1990, 2), "requires the capacity for a certain abstraction and sophistication of thought." A citizen of the nation-state has "a status, a sense of loyalty, the discharge of duties and the enjoyment of rights not primarily in relation to another human being, but in relation to an abstract concept, the state." While I do believe that many tribal citizens alter this meaning through everyday practices within their communities, it still performs the same abstract function in relationship to settler-colonial nation-states. I have a deep concern that our use of the word "land" to claim rights for tribal citizens moves us away from the connected dimensions that land holds in various communities. The responsibility of the citizen is to the state, rather than to each other's well being. The stories that teach us how to interact, how not to act, how to survive, and our responsibilities to each other are what give Indigenous nations meaning; they hold us together through time and beyond the boundaries of the state. We still have a lot to learn from them.

So how have we reached this stage of abstracting space in our academic inquiries? Or focused our relationships to each other in the form of our relationship to governments, tribal or otherwise? How have we moved away from the tangibility of place and stories that are embedded in generations of experience? We need to begin focusing on these questions with greater intensity.

To claim land, it is set up through the court systems that we must claim difference from settlers. In our pursuit to differentiate ourselves from settler-colonists, we have territorialized land and body. The legal tensions between stability and static versus change, adaptation, and growth are very real for Indigenous people. They are in a particularly difficult political situation in which recognition of cultural and racial uniqueness is detrimental to the overall physical and cultural survival of indigenous people. If specific tribal cultures are not recognized as different from that of mainstream America, a Nation may not maintain recognition within the Anglo-American court systems, for instance; in this case, land and treaty rights become threatened. In 2001 through pivotal skirting political moves, tribal Nations in the U.S. had their status revoked and land or monetary claims denied as a result. Policies and political rhetoric espousing a "different but the same in that we are all American" remains a continuing threat to American Indian people, who need to "prove" and "substantiate" a continuing cultural difference (Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001). In Canada a turn toward recognition has resulted in "the countless ways in which the liberal discourse of recognition has been limited and constrained by the state, the courts, corporate interests, and policy makers so as to help preserve the colonial *status quo*...even though the Court has secured an unprecedented degree of protection for certain 'cultural' practices within the state, it has nonetheless repeatedly refused to challenge the racist origin of Canada's assumed sovereign authority over indigenous peoples and their territories" (Coulthard 2007, 451). The liberal policies of recognizing difference, myths of racial reconciliation, and diverse states, still upholds land as a dead space that contains "different" people and is very problematic for obtaining indigenous access to lands recognized as indigenous and even more so for those not recognized by the state as indigenous.

Recognizing a connection of land beyond property or facile definitions of limited territory and turning to cultural practices are part of "a radical alternative to the structural and psycho-affective facets of colonial domination" (Coulthard 2007, 456). In many cases, difference is produced through the ordering of space by the language of the nation-state; the power of language imposes territories and produces socio-scapes within its boundaries. It is necessary in Indigenous scholarship to not only address the *meanings* of territories, such as where they are demarcated, but also the *legitimacy* of the settler-colonial governments to determine such meanings. We must use the discourses cultivated through generations to critique the workings of power that attempt to simplify relationship to land by marking a space as Indigenous or not Indigenous or by marking bodies as citizens with access to civil rights or non-citizens of the state without access. Andrea Smith (2003, 50) profoundly states: "We should also frame reparations as a human rights issue rather than a civil rights issue; human rights are recognized under international law to be inalienable and independent of any particular government structure." This calls for a spatial reframing of land and bodies. The sectioning of land into discrete territories to fit the interest of the

nation-state depends on discursively denying indigenous peoples relationship to the land and physical containing, subsuming, and marking indigenous bodies in accordance with those interests. “While we may use a variety of rhetorical and organizing tools,” Smith (2003, 50) insists that it is dangerous “to rely solely on a constitutional framework [that] reifies the legitimacy of the U.S. government, which is founded on the gross human rights violations of people of color and the continuing genocide of indigenous peoples.”

The “rhetorical tools” of territory, property, and the boundaries—and the meaning deployed by such spatial apparatuses—are *always shifting and in flux*. While most Indigenous scholars often recognize the relative short span of the U.S. as a powerful nation-state, many do not address the fact that “our overall strategy should not be premised on the notion that the U.S. should or will always continue to exist” (Smith 2003, 50). While this may seem idealistic to many, it is not such a radical idea. Watson asks her readers to consider the following questions: “Is aboriginal sovereignty to be feared by Australia in the same way as Aboriginal people fear white sovereignty and its patriarchal model of the state—one which is backed by power or force? Or is aboriginal sovereignty different...for there is not just one sovereign state body but hundreds of different sovereign aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal sovereignty is different from state sovereignty because it embraces diversity, and focuses on inclusivity rather than exclusivity” (Watson 2007, 20). Many early Indigenous visionaries who took up the pen to write and many of those, whose work is not collected in the archive, questioned the longevity of Settler-colonial governments who operated along the lines of fear and exclusions. They fought to retain a relationship to land, a land that they knew would support their entire communities and not a few, apart and often in spite of colonial spatial restructuring. It is “so simple to assume quietude” even though Indigenous writing and storytelling is “the roar that exists/ on the other side of silence” (Stevens 2005,20); a silence created through distancing and abstracting and extracting the Indigenous from the land through discourses and policies of exclusion.

By organizing *meanings* of land around ideas of territory and boundaries in which our rights are retained, we miss out on very important mechanisms of fighting colonialism. Seeing land as storied and providing stories from time immemorial, rather than as a confined place within rigid boundaries, will remind us of the responsibility to each other. The people still speak of the sacredness of places now claimed by the parks services for instance, or even those gravesites found under shopping malls. I refer to the Black Hills, for example, or the Oholone gravesites buried under the Emeryville Mall in California's Bay area. As poet Kimberly Blaeser states in her introduction to Anishinaabe writing:

Story remains the heartbeat of Indian community. People and other beings have stories associated with them...The account may have morals, suggesting an appropriate action or relationship, or they may simply allude to the general or specific mystery of life, but always they reinforce our connections. By centering us in a network of relationships, stories assure the survival of our spirits. Stories keep us migrating home.

What continues to endure and “reinforce connections” are stories and our “appropriate action or relationship[s]” to each other. Knowledge of where to collect grasses for basket weaving or the best hunting spots continue to be passed on and used for cultural survival, though fences mark private property and the government punishes transgressions.

It is also important to remember here that stories are also *situated* within knowledge systems: language doesn't merely reflect the actual but has the power to construct reality. Many Indigenous writers for instance, in their uses of spatial metaphors, are not simply inverting the colonial narrative and counter-reflecting, but instead are using metaphors to construct working frameworks for the contemporary moment. Through narrative, or the history, story, memory, or experience recalled, we can (re)create meanings of land through language. Metaphors, for instance, rely on a cultural context to create meaning. Land, and our relationship to it, is narrated and more flexible in time and space than the boundaries set up through the discourses of colonialism that seek to fix it in a state of control and power.

One story recalls another and another, perhaps a story of another place, time, land, or people. Stories open up land to various nodes rather than limit or erase possibilities. Blaeser (1993,7) use of language as a compass are demonstrated through the following eloquent poetics in which she ends her journeying poem:

memories of passages
ranging like voices
across my inner ear
distances
traced in hieroglyphics
written in swamp meadows
stories migrating home

As the first word in each line expresses, memory ranges “across” “distances” because it is “traced” and “written” through “stories.” Without them we cannot place ourselves. It is the stories and fragment of stories which have the power to migrate and place us simultaneously. As Silko (1997,95) reminds her readers, “The land has not been desecrated; human beings desecrate only themselves.” Through active restructuring of land and our connections to it the stories will bring us home. We will remember those places and our relationship to them through our active imagining of ourselves in place. While “Mother Earth is inviolable” (Silko 1997, 95) it is important to remember our responsibilities and nurture these fragile connections. So many of our relationships to places and individuals depend upon it.

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