

TRACING LINES: A PERSONAL INVESTIGATION INTO YAQUI STORYTELLING,  
DISPLACEMENT, AND BELONGING

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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This project uses fracture as a framework to analyze and visualize the devastation that settler colonialism has wrought on Indigenous communities, specifically through the history of Yaqui people, my ancestors. Utilizing Yaqui history and stories, I frame Indigenous storytelling as a critical method to (re)write oneself out of and beyond the fractures in order to (re)claim the losses, gaps, and absences through an intentional tracing of the lines left behind by family, ancestors, stories, violences, and ghosts. In order to further disrupt institutional violences and conventions and (re)claim a voice and story beyond them, I have interrupted scholarly writing with various creative forms, such as narrative and poetry, as well as family archives in the form of letters, photos, and, essentially, my father's memoir.

*For Micah*  
*1971-2023*

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## I.

### **Origin Story**

In many ways, this story began before me. It certainly began before my academic journey. It began with my father's childhood and the seething absences in family history that shadow the stalking, angry steps of his mother. It began with my parents' love. It began when I held my auntie's hand and said goodbye to her on her deathbed. It began with questions, gaps, and the wide, watching landscapes between stories, memories, and longings. I came to this story already a part of it and with personal investments. I came to this story removed from my Indigenous community, language, place, and culture. I came to this story with a heavy sense of my father's and auntie's survivance and of all that has been lost. I came to this story knowing how they carried their brown skin through life since they were children captive in a system that did not care for them. This project is about placing their lives and experiences within the greater narrative of Indigenous destruction by settler colonial powers in a Yaqui context, but it is also about how their lives and stories defy this narrative. Put differently, this is a story about devastation, damage, and loss wrought by settler colonial violence, but also about Yaqui love, resilience, desire, and futurity.

In an academic context, this project began to take form in a graduate seminar where I was given permission to fuse academic research and writing about Yaqui deer dances and cosmology with creative and poetic writing about my relationship to Yaqui identity and history. Initially, my interest in interrupting and unsettling academic form was inspired by Indigenous writers in pieces such as "A Glossary of Haunting" by Eve Tuck and C. Ree, and also by Black feminist

scholars such as Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Saidiya Hartman. The work Kim Hall did unsettling academic conventions in “I can’t love this the way you want me to: Archival blackness” influenced and inspired my desire to experiment with form. I felt even more liberated to write in a synthesized form when reading Indigenous authors like Deborah Miranda, Lee Maracle, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Like these authors, I refuse containment and categorization of personal, creative, academic, poetic, historical, and storied voices/forms. This is why my work includes poetry, creative writing, family stories, letters, and photographs. I have placed a constellation of voices and a mosaic of texts that span generations in conversations with one another; my father’s, my great uncle who died in World War II, my own, and even the silent and lost voices of my auntie and my father’s mother. My personal and creative writing appears italicized and double-spaced throughout the text.

My father’s memoir was foundational to the construction of this project. My father’s stories appear throughout the text, single-spaced and italicized. The larger passages include a title and the text is contained between horizontal lines. The passages are strategically inserted in specific discussions to reflect themes in the academic portions of the text. The lines that border them indicate not only a break from conventional academic form, but reflect more broadly the theme of fracture. I also think of these lines as protection and boundaries. These are specific stories from my father’s memoir that I have selected with care and intentionality. I take the responsibility of sharing his childhood stories seriously, as it was a childhood fraught with trauma and violence. In order to avoid making a spectacle of that trauma and violence, I have chosen words that allude to but do not explicate those violences. As well as the larger passages from my father’s memoir, I have included sentences and lines from the text scattered throughout

the body of the paper to evoke themes, be a visual marker of fracture, and disrupt academic form and its desire to “know.” These lines are compressed together without spaces and often evoke moments/images of loss, pain, or neglect. I made the choice to compress the words to suggest a line of breakage in the academic text, but also to refuse easy accessibility. To decipher these words, you have to pause and interrupt your academic reading practices and expectations in order to identify their meaning and to feel the impact of the sentence, its rhythms, and emotional texture. This juxtaposition between academic forms of writing and the emotional/personal fragments that surface and press against the edges of those forms also reflects my interiority as it is broken and jarred by family stories and histories when I read and write about Indigenous displacement, trauma, and survivance. Another important feature of this project are the photographs and letters that I have selected from my family archive. These visual markers of the past, memories, and lost/unknown loved ones and ancestors are a way to honor and illustrate how the themes of fracture, storytelling, dispossession, and Indigenous identity have been lived and embodied through generations before me. They are also essential treasures in a lineage full of gaps and silences. They are an important site for tracing stories and fracture through the lines on the faces of my family members.

This story ends with a letter to the future. I spend a lot of time thinking about generational trauma and the way that pain is passed down. As an auntie, I end this work thinking about desire and futurity—not just the kind of world that is being passed down to the next generation, but the emotional futures that we have to help them build and foster now.

I’m telling *this* story so we can make a new one.

## II.

### Fracture

Roses  
drunk on their bleeding petals  
pressed against glass

inside

she asked me to  
write down her story

Her face wilted  
across a table  
covered with glossy  
photographs  
unable to hold with her eyes  
memories nebulous  
but piercing



Her brown, spidery fingers stuffed them into envelopes  
names written  
in her gliding hand

an inheritance

My promise hung between us  
with its cavernous hunger  
when I went to  
her  
survival held in the claws of a hospital bed  
her inactivity so foreign and frightening  
an alchemy of sorrow broke my chest

like wings opening

frozen blocks of salt calcified behind my eyes

The armor of her spine  
eaten  
by malignant cells

shattered

into a web of fractures  
until all her motion disintegrated  
metal and steel and drugs and spirit  
held flesh together in a fragile containment



actively splinter and scatter Indigenous tribes, cultural traditions, identities, and ties to community. This splintering has amounted to barriers—psychological, emotional, geographical, and temporal— between many Indigenous individuals and their heritage. The Yaqui people of Sonora, Mexico, my ancestors, are survivors of this colonial apocalypse and an example of the endurance of culture and tradition when wrested from the violent fractures of history. A diasporic community, with roots in Northern Mexico, and communities in the Southwest, the tribe has survived missionization, slavery, extermination attempts, and migration. They live in what Gloria Anzaldúa defines as a borderland:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.

It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (25)

These invisible geographical, psychological, social, and emotional lines are breakages rendered by the domineering hands of a violent history forcefully stolen by colonial powers. This Borderland consciousness<sup>1</sup>, this “narrow strip along a steep edge,” follows along a viewscape of loss that is punctuated by gaps, absences, disappearances, and erasures. It is a fractured state of being. The emotional residue is the lingering of the gaping absence on the psyche, the invisibility contained within the darkness between breakages, the divisions between the dominant historical narrative and embodied history, memory, and trauma. It is the division between identity and loss of culture, between place and being.

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<sup>1</sup> “Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision” (Anzaldúa 100).

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*THE BEGINNING*

*Time seems to be immeasurable when we are children, and therefore I cannot tell you how long my brother and sister and I wandered around in what seemed to be an abandoned apricot grove. My sister still could not eat an apricot to the end of her days on this earth.*

*I remember headlights coming through the windows of the laborers shed where we were abandoned by our mother and my sis shoving me under a sink and slamming the cabinet doors shut. “Be quiet, they’re coming.”*

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These precarious fractures of identity, place, culture, history, and psyche are gingerly navigated by those “prohibited and forbidden inhabitants” condemned to walk alongside its edge, ever in sight and feel of the wound, the heady unknitting of flesh. The reverberations of this fracture resonate on historical and personal levels—from the theatrical stage of history populated with innocent, savage, noble, romantic, threatening, inconvenient, and consumable Indians, to the intimate and internal carrying of trauma, *weweretorturedemotionallyphysicallystarved laughedatandthreatenedwithmoreharmthanwewerealreadyhavingtoendure* to the stories of family, culture, and history that we glean from the wreckage and attempt to paste over the gaps. Yaqui history, culture, and experience encapsulate tensions inherited from the cross-cultural exchange and loss induced by colonization. While the initial fractural force is understood as a divisive feature and method of colonial powers to separate Indigenous peoples from their cultures and identities, Yaqui people, through their refusals, resistances, and stories, teach us that some breakages are holy. These breakages, or fractures, can be traced through history to reveal stories of the varied, complex, and triumphant nature of Indigenous identity and belonging.

Yaqui culture believes in multiple worlds, in kinship relations with the more-than-human, and in communion between all. The less-than-human status of Yaqui people that has haunted them since colonial contact is unavoidably attached to their relationship to the more-than-human world. This cosmological practice has always been a threat to the colonizer. The historical struggles of the Yaqui demonstrate Kyle P. Whyte's argument in "Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises." Whyte highlights Candis Callison's work which "recognizes that the hardships many nonIndigenous people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured already due to different forms of colonialism: ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration" (Whyte 226). In our current moment of climate crisis, the borders of the apocalypse between the colonized/post-apocalyptic and the colonizer are dissolving. What Sylvia Wynter refers to as the struggle against the overrepresentation of man (262), is grounded in the classification of Indigenous and enslaved people as "physical referents of its [the west's] reinvention of medieval Europe's Untrue Christian Other to its normative True Christian Self, that of the Human Other to its new 'descriptive statement' of the ostensibly only normal human, Man" (265). With race as an essential factor, *schoolwasveryhardiwasharassedeverydaybecauseiwasntawhiteboy* the west's manipulative practice of othering humans across an adaptable Chain of Being (Wynter 300) in order to elevate white Man as the unmarked, normative human has, in fact, brought our world to this moment of crisis. The apocalypse follows the western man because he made it. Western man started killing worlds in a cosmological/cultural sense, as well as an environmental one, long before the Industrial Revolution. That is in fact how they built the "new world." According to Daniel Heath Justice in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*

Yes, Indigenous and Black folks understand apocalypse—our peoples have lived it. For populations that faced eighty-percent mortality and higher due to European-inflicted disease, displacement, enslavement, starvation, military action, and internment policies over just a few centuries—and in some cases mere decades—the “end of days” isn’t just the stuff of doomsday religionists or science fiction, but of historical memory and lived experience. It’s the template for our survival today, and that, I think, is key: our peoples survived. (168)

This world-killing, world-unmaking, and apocalypse-making occurred across the globe, on slave ships, on plantations, and in the wilderness of Indigenous America.

As Derrida demonstrates, apocalypse anxiety is wrought by the gazing, knowing other (12). This other is the animal that *sees* the base limit of humanity. It is a reflexive gaze, one in which the other-maker recognizes the limits of his humanity only through the gaze of his own construction. Indigeneity and Blackness have been conflated with animality and savagery in different ways resulting in varied manifestations of oppression and violence, and for different purposes that are both linked to land. The Black body was commodified and enslaved in order to work the land. Extermination of the Indigenous body was persistently attempted in order to claim ownership over the land. But this apocalypse anxiety that “follows” the Western man is one of his own making. This sense of apocalypse, now so clearly threatening in the climate crisis, “is really the arrival of the reverberations of that seismic shockwave into the nations who introduced colonial, capitalist processes across the globe in the first half-millennium in the first place” (Davis and Todd as quoted in Whyte 227). That is, current “concepts and narratives of crises, dystopia, and apocalypse obscure and erase ongoing oppression against Indigenous peoples and other groups” (Whyte 234). In a similar vein, April Anson argues in “Master Metaphor” that

“Western apocalyptic appeals erase, embolden, and ultimately acquit the white violence of settler colonial capitalism” (62). For Indigenous people, apocalypse is past, present, and future. Apocalypse is, in fact, the predatory, land-hungry, resource-extracting gaze of the human—i.e. western man .

Crucially, when the apocalypse occurs it defies temporal boundaries. Patrick Wolfe understands settler colonial society “a structure rather than an event” that is predicated on its continuity through time (390). Its function is to destroy in order to replace (388). Therefore, terrifyingly, the apocalypse of non-white worlds is built into the very structure of settler colonial society. Like settler colonialism, apocalypse is not an event that remains in the past. As Cutcha Risling Baldy writes, “California Indians often refer to the Mission System and the Gold Rush as ‘the end of the world.’ What those who survived experienced was both the apocalypse and post-apocalypse.” Due to the world-killing violences of colonialism, the apocalypse is a temporal marker that orients an Indigenous person’s relationship to the past and to history. It also determines, depending on where your family was scattered amidst the wreckage, your relationship to culture and community. Following contact with the Spanish, Yaqui people began a centuries long resistance to the west’s apocalyptic assaults. These resistances have manifested in various forms such as traditional warfare, cohabitating with Jesuit missionaries, and maintaining cultural identity markers, such as the deer dance. Even so, colonial violence left its scarlet mark—a scar that is the fracture rendered between pre and post contact.

Yaqui people are Indigenous to the Sonoran Desert in Northern Mexico. Due to historical events, they also have communities in the southwestern United States, most heavily in Arizona. They have survived centuries of conquest by the west as colonization has attempted to kill and unmake all cultures and their various worlds that do not conform to its capitalist driven agenda.

In *Yaqui Indigeneity: Epistemology, Diaspora, and the Construction of Yoeme Identity*, Ariel Zatarain Tumbaga writes that “The Yoeme nation was a battered community when the Mexican Revolution ignited in late 1910” (61). Decades of resistance to state and federal campaigns throughout the nineteenth century was followed by the “Porfirian policy of deporting Yoeme men, women, and children to slave labor camps in Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, and, most notoriously, Yucatán’s henequen plantations” (61). In spite of this brutal history, the Yaqui, or Yoeme, people fought for the Mexican revolution and became state symbols of revolutionary resistance. Even so, they are often reduced in public discourse to stereotypes such as militant ferocity and Indian backwardness (6). As a result, their communities in northern Mexico suffer from endemic poverty, *idontknowhowisurvivedmytimeincuervobecauseitwasntlongbeforeiwasno longerwelcomeatthathouseandifoundmyselfjustwalkingthestreetsiwatchedmytennisshoesbecomeragsonmyfeet* and they continue to struggle for land rights and resources (15). Additionally, due to relentless military campaigns, extermination attempts by the Mexican government, violent revolution, and present economic circumstances, Yaqui people constitute a diaspora. As Tumbaga writes, “Whether they join the Yaqui communities in Arizona or turn into Mexican immigrants, they are part of a transborder community with roots in the northern Mexican and southern Arizona borderlands” (6). Through all of these conquest attempts Yaqui people have not relinquished their claims to sovereignty or their land in the Sonoran Desert. The centuries of refusal<sup>2</sup> against an illegitimate colonizing power, as well as resistance against state violence, have resulted in fractured histories, families, *aspreviouslymentionedwatusiwasmymomsstreetnameandsherelished thattitleshealwaysdressedlikeamanandshewasalwaysdressedinblackwatusihaddemonsandwasalwaysrestle*

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of refusal is placed in an Indigenous context and discussed in more detail in my analysis of the Yaqui Holy Dividing Line below.

ss and communities, as various colonial borders have sliced, split, and separated Yaqui people from their homelands. Yaqui educator Stan Padilla writes:

Intensifying the basic policies of the Spaniards, the Mexican national government repeatedly attempted to colonize and exploit Yaqui land and people. The Yaqui homelands were transformed into a “world out of balance” with the presence of the Mexican military in occupation. Terror, death, struggle, and tragedy became a part of everyday life. Organized communities were dispersed, families were broken up, many Yaquis were deported to other parts of Mexico, and a steady stream of refugees began to flee their homelands. By the turn of the century, Yaquis were one of the most dispersed of North American people, living in fragments from Yucatan in the south to California in the north. In time, Mexican colonial forces took political control of the land, river, and natural resources. At that point, the Mexican government began to regulate and direct Yaqui lives. (12)

This “world out of balance” resulted in a dispersed people existing in a land of fractured relationality and history. The fracturing of Indigenous community, family, and self is a fitting colonial weapon, because within the abysmal gaps between edges that separate individuals from cultural knowledge, history, and community it is so very easy to disappear—disappearance being the primary objective of colonizing powers to extinguish Indigenous existence and the cultural and kinship structures that hold communities together.

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*FAMILY*

*So now this was home in Pinedale with my real family. This was Ernie hiding in the attic when the welfare lady would show up unannounced, driving out to the country in our old 50 something Chevy sedan with 100 pound gunny sacks and filling them up in record breaking time with beautiful, juicy navel oranges. Ginger and her two best friends, Rosie and another girl, practicing to be the next Diana Ross and the Supremes. I think Ginger wanted to be Diana. Poor sis, she never could hold a note. Even years later in church, she could throw three pews in front and the three in back completely off key. But my sister was special and strong and she loved me and she was always there for me.*

*And one day, out of nowhere again, our mother told me “you’re not going to school today.” It was strange because as my sister was leaving for school, our mom stopped her and gave her the sign of the cross before she went out the door. And that was that. We loaded up the car and left. I remember asking “Mom, what about Ginger?” I don’t know if she replied, but she didn’t give a fuck about driving off and leaving my poor sis in an empty house without a word. No food, no family, no one to turn to. We hadn’t seen our brother in quite some time because Watusi had already kicked him out. I think he was probably old enough to where he just wasn’t going to put up with her shit any more. He was gone, so she had nobody.*

*She told me she waited for days and days for us to return and it never happened. Eventually, I don’t know how, but she ended up living with a woman in Fresno who was some type of relative on our mother’s side. My sis was like a slave in that house. My sister could not have been any older than 14 or 15 when we left her.*

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Indigenous existence is indelibly rooted to land and the severing of Indigenous peoples from land, culture, community, and kinship is integral to the violence of Indigenous erasure. In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, in conversation with Audra Simpson, names “*fear of disappearance*—a basic, terrifying, omnipresent reality of being Indigenous,” and reiterates the need for a “refusal of state recognition as an organizing platform and mechanism for dismantling the systems of colonial domination” (176). Mishuana Goeman argues that “A consequence of colonialism has meant a translation or too easy collapsing of *land* to *property*, a move that perpetuates the logics of containment” (72). As colonialism contains both land and bodies within lines and borders that sever kinship, relationality, and culture, and that prioritizes property and commodification, it also

works to contain Indigeneity in a state of non-existence or disappearance that is removed from land, nation, community, and family. Arguably, the politics of state recognition that Simpson critiques function as a method of containment. Recognition practices, such as blood quantum and demands that Indigenous peoples prove their historical connections to specific territories and their “cultural integrity,” both contain Indigenous identity within a settler-colonial structure of recognition and erase it depending on the various measurements and markers that “certify” Indigenous political claims. In *Fugitive Poses* Gerald Vizenor writes that “The current and most common measures of native identities are based on genealogical narratives, the recognition, rhetoric, and enmity of peers, service to native causes and communities, federal or reservation documents, and autoinscriptions, or the heritable names, assertions, and ethnic canons that endorse the mere simulations of identities” (74). Expanding on the idea of recognition, Glen Coulthard argues in *Red Skin, White Masks* that colonial power has modified itself “from a structure that was once primarily reinforced by policies, techniques, and ideologies explicitly oriented around the genocidal exclusion/assimilation double, to one that is now reproduced through a seemingly more conciliatory set of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize our *recognition* and *accommodation*. Regardless of this modification, however, the relationship to Indigenous people and the state has remained *colonial* to its foundation” (6). In this way, the continuity of settler colonialism's methods, its adaptability and plasticity across space and time, indicate a lack of fracture—a uniformity of oppression that has not broken from its origin.

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*THE HOBBS (Foster Home #1)*

*I woke up one night to my brother and sister sneaking back into the house. They were coming back after breaking into a school for food. We were hungry and they had discovered a way to feed themselves. From what I remember, this happened more than once. I don't recall how long this went on or if they ever got caught. But I do remember the day when I caught them running across the street. They were running away. "Where are you going?" I yelled from the front yard. "Get back in the yard, you can't come. Don't follow us." I was alone.*

*Years went by before my sister shared that they actually made it to one of our mother sisters' houses. Alice, I think. Cousins, family, shelter, food. Like my sister said, The fucking bitch turned them in. Off to juvenile hall.*

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These external, state sanctioned markers often act as a breakage, a fracture, that separates an Indigenous person and/or community from their sense of identity and their longstanding relationships with and responsibilities to specific places and relations. Being severed from your ancestral place, community, and historical identity signifies a disappearance of the self within the self. As Anzáldua notes, such traumas instigate a sense of “psychic restlessness” (100) as one navigates the absence of identity anchors in a state-prescribed sense of existence that is fundamentally bordered and contained. Indigenous dispossession, then, is not just a crime against land and culture, but also against the self, family, and community. Beth Piatote writes of the “domestic front” as the site of renewed conquest against Indigenous communities (3), noting that the mitigation of bloodshed that was ushered in with the assimilation era did not mean an end to violence (2). Piatote argues that although Indians were no longer targets of extinction “Indian economies, lands, kinship systems, languages, cultural practices, and family relations— in short, all that constituted the Indian home— became the primary site of struggle. The battle, although not the stakes, moved from the indigenous homeland, what I call the tribal-national domestic, to the familial space of the Indian home, or the intimate domestic” (2). These state manufactured

cartographies of dispossession and destruction<sup>3</sup> are fueled by the breaking of Native families. The gaps between state-sanctioned severings and fractures of place, being, family, and community create historical gaps and cultural absences that render the process of both political and personal recognition existentially fraught, painful, and intimidating. In this morass of absence, *whatwasmissingwasamother* the space between edges of fragments, it is very easy for a sense of Indigenous identity to be swallowed up or to be disappeared. Disappearance and dispossession are forms of containment. This space of colonial containment—psychic, cultural and environmental—can facilitate an existential sense of dispossession that is closely linked to the dispossession of land in order for its commodification and privatization. These state sanctioned borders and spaces of containment are traps intended to solidify and extend state power, ownership, and wealth.

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<sup>3</sup> “More, let us speak of cartographies of dispossession—the kind that rips away, distances, alienates—but also the kind that is waged upon us like war. The kind that is manufactured for my destruction” *Before Dispossession, Or Surviving It* (4).

Ramirez Alvarez

Parents: doña Carmen [Ramirez] and don Anselmo Alvarez

Children in order

5. Carmen - died at 12. Springville Sanatorium  
died c. 1940 (born c. 1928)
4. Michael - died at 16 of T.B.  
died c. 1942 (born c. 1926)
2. Johnny - died of T.B. - ~~Concepción~~ "Johnny" Alvarez  
died c. 1944 (April) Concepción "Johnny" [Ramirez] Alvarez
6. Josephine
1. "Tony" Antonio Ramirez ~~Alvarez~~
7. Alice
3. Rachel

Tony's father: don Anselmo Alvarez - from Sonora, Mex. (Hermosillo?)  
used to make adobe bricks in a mud pit in Dinuba  
doña Carmen used to speak a different language with Shorty Penn  
from Dinuba (Yaqui?)

*Pieces of a Family*

Yaquis have had to navigate these traps of recognition on the national terms of Mexico and the United States. As Yaquis fled Mexico and crossed the border, they engaged in a struggle to rebalance and redefine a sense of culture and nation. In "Yaquis of Southern California in-between the US-Mexico border," Aracely Rivera Cohen notes that "U.S.-Mexico border indigenous peoples such as the Yaquis face a complex process of identity construction, which may involve shifting perceptions of self-concerning nationality, ethnicity, and politics." *as ilookbacknow iguess the greatest irony of all was that the white kids in washington wanted to beat me up all the time and so did the little mexican dudes in mexico* Cohen highlights the challenges of identity construction for the Yaquis as a bi-national community noting that "identity construction is complex for Yaquis from other parts of the U.S. Like many Pascua Yaqui members, they might identify

themselves as Yaqui, Mexican, American, Indian, and Native American, depending on the context and momentum.” The momentum of mobility *as we traveled east the land became more and more wide open with open areas filled with horses cows and agriculture we drove down along gravel road for what seemed like forever until we reached at in the road* is an essential aspect to the way that Yaqui people have navigated the fractures of colonial history, such as dispossession and diaspora.

*again i had no idea where we were headed but i remember being left at a movie theater in portland for a few hours and afterwards hearing my mother tell me i just that river is a mile wide columbia* Although this movement has ensured an element of protection and survival, the territorial borders that separate states and define nations can be reflected in the internalized understanding of the self and one’s community. Writing about the bi-national nature of Yaqui people in *Divided Peoples*, Christina Leza notes that “The history of the Yoeme Nation, a binational indigenous community of the Sonoran Desert region, serves as an example of how shifting governmental policies and nationalist ideologies can result in the division of indigenous nations” (27). Compounding these nation and governmental divisions among Yaqui people, is “another political and geographical division between different groups of Yaquis in Arizona, California, and Texas” (Cohen). Within Yaqui culture there is a compounded sense of splintering, both geographically and nationally, that renders identity navigation particularly fraught due to an extended history of forced removals and migrations.<sup>4</sup> The mobility that migration requires in some ways enables the Yaqui sense of nationhood to transcend the settler colonial concept of nation, which emphasizes possession and

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<sup>4</sup> “After the battles with the Spaniards, they had to fight the Mexican government. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they suffered devastating attacks from the Mexican government and transnational companies (Figuroa 16-161). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, during the Mexican presidency of Porfirio Díaz, Yaqui diasporas were registered in Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oregon, and Nevada (Spicer *Pascua* XIII). It is considered that there was no diaspora of Yaquis before 1882 when the Yaqui War started in their territory (Spicer 21–24). Yaquis fled persecution, genocide, and deportation by Díaz’s government. They were forced to disperse to the Yucatán peninsula among the Maya or to the barrios of southwestern California among Anglo Americans in Los Angeles. Yaquis who came across the border returned soon to Sonora, sometimes with ammunition to support the guerrilleros of the Bacatete in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Spicer 21–24). After the Mexican revolution, many Yaquis returned to their lands, while others remained in the United States. Those who were deported to Yucatán were never provided proper repatriation (Padilla 1995)” (Cohen).

ownership of the natural environment, as well as its commodification. Mobility is also potentially an obstruction against the settler colonial states' terms of recognition, something that Yaquis have fought and continue to fight to attain.<sup>5</sup> However, the diasporic reality of Yaqui people can also complicate the concept of nationhood. As discussed in *Native Studies Keywords*, diaspora unsettled the conventional conception of nation and homeland:

Scholars of transnationalism and diaspora would take issue with the assertion that nation and its referent, nationalism, rests on the actualization of a nation-state formation, especially given the ways in which colonialism and globalization have forcibly removed indigenous peoples from (or made it very difficult for them to remain in) their homelands. People often rest their sense of identity and belonging in national terms, and this can sometimes mean a relationship to a homeland that you have never been to or were removed from. (161)

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<sup>5</sup> “During the 20th and 21st centuries, Yaquis established transnational networks and coordinated with the Mexican and the US governments, claiming and gaining federal recognition from both nation-states at different times (Schulze Jeffrey *Are We Not Foreigners Here?*). These networks were part of a transnational social field established among Yaquis of the Yaqui River, Pascua Yaquis, Yaquis of Texas, and Yaquis of Southern California. They also included non-indigenous groups, such as Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and or Anglo Americans” (Cohen).



*Antonio Alvarez, naturalized hero. Died December, 1944, at The Battle of the Bulge.*

Outlining Gerald Taiiaki Alfred’s definition of Indigenous nationalism, Glen Coulthard writes, “For Alfred, Indigenous political identities are not based on clearly delineated essences, nor are they merely ‘invented’ to correspond with shifting political aspirations; rather, Indigenous articulations of nationhood are best understood as informed by a complex of cultural practices and traditions that have survived the onslaught of colonialism and continue to structure the form

and content of Indigenous activism in the present” (64). Coulthard also emphasizes that Indigenous nationhood is not based on state creation but cultural sovereignty, political group autonomy, and self-government (65). According to Kirstin Erickson, Yaqui people have emphasized and recognized their difference from settlers since contact. This is reflected in their language. Yaquis refer to themselves as Yoeme meaning person or human being, while Yori is the identifier for a non-Yaqui Mexican and can mean foreigner, stranger, white person, and even nonperson (Erickson 12). Often, “the diction is spatialized; a Yori is described as ‘one from the outside’” (12). This aligns with Chris Anderson's understanding of peoplehood as outlined in *Native Studies Keywords* in that “claims to peoplehood speak to a ‘positive core’ of Indigenous peoplehood, which in turn speaks to the kinds of historical and political relationships that sustained Indigenous peoples’ collective consciousness and identity” (191). Although caught between and within the formation and rhetoric of the nation, Yaqui conceptions of self and peoplehood that continue to identify the colonizers as other, destabilizes settler nation state claims to legitimacy.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, “Yaquis identify themselves not only in terms of the struggle for their homeland but also by virtue of their movements through the space of a modernizing nation” (Erickson 45). As a contemporary transnational community, Yaqui people have had to form creative and dynamic ways<sup>7</sup> of engaging with their bi-national communities, based on an

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<sup>6</sup> “Contemporary Indigenous articulations of nationhood thus ring a discordant note to the trumpeting of settler claims in that they offer contrasting memories of invasion, attempted conquest, and (re)settlement that belie the seemingly natural association between “nation” and “state.” This counter-narrative requires settler national narratives to be understood in terms of the physical and symbolic violence they enact to produce their legitimacy, and they ask us not only to think about prior claims to such territories but about the people-to people negotiations through which territories were shared and collectivities governed ... “Rather than conceptualizing Indigenous nationhood in terms of difference, he suggests we do so in terms of separateness...rooting claims in political separateness cuts to the political core of what separates Indigenous nationalism from settler nationalism: our ability to envision a consciousness as Indigenous nations prior to the presence of settler nations” (Anderson 183, 187).

<sup>7</sup> In *Stoking the Fire* Kirby Brown writes about the nuanced nature of Indigenous nationhood: “As with Womach and Goeman above, these moves—whether understood in regional, intertribal, relational, or trans/national terms—are less about leveling tribal nations’ differences and distinctions into transnational sameness than recovering and (re)situating Indigenous understandings of identity, community, and nationhood as being ‘shaped not only by a nuances and realist understanding of one’s own group, but of the many relations’—economic, legal political, cultural,

ancient and engrained sense of peoplehood, since colonialism necessitated new modes of navigation to ensure survival.

The complex cultural practices and traditions that have survived colonialism, as noted above as central aspects of Indigenous nationhood, are captured in the Yaqui argument for federal recognition of their Arizona communities in 1978. These arguments to prove that they were “real” Indians relied on Yaqui leader Anselmo Valencia’s assertion that Yaquis lived in the United States before the creation of international boundaries; most Pascua, Arizona Yaquis had been born there, and many Yaquis served in the armed forces (Evers and Molina 20). In *Yaqui Deer Songs: Maso Bwikam*, Evers and Molina recorded the most important and convincing aspect of Valencia’s argument:

*The Yaquis are Indians in every sense of the word. We have our own language, our own culture, such as the Pascola dancing, the deer dancing, and the coyote dancing. These dances are Indian in origin. In the deer dance, we sing to honor the great mountains, the springs, the lakes. We sing of our father the Sun, and of creatures living and dead. We sing of trees and leaves and twigs. We sing of the birds in the sky and of the fish in the ocean. Our drummers play their music in their drums and flutes. All the songs sung and played are to the olden times—ancient Yaqui Indian stories...The Catholic faith and the various governments under which the Yaquis have had to suffer have tried for centuries to undermine our “Yaquiness” but after 400 years they have not succeeded. We have retained our language, our culture, and our Indianness. (20)*

The Yaqui understanding of “Indianness” is predicated on a deep and ancient relationship to storytelling as well as cultural dances, which denotes the sacredness of movement and interaction

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spiritual, familial, geographic— ‘it has with groups outside of it.’ Part and parcel of this reframing is coming to more productive terms with ‘the intensely relational nature of sovereignty’ and with the multiple visions of tribal nationhood that are produced by those relations” (21).

with the land and the more-than-human world. Utilizing the term resistant adaptation,<sup>8</sup> Cohen argues that

The Yaqui peoples have practiced resistant adaptation while adapting the Indigenous identity to the context in unanticipated, resilient, and sometimes defiant ways of responding to the global economy, discriminatory policing, racist law enforcement, and other related processes of colonial powers. Moreover, systemic racism has legally and socially forbidden cultural and religious practices in the public arena for decades.

Therefore, cultural hybridity has resulted in redefining, questioning, and reiterating the “imagined community.” (Cohen)

This dynamic mobility of both geographic, cultural, and personal space has been crucial to the survival of Yaqui people. Even so, “among those who hold the responsibility of preserving Yaqui ceremonies and ceremonial knowledge, there is an extreme consciousness of real and potential loss. It is clear to Yaqui ceremonial leaders like Matus that border reform is needed to prevent this loss and preserve Yaqui knowledge on both sides of the border” (Leza 33). In a moment of heightened border militarization and surveillance, the cross cultural exchange necessary to ensure ceremonial and cultural preservation and community are under threat due to the settler-state nations that Yaqui people have been caught and divided between. Yaqui people find themselves in a moment of cultural fragility, although they continue to persist and endure. Although this fragility is rooted in the violent rupture of settler colonialism, it also leads back to an initial sovereign stance of refusal.

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<sup>8</sup> “In addition, they manifested oppression on nationality and ethnicity, primarily negating – or negotiating – their “Yaquiness” for generations and embracing Mexican or Mexican American heritage. Consequently, some Yaquis created new ways of expressing identity in an ethnic mode rather than the indigenous one. Eric Meeks argues that indigenous and Mexican descent peoples have created new institutions and practices to be included in national culture and in the capitalist economy. He calls this process “resistant adaptation” (Cohen).

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The centuries-long battle for Yaqui self-determination and land rights rests on what is known as The Holy Dividing Line. In “The Holy Dividing Line: Inscription and Resistance in Yaqui Culture,” Larry Evers and Felipe S. Molina discuss the origin of The Holy Dividing Line in Yaqui culture. They look closely at its evolution in written forms (noting its important oral aspects), its function as a living document, as an essential text of Yaqui sovereignty, as well as its relationship to Yaqui storytelling. The Holy Dividing Line was etched into the earth of Sonora, Mexico on October 4, 1533 when the Europeans encountered Yaquis for the first time.<sup>10</sup> This line is indelibly rooted to inscription and the relationship between land and story.

At some time, perhaps long after the Yaqui elder drew that line on the earth, other Yaquis wrote a narrative on paper as a way of reinscribing the same boundary, a boundary Yaquis have come to call the Holy Dividing Line. We write in order to make available a version of this narrative. It is one Don Alfonso Florez Leyva copied for us in 1988 from a copy he had received from his wife’s uncle, Miguel “Miki” Romero. Titled “Testamento,” the

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<sup>9</sup> In an act of refusal, I honor my father’s vulnerability and willingness to share some of the most traumatic events of his life by protecting and shielding those moments. These are stories of pain and violence that I withhold in order to avoid crafting a spectacle of trauma and to respect the little boy that my father was, even as my family grapples with the repercussions of those events to this day. I honor them by making a space to acknowledge their existence while simultaneously refusing their consumption.

<sup>10</sup> “Hu-DeHart continues, ‘the old man drew a line on the ground as a demarcation, threatening death to any intruder who dared to cross it’ (1981:15). The old man’s line was as far north as these Spaniards got. They went away describing the Yaquis as ‘the fiercest fighters in the New World’ (Evers, Molina 3).

text records a complicated discourse in a combination of Spanish and Yaqui. It narrates original events in *Hiakim*, the Yaqui homeland: a world flood; the definition of the Holy Dividing Line, the tribal boundary; and the establishment of the *Wohnaiki Pueplom*, the Eight Pueblos which are the backbone of Yaqui social, cultural, and political life. (Evers, Molina 4)

This line, rather than being a location from which culture and identity are splintered, has been a defining boundary that marks a place of self preservation and wholeness. This Yaqui barrier intended to combat European, and later Mexican, encroachment and violence, is an important example of a productive breakage from oppressors that is protective, empowering, and ultimately acts in the service of securing and reproducing Yaqui culture, identity, community, and kinship in the face of a centuries-long attempts to disappear, disenfranchise, and exterminate them. This line signifies Yaquis' centuries-long posture of refusal in the face of colonial domination.

In “The Ruse of Consent and the Anatomy of ‘Refusal’: Cases from Indigenous North America and Australia,” Audra Simpson refuses settler colonial narratives of Indigenous acceptance and recognition to state power in the following terms:

The ethnographic and historical cases here point to the multiple ways in which contractual thinking and dispossession have produced historical consciousness in indigenous people that pushes against the contained, diagnostic language of politics (or perhaps political science itself) and rendered refusal an expression of this consciousness. Refusal is a symptom, a practice, a possibility for doing things differently, for thinking beyond the recognition paradigm that is the agreed-upon ‘antidote’ for rendering justice in deeply unequal scenes of articulation. (29)

Eve Tuck elaborates on the concept of refusal in “R-Words: Refusing Research”: “Settler colonial knowledge is premised on frontiers; conquest, then, is an exercise of the felt entitlement to transgress these limits. Refusal, and stances of refusal in research, are attempts to place limits on conquest and the colonization of knowledge by marking what is off limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred, and what can’t be known” (225). Although Tuck is writing about Indigenous refusal in the specific context of research within the academy, the Holy Dividing Line exemplifies a Yaqui commitment to and utilization of refusal as a method that limits conquest and colonization since contact. *In As We Have Always Done*, Leanne Simpson situates refusal as bound to “radical resurgent organizing,” which “refuses both settler colonialism and its many manifestations...Radical resurgent organizing refuses the politics of recognition as a mechanism to bring about change, and it is generative” (178). The Yaqui act of radical refusal upon contact would result in centuries of resistance and organization against state power. When the Yaqui elder drew a line in the earth he made a stance of reversal that reverberated across time and generations. As Evers and Molina highlight, “This first scrap of writing about Yaquis by Europeans links Yaqui resistance to an act of inscription. It describes roots of a Yaqui resistance to colonial domination, a resistance to control by those outside their aboriginal homeland that persists today” (Evers, Molina 3). This persistent refusal against the systemic apocalypse making of colonial powers signaled the sovereignty of Yaqui people, but contact was determined and relentless, and throughout the historical assaults against Yaqui people, fissures would spread and web from that initial line of courageous refusal.

Although the Holy Dividing Line is an origin of Yaqui refusal that can be traced, it did not remain a pure edge marking a culture unchanged by its oppressors. The long and violent history of Yaqui resistance, its diasporic nature, and the tribe's current struggles are evidence of

this. As Evers and Molina note, an important part of Yaqui resistance and survival has been a “tradition of cross cultural interpretation” (5).<sup>11</sup> Although these cultural interpretations may be viewed as a submission to hegemonic power, Evers and Molina interpret them as a reversal and appropriation that allowed Yaquis to turn Christian authority back on invaders throughout their history (5). These strategic reversals against state power indicate a sophisticated narrative navigation, one in which narrative contains layers of cosmology (melding together those that would be opposed and weaponized), an integration of difference, a devotion to Indigenous land and sovereignty, and the replication of an oppressors' authority to invalidate their attempts at oppression. However, the centuries-long mingling with and resistance to colonial powers and nations, violence, political persecution, and migration across borders has complicated Yaqui conceptions of nation, culture and identity. In *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King discusses the difference between culture and authenticity, noting that authenticity is a colonial construct that is weaponized against Indians to contain them in the colonial imaginary of what a real Indian is. This, in fact, hastens their disappearance. As King notes, the idea of authenticity has been unsettled by the way cultural and racial signifiers of Indianness have changed: “This is no longer as true as it once was, for many Native people now live in cities, with only tenuous ties to a reserve or a nation. Many no longer speak their Native language, a gift of colonialism, and the question of identity has become as much a personal matter as it is a matter of blood” (55). But still, the “authenticity test” and “racial-reality game” (54) remain. These are very present realities for Yaqui people, bi-national and diasporic as they are. The discourse of authenticity is yet

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<sup>11</sup> “The ‘Testamento’ is one result of Yaqui efforts to continue to define their own culture through a dialogue with the European history and Christian religion that followed Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán to the Yaqui homeland. The Yaqui elder who marked a boundary on Yaqui lands in 1533 backed by the authority of warriors, birds, deer, his impressive staff, the morning sunlight, and so forth has given way in Don Alfonso’s “Testamento” to a group of Yaqui prophets with names like Rabbi Kauwuamea who establish the boundary of Yaqui lands under the authority of an angel sent by God” (Evers and Molina 5).

another fracture that divides a Yaqui sense of self in terms of distance from the homeland and Yaqui communities, language and cultural knowledge, and racialization.

The divides between community, culture and language are heavy burdens to carry. Deborah Miranda, meditating on the devastation of California Indian communities since contact acknowledges that “Sometimes something can be so badly broken you cannot create its original shape at all...I am beginning to realize that when something is that broken, more useful and beautiful results can come from using the pieces to construct a mosaic. You use the same pieces, but you create a new design from it. Matter cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed” (135). The mosaic is an instructive image as it is a design that can only be rendered through the creation and usage of fragmented, often disparate parts. The fractures between the pieces are pathways that highlight the design's fragmented nature, but also draw your eye to the new “whole” that has been created, a whole that bears the scars of transformation. The Holy Dividing Line etched in the earth by the Yaqui elder is the original pathway of refusal that, throughout time, has webbed outwards. Even as it leads the eye to disparate parts, it also builds and preserves worlds. It is a narrative weapon of defense. It is a place of wholeness to return to as one moves farther away from the origin of unbrokenness and deeper into the land of fractures.

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### MEXICO

*I just quit going to school. Anyway, the good times began. I ran the streets, I ate paletas, fresh fruit, pineapples, oranges, strawberries and mangos that were sold by people pushing small carts with large bicycle tires. Horchata, tacos, nieve y dulce. I made a best friend named Manuel and we spent what seemed like endless hours running around town throwing firecrackers at anything or anyone we pleased. Manuel was older than myself by maybe two or three years. Much more mature than I, and streetwise. He took care of me as though I was his little brother. I loved him like a big brother and I think he loved me like a little brother.*

*If my memory serves right, the move wasn't bad from my point of view. We ended up all the way across town at the very edge of town, on a street that bordered farmland and a canal. Let me tell you, I spent countless hours in those canals. I was a water rat. As it turned out, we were now living in the same place as my friend Manuel. My days were spent running the streets, swimming in the canals most every day and spending countless hours at the theaters in town watching Mexican cowboy movies. I arrived in town not being able to speak a single word in Spanish, and when I finally left, I believe I was quite fluent in the language. And I can honestly say, a lot of that came from the countless hours spent watching those wonderful movies and those great actors like Antonio Aguilar, Pedro Infante, Javier Solis, and many others. These guys became my heroes. Kick ass cowboys.*

*The air was warm, the sky was always blue, and people for the most part seemed friendly. But when I look back on that time, I realize that something was always missing. All that running around, playing, exploring, meeting people. What was missing was a mother. I honestly struggle to find her in any of my memories of time spent in the small border town named San Luis Rio Colorado.*

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Since Spanish contact, Yaqui people have resisted conquest and cultural disintegration. Yaqui culture is deeply rooted in song, dance, and more-than-human worlds. Traditional Yaqui cosmology believes in a universe of overlapping worlds, not in hierarchies of dominance forced into place by violent acts of fracturing and categorization. The more-than-human worlds of the Yaqui cosmology, particularly the *sea ania* (flower world) and its relationship to the deer songs and deer dance, make evident the power of dreaming more-than-human worlds into being as ontological weapons against the life-killing practices of western racial capitalism. Nevertheless, the very existence of these worlds, rooted in kinship, song, dance, and poetry, threatened, and continue to threaten, the world-building/apocalypse-making of the West. These common Indigenous practices, involving deep spiritual ties to the more-than-human world, made Indigenous peoples targets of the western colonizing, capitalist system. It is a system that has perfected the breeding of cultural apocalypses against the victims of colonization to ensure its expansion and continuation. Cohen highlights the in-betweenness of Yaqui identity. Cohen bases their argument on “the cultural hybridity of the “in-betweenness” of both Indigenous groups and their transnational ceremonial and migration practices. According to this theory, the location of

culture is in between tradition and “newness,” in the hybridity of these elements, rather than in a homogenous national culture or an organic ethnic community” (Cohen). Yaqui peoples traditional beliefs in multiple worlds signals a cultural legacy of navigating in-betweenness. The in-between spaces between fractures, while violent and destructive in origin, become part of that legacy. Fracture, by necessity, becomes a place of emergence—a gap, erasure, absence, or silence waiting to be filled. Story is one way in which to fill and heal those fractures.

### III.

#### Story

*“As the months passed, the girl sat by the tree and continued to interpret the messages spoken by the tree. Soon the sabios sat by her side and began to ask questions of the tree, and the tree in turn gave messages to individuals. This stilled the doubts in anyone’s mind that the girl understood the tree and that the tree understood the people. The tree gave counsel on the way of life to be established by the Surem for the Yaquis that were to come in future time. It was the tree that showed us agriculture and irrigation; it established the laws of the early ceremonies and correct behavior. It told the Surem where to live and how to establish new villages along the Rio Yaqui, how to hunt, where to find foods, and how to order themselves along new lines of leadership that it had taught. The tree also spoke with a prophetic voice that told the future. It warned of the coming conquest and told of the chaos and bloodshed that would follow. It spoke of a new way of life that would change the tranquility of the Surem’s way forever. Most of the Surem could not face the prospects of the future and began to walk back in time to where they were created. Many say that they have chosen to live in the rocks, the sea, the clouds, and underground. The young girl and her family eventually walked north up the river to the cloud world above. The few Surem that did stay grew larger and were the beginnings of the Yaqui bloodlines. That is why we say they are our ancestors. The talking tree remained in the valley until the Spanish soldiers cut it down. Some say it is gone forever. Others listen on quiet nights for the buzzing to begin again” (20)*

*Yaqui Legends of Life by Stan Padilla*

*You who do not have enchanted legs,  
what are you looking for,  
what are you looking for?*

—*Yaqui Deer Songs Maso Bwikam: A Native American Poetry* by Larry Evers and Felipe S. Molina

As the story of the talking tree indicates, traditional Yaqui storytelling has guided Yaqui navigation of colonial fractures. Because the tree is a prophet, the talking tree also underscores the Indigenous relationship between story and land. The story of the talking tree highlights the symbiotic relationship between stories and land in Indigenous thought. Land is the source of stories and stories bring one back to the land. In *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Keith Basso's study of Apache relationship to place, Basso writes of the relationship between landscape and symbolism and how landscapes are transformed into imaginative tools (71). Basso claims that "landscapes are never culturally vacant. The ethnographic challenge is to fathom what it is that a particular landscape, filled to brimming with past and present significance, can be called upon to 'say,' and what, through the saying, it can be called upon to 'do'" (71). In the case of the talking tree, the landscape is clearly and authoritatively articulating, in an act of voluntary agency, the coming of a time that will bring with it the loss of its own power and voice. The land, through speaking, through storying, is sharing knowledge, as well as making, through revelation, a vision of the future. In this case, the story told by the tree is foretelling the rupture, loss, separation from land, and grief that Yaqui people will endure as the result of Spanish invasion and colonization. Kristin Erickson outlines the social and historical significance of Yaqui conceptions of place:

In order to understand the Yaqui production of a concept of homeland, we must frame it, as an overwhelming number of Yaquis do, within discourses that locate the intersection of a particular history with movement across socially and politically defined spaces.

Through ordinary social practices, particularly biographical narratives, Yaqui individuals produce meaningfulness of *their place* by tracing a history of exile and return. (43)

Contained within the apocalyptic prophecy of the Talking Tree story is a promise of endurance, evolution, and a hope of return.<sup>12</sup>

In *Walking the Clouds* Grace Dillon frames apocalypse storytelling in terms of Lawrence Gross' concept of post-apocalypse stress syndrome informed by his Anishinaabe worldview. According to this diagnosis, Indigenous people suffer from a sickness because the world is out of balance and needs to return to a balanced state, or bimaadiziwin (9). In this context, Dillon asserts that "Native apocalyptic storytelling, then, shows the ruptures, the scars, and the trauma in its effort ultimately to provide healing and a return to bimaadiziwin. This is the path to sovereignty embedded in self-determination" (9). Evers and Molina understand the story of the talking tree, or the talking stick, depending on the version, in similar terms:

The focus of the story is not so much on what the talking stick sounded like as it is on what the young woman is able to hear. In the vibrations of the talking stick the young woman hears a message that marks the boundary between an ancient Yaqui way of living and a way of living that takes account of the new world created by the European presence, a boundary between myth and history, immortality and death, a boundary between the language of the wilderness and the language of the town. It marks, then, not so much a creation as a re-creation, a time "when the earth was becoming new here." (38)

In a similar vein, Kristin Erickson argues that "the Talking Tree story is an alternative history, one that presents Yaquis as agents rather than victims, one that *refigures* the relation of Yoemi

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<sup>12</sup> In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* Daniel Justice writes that "In settler colonial fantasies of the end of the world, we're all thrown back to a time of glorified, even sanctioned violence, a time where white patriarchy rule this bloody world with impunity. But it's vital to remember that when Indigenous writers and other writers of colour imagine apocalypse, they think about what endures beyond it, and they imagine the living, loving, and connecting that takes place in the ruins of settler colonial excess; theirs are intersectional worlds where so many of the marginalized and dispossessed find ways of (re)making community together (167).

selves to Yori others in the process of ethnogenesis” (25). The talking tree contains the stories of the future. From its rooted place in the earth, it predicts fracture and boundaries, but it also offers the hope of wisdom and emergence, of re-creation. According to Daniel Heath Justice “Stories are bigger than the texts and the bodies that carry them. When absent they leave gaps that communicate as surely as their presences.” Justice aims to reveal “what happens when the meaningful stories of our place and belonging are denied us, and how, through their returning, we can knit the jagged edges of our histories across the woundings of time, space, and experience” (185). Although colonial contact inflicted a breakage of apocalyptic size, leaving Indigenous people to grapple with the gaps between jagged edges, there is a hope of return through these wounds in the stories that are carried, spoken, and preserved. In the wreckage of fracture is blazed not only the indomitable will to survive, but to create, and to imagine pathways of being, becoming, meaning, understanding, and healing.

This act of recreating or rewriting can be understood through Gerald Vizenor’s definition of survivance found in *Fugitive Poses*: “survivance, in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence... The native stories of survivance are successive and natural estates; survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (15). Dominance, tragedy, and victimry are tenets of the Indigenous deficiency narrative, what Vizenor refers to as the “terminal creeds” of “manifest manners.”<sup>13</sup> The deficiency narrative is a psychic fracture and a prime example of the wounds left behind by colonization. These psychic fractures and woundings are multi-layered as they encompass divisions between communities, families, identity, land, and culture. They

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<sup>13</sup> In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* Daniel Heath Justice defines Indigenous deficiency accordingly: “According to this story, Indigenous peoples are in a constant state of lack: in morals, laws, culture, restraint, language, ambition, hygiene, desire, love. This story presumes that we’re all broken by addiction or dangerously promiscuous according to pleasure-hating, Puritanical concepts of bodily propriety” (4).

also threaten to subsume the stories of survivance that emerge from these often very devastating divisions. As Justice writes, “Perhaps the most wounding way in which this story of Indigenous deficiency works is in how it displaces our other stories, the stories of complexity, hope, and possibility” (4). And so, story becomes the tool of Vizenor’s postindian warrior of survivance from *Manifest Manners*:

Postindian simulations arise from the silence of heard stories, or the imagination of oral literature in translation, not the absence of the real in simulated realities; the critical distinction is that postindian warriors create a new tribal presence in stories. The simulations of manifest manners are dominance, the scriptures of a civilization in paradise. The counteractions of postindian warriors are the simulations of survivance.  
(12)

Expanding the definition of the postindian warrior in *Fugitive Poses*, Vizenor claims that “The *indian* is a simulation, the absence of natives; the *indian* transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memories, or native stories. The *postindian* must waver over the aesthetic ruins of *indian* simulations” (15). From a Vizenorian perspective, story is a prophet. It reveals the fractures to come and excavates the fractures within and without. Story marks the line between colonization and refusal. It is the method used to deconstruct the enemy and emerge from the jagged edges of the wounds.<sup>14</sup> In these ways, story is also about dreaming and desire.

In “Intense Dreaming: Theories, Narratives, and Our Search for Home,” Dian Million writes about the Indigenous relationship between theorizing, story, and dreaming. Million argues:  
Story has always been practical, strategic, and restorative. Story *is* Indigenous theory. If these knowledges are couched in narratives, then narratives are always more than telling

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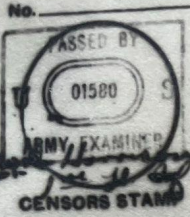
<sup>14</sup> See Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird’s introduction to *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writings of North America*.

stories. Narratives seek inclusion, they seek nooks and crannies of experience, filling cracks and restoring order. Narratives lay boundaries. Narratives give orphans homes. Narratives both make links and are the links that have been made. Narratives are our desire to link one paradigmatic ‘will to knowledge’ to discursive and material projects that have consequences. They serve the same function as any ‘theory’ in that they are ‘practical action.’ And last but not least, Indigenous narratives are also most often emotionally empowered. They are informed with the affective content of colonial experience. The felt experience of colonization is in our narratives, and that has made them almost unrecognizable to a Western scholarship that imagines itself ‘objective.’

(322)

Indigenous narratives and stories contain essential knowledges that have no temporal or spatial limit. These knowledges expand and evolve to fill the need at hand. As Million asserts, narratives fill gaps and reconstruct order from the wreckage of destruction. Stories have always been a part of Indigenous life and culture. After colonial contact, they emerged from the cracks between fractures to fill and bridge absences, to trace the temporal geography of loss, to honor what cannot be fully known, and to build homes—imaginary, necessary, hopeful. Stories are also acts of refusal. They do not hide from or dismiss the embodied and emotional reality of a fractured state of being, but they also offer the opportunity for the binding together of seemingly opposed elements.

WRITE COMPLETE ADDRESS IN PLAIN BLOCK LETTERS IN THE PANEL BELOW, AND YOUR RETURN ADDRESS IN THE  
MAIL PROVIDED. USE TYPEWRITER, DARK INK OR PENCIL. WRITE PLAINLY. VERY SMALL WRITING IS NOT SUITABLE.



Mrs. Tony Alvarez  
1421 Wilson Avenue  
Fresno, +, Calif.

*1944/45*  
Pl. Tony Alvarez  
SENDER'S NAME  
Co. F 327th G Int.  
SENDER'S ADDRESS  
A.P.O. 472  
New York, N.Y.  
DATE  
April 8, 1944

6 APR 1944

Dearest Lou -  
I don't feel a bit good tonight and I suppose you know why. If anything were to happen to John, I don't think I could come back. Remember the days when just us three were at the ranch? I thought they were fun. I use to be "chief cook + bottle washer" and I loved those days. Some how I feel that nothing can happen to either him or I. We're close, very close to combat and I still feel the same. I just call it another job. If you happen to see Dad tell him every thing and what can happen and whose fault it is. I really don't feel like any thing tonight. I've been going to church every nite this week and I pray for all of you, cause I love each and every one of you. Of course I love you the most and always will. I had my shoes reboled. Some better, isn't it? Sweetheart, Please forgive me - I'm worried  
Love + kisses a million of them  
Tony

V - MAIL

Lines of Sorrow

April 26, 1944  
Fresno



Dearest Tony,

By now you've received the notification that would hurt you so much. I wish I had been with you when you found out. The telegram from the Red Cross in Washington arrived after Johnny's funeral. You sounded so desperate. I can imagine how you felt. It came addressed to Mrs. Burum at the Hi School as she is the chairman of the Red Cross in Dinuba. She had Lily call me when

*Lines of Longing*

Across the lines of division induced by colonial destruction, story works to bring together ways of knowing and being that western structures of dominance would prefer to silence and delegitimize. In *Indigenous Storywork*, Jo-ann Archibald writes, “Bringing heart and mind together for story listening was necessary if one was to make meaning from a story because often one was not explicitly told what the story’s meanings were. Linking how we feel to what we know was an important pedagogy” (76). This defies the western logic that is deeply rooted in hierarchical binaries where “objective” knowledge is always more superior and reliable than emotional or heart knowledge. Archibald forwards an Indigenous understanding of storytelling to “help people think, feel, and ‘be’ through the power of stories” (i). Archibald coins the term storywork, which she defines as “First Nations stories and storytelling for educational purposes” (i). This storywork has seven foundational principles: respect, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (i). Archibald introduces readers to important concepts such as story pathways (12). Pathways indicate a need for guidance. They offer navigation and shelter for the lost. Story pathways, then, offer an alternative to the psychic, cultural, and environmental fractures induced by colonialism's apocalyptic appetites.

Pathways, for Archibald, are also land based, so part of their work is to bring one back to the land. As Million argues, narratives seek the gaps, but they also fill the absences and when they do so, they leave lines to trace. Similar to Yaqui narrative themes of exile and return, the space between these lines is transformed from a past fracture that precipitates loss into a future oriented pathway. Therefore, the spaces between fractures represent possibilities for (re)emergence. Emergence, in an Indigenous context, cannot be separated from the intertwined relationship between story and survivance. Following these story pathways precipitates a space of dynamism and movement. If narratives link, they must also move. Whether they are moving

backward or forward in time, they are vehicles of mobility that navigate geographical, temporal, and psychological space.

*I think for some people diaspora must be shorthand for apocalypse survivors. The scattered ones.*

*I wonder what it would feel like to carry worlds and worlds inside of you.*

*I wonder what it feels like to have a world die inside of you.*

*Is there a dying world inside of my chest?*

*Imagine the healing worlds that would be freed if we stopped hemorrhaging apocalypses.*

*Can you remake without destroying?*

*Is there time to salvage these bleeding worlds?*

*The answers are hard to find.*

*I think I will have to intensely dream myself there.*

Story pathways are generated by creative spaces. These spaces of creative energy engender rhetorical, narrative, and spiritual movement through place and time. In “Tribalography: The Power of Native Stories,” LeAnne Howe forwards the concept of tribalography as a rhetorical space where “Native people created narratives that were histories and stories with the power to transform” (118). Howe uses the lens of tribalography to reexamine the history of the formation of America. Howe also considers the significance of Haudenosaunee practice of retelling their origin stories at councils to renew the “Covenant Chain” (121). Howe describes the purpose of this practice as presenting “a unified image to the colonists” and as “what historian Ray Fogelson calls an epitomizing non-event for both speaker and audience”

(121). This non-event, whether it happened or not, is a story and “story creates attitudes, culture, the very glue which binds a society together” (121). The validation of a non-event as an integral and effective strategy of storytelling is especially relevant to Indigenous stories and histories that grapple with the reality of archival gaps and absences, as well as Indigenous peoples who live with lost or lacking cultural and communal ties. *Bad Indians* by Deborah Miranda is a devastating tour de force that retells the history of California Indians in the wake of Spanish missionization and ongoing settler colonial dispossession and violence. Miranda refuses convention in her presentation of the violent realities that Native tribes faced, while simultaneously grappling with the weight of her own Indigenous identity, being descended from the Carmel Mission Indians. The text richly and compellingly interweaves historical details and archival documents with poetry, personal narratives, and family photos. As with Howe’s tribalogy, Miranda crafts a mosaic of stories that are gleaned from and in between the gaps of the historical record, as well as stories of her own family and identity that she tracks and crafts and thoughtfully places within this Indigenous-centered record of history that she is forwarding. Miranda writes, “I chose to make this book: to create a space where voices can speak after long and often violently imposed silence” (xx). Like Howe’s tribalogy, Miranda’s text is enriched by narrative and temporal movements that defy settler colonial structures and forms while also navigating loss through story creation that locates one in a particular place or homeland. Similarly, “The Yaqui homeland is a place continually made ‘real’--situated and strengthened in its location--through narratives about movement” (Erickson 54). These narratives revolve around the concept of return--to home, self, community, land.

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## ARIZONA

*So we drove and drove through Idaho, Utah, and Arizona. Arizona was interesting because my mother seemed to know exactly where she was headed at one point. It was evening when we pulled up to a small hutch looking type building that almost looked like it was built with small logs and discarded lumber. Almost tepee-ish. This is how I remember it.*

*A small older woman came out and she seemed nervous, not really happy to see Watusi. We spent the night and left early. I think she was relieved when we did. Her home was out in the middle of nowhere. I think she was a native woman, related to my mother. My mother seemed to do everything she could to keep me from having any contact or communication with this woman.*

*From here, we drove to Yuma, Arizona.*

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Bordering the many crimes of colonialism's violent history are the silences, gaps, and elisions left in the wake of its destruction. These silences and the absences that embed them become the spaces that necessitate a contemporary crafting of Howe's epitomizing non-events. As Vizenor writes in *Manifest Manners*, "The shadows of tribal names and stories are the ventures of landscapes, even in the distance of translation. Tribal imagination, experience, and remembrance, are the real landscapes in the literature of this nation; discoveries and dominance are silence" (10). Stan Padilla points out something similar when discussing the Yaqui storytelling tradition.

Generation after generation these stories have been passed down from father to son and mother to daughter. In the earliest days, it took many days to tell these stories, to give their meanings, and each time they were shared, it was as if they were spoken for the first time. Yaqui identity is rooted in this ancient time, and it was during the earliest era that authority was given by spiritual beings to establish the Yaqui homelands. The myths became the models for ceremonial and ritual actions and established the laws which governed the way of life that would guide Yaquis into the future. (36)

There is a path connecting the stories from ancient time to their resonance and relationship to Yaqui futurity. Rather than merely signifying gaps of history, relationship, culture, or connection, colonial silences become potential origin points of new stories of (re)emergence, returning, and becoming. They come forth to do their work in Indigenous storytelling post-apocalypse—to resurrect the forgotten, neglected, misremembered, and vanished. These become, in Howe’s words, the histories and stories that contain the power to transform.

Essential to the birth of these transformative stories are their relationship to land. In Kirstin Squint’s interview with LeAnne Howe in “Choctawan Aesthetics, Spirituality, and Gender Relations,” Howe discusses tribalography further. Howe argues that Native literature is foundational to mainstream novelists and that American novelists are moving towards a Native understanding of literature. She claims that “It’s the way that we tell stories that American writers have adapted to, not the other way around” (216). She points out that like Native stories, contemporary novels often utilize a “community of people” (216) and take on a non-linear, “splintered storytelling style with multiple characters and multiple points of view” (216). Howe explains this as “the land teaching people here how to understand and talk through that space” (217). This splintered Indigenous storytelling style is reminiscent of fracturing but, while it may encompass an element of fragmentation or separation, it is inherently inclusive and wide-ranging. Splintering, in this context, instead of being a damaging division that spreads outwards from the colonial epicenter, can be envisioned more like the roots of a tree: in the land, deep, branching, connected, seeking nourishment, and fostering life. This is how stories spread, grow, and deepen. Howe also describes tribalography as bringing the past back into existence by remembering stories (218). Stories strengthen connection to land but they also disrupt temporal space. According to Howe “the past is ever-present whether it’s through the ceremonies, ghosts,

or land. Think of it, land is past tense and present tense at the same time. The land actually is a wonderful space in physics that is all things at once—past, present, and future” (219). Like stories, land is a vehicle through which temporal space can be traversed, re-known, and re-claimed.

These place based narratives and pathways offer access to lost knowledges, lost ways of being, and encounters with the ghosts who need us to care for them by invoking their voices in our stories.<sup>15</sup> In “Land as Life: Unsettling the Logics of Containment,” Mishuana Goeman understands land as a meaning-making place<sup>16</sup> that is at the heart of Indigenous identity, longing, and belonging, and that meaning is attributed to land not merely through claiming but through narrative practices (73). Similar to Howe, Goeman also conceives of the relationship between land and stories as a disruptor of temporal norms: “The dialectic of stories in the past and present break from the unidirectional, progressive narrative found in narratives of manifest destiny. Indigenous conceptions of land are literally and figuratively the placeholder that moves through time and situates Indigenous knowledges” (74). In this conception, land is a placeholder that moves, or remains, through time as opposed to a fracture that splits time, space, and being. Land is a place of wholeness and it contains narratives. When these narratives emerge from the gaps, they not only strengthen ties to land, but they also facilitate navigation, declaration, and meaning-making of the self within social, cultural, national, and even cosmological contexts.

Indeed, the traditional Yaqui belief system is based on a cosmology in which multiple worlds exist within our own. According to Evers and Molina in *Yaqui Deer Songs*, these include

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<sup>15</sup> “Erasure and defacement concoct ghosts; I don’t want to haunt you, but I will” (643). “A Glossary of Haunting” by Eve Tuck and C. Ree.

<sup>16</sup> “I begin with land as meaning-making 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 politics and our 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” (Goeman 73).

the *huya ania*, understood to be the place where the first real Yaquis lived (44), as well as the source of all things that contains the elements of everyday reality and the powers of dance and song. The powers of *huya ania* are divided into realms or worlds and they include *tuka ania*, night world; *tenku ania*, dream world; *yo ania*, enchanted world; *sea ania*, flower world (45). Of particular significance is the *sea ania*, as it is the world associated with the Yaqui deer song, a sacred ceremony that was traditionally practiced before the hunting of deer. It is still performed today, though deer hunting is no longer common. Yaqui relationship to the deer or *saila maso* (little brother deer) is based on a kinship relationship (47). The deer songs are of essential cultural importance for Yaqui people. As Evers and Molina note, “Most Yaqui’s believe that deer songs perpetuate the oldest form of their language. In that sense deer songs are regarded as one of the most essential expressions of what it is to remain Yaqui after four and one-half centuries of attempts to destroy their communities and dissolve them as a people. The continuance of Yaqui deer songs is thus directly related to Yaqui memories of their history and survival as a people” (19). The conception of Yaqui personhood and culture is intimately woven together with song and the more-than-human as reflected in the *sea ania*. The Sonoran Desert holds these worlds and relations. It binds them together through its own complex and diverse ecological systems. According to Erickson,

Location and geography figure prominently in the identity narratives of the Yaquis, a people whose aboriginal territory has been a source of contention since colonial times. Their removal from their aboriginal territory, enslavement in southern Mexico, life in exile, and struggle to return to their homeland have become central themes in the narratives that are the fabric of Yaqui social history. As portrayed in myths focused on territory and borders, stories of ancestors who dwell underneath hills, historical accounts

of exile and return, and legends of enchanted caves and blessed springs, Yaqui ethnic–cultural identity has a decidedly spatial component. (15)

The Sonoran Desert is the homeland. It is the place that carries Yaqui language and stories. It is at once the place of origins, of departures, and of returns.

*I think how beautiful it would be to enter another world through song. I think how much it would ache to sing against extermination.*

*I would like to stand on the edge of the Sonoran Desert, at the border of Mexico and the United States, the border of night and dawn, the border of sung and unsung.*

*Between the present and the past, between ancestors and descendants, between my white mother and Indigenous father.*

*Stand still until the mirror image of a singing world of life that does not have to fight to stay alive appears.*

Understandably, a people whose relationship to the more-than-human world is deeply linked to song would also have a unique relationship to sound. *thathomewasmyfirstintroductiontothelategreatraycharlessheobviouslylovedhismusicasshewouldplayhisalbumoftenandsheplayeditloudtakethesechainsfrommyheartandsetmefreehittheroadjackanddontyoucomebacknomoreitwashifistereoanditjustmademefeelgood* Evers and Molina write: “The sounds that need to be understood may come from fishes, caves, or invading spaniards. They may be a part of what we call myth, history, vision, or dream, but time and again in Yaqui stories the people must understand sound from beyond the limits of the everyday language of their communities in order to continue” (36). In this conception, there is a thickening of time, of sound, as well as a layering of space. The sound, like the matter of the land, has a memory of the past (Neimanis et al. 570). It is imbued with the

livingness and memory of the more-than-human. Understanding stories and language and sound from beyond everyday limits signals a freedom from temporal contaminants that place these elements in the context of futurity as their presence guarantees communal continuity. The relationship between sound, language, story, and futurity is exemplified in the story of the talking tree. Importantly, in Ramón Hernández's version of the story of the talking tree, the girl who translates for the tree is a poetess. Erickson points out the significance of this change: "While some Yaqui storytellers have identified the young woman as a 'prophetess' (Sands 1983; 363), Ramón calls her a 'poetess.' Even if unintentional, the implication of Ramón's word choice is meaningful. Playing with sound, rhythm, syntax, and vocabulary, the poet fashions language into something out of the ordinary" (31). This act of breath through song, story, or poetry breeds speech, creates meaning, and anchors a connection and communion between the more-than-human that is predicated on the Indigenous practice of intense dreaming. Importantly, to understand all sounds as languages broadens who can be considered a speaker, such as the land and all of its beings. In "(Re)Mapping Indigenous Presence on the Land in Native Women's Literature" Mishuana Goeman, considering the poetry of Esther Belin, argues that the "act of breath, which is necessary to life, leads to speech. In the act of speaking, Belin articulates a history of connection and breaks down a Western "boundary drawn to separate people"" (299). Stories, particularly those in oral form, are imagined, enacted, embodied, and dreamed acts of breath that sustain, fill gaps, and inspire return. The Yaqui homeland is a place that is haunted, enchanted, and pulsing with memory<sup>17</sup>. The land is itself is a being, a relative, that has been witness to the suffering of the people it sustains, "encapsulated in the phrase

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<sup>17</sup> "Among the Yaquis, narratives of haunting and enchantment are not merely about history and encounters with ghosts and ancestors in a multiply layered world; they are fundamentally about place—about the Yaqui homeland as an entity and about natural landmarks and special locations on the homeland. These stories are about the ways that these places embody memory; they are about identification with a particular landscape" (Erickson 69)

‘inim bwan bwía,’ this weeping land” (Erickson 58). The land feels, speaks, weeps, but also gives life and beckons. Necessary to sustaining life are the dreams and stories that shape our relations between worlds and beings—the dreams that encourage the layering of worlds that are mirrors and teachers and hope-growers. In Yaqui cosmology, the Sonoran Desert holds these layers: of matter, of time, of sound, of memory, of song, and of story.

*Maybe there is no distinction between dreaming and breathing. No pause between story and breathing.*

*I wonder what it would be like to exist together in one place, at one time, without division.*

*Layers instead of limits.*

*I wonder if my father’s mother ever went to the desert. If she bestowed thought or care towards it. Towards anything or anyone. I think her anger was a self-destructive dance.*

*I trace her geographic outline through the damage she left behind.*

*Is it true that the land knows you, even when you are lost?<sup>18</sup>*

*I grieve these geographies.<sup>19</sup> Maybe the geographies are grieving too.*

*Resilience is “The ability of a system to remain in or return to its current state following disturbance.”<sup>20</sup>*

*I try to hear the songs.*

*The enchantment was not passed onto me.*

*But desire was.*

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<sup>18</sup> Kimmerer (36). *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

<sup>19</sup> Rodríguez, Meztli (29). “Grieving Geographies, Mourning Waters: Life, Death, and Environmental Gendered Racialized Struggles in Mexico.”

<sup>20</sup> According to “Estimating social-ecological resilience: fire management futures in the Sonoran Desert,” by Clare E. Aslan, resilience as “the ability of a system to remain in or return to its current state following disturbance” (1).



*Young Love*

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## *MADERA*

*This is the place. This is the place where I learned to survive on my own. It's the place where I spent the next three years or so on my own being a child of the street. It's where I spent countless hours searching all the bars on C street, trying to find my mother so I could maybe get a dollar from her so I could buy something to eat. I know it sounds horrible and it was. I don't write these things for some kind of pity or to make some kind of excuse for things I did or became later in life. Mistakes and choices that no one can be held accountable for, except myself.*

*I always felt embarrassed, and I remember how dark these places were, and I could only open the door wide enough to get my small head through the open door. It was always very dark. Black. The ranchera music coming from the jukebox was loud, mixed with the drunken laughter and the smell of beer and cigarettes. Glass clanging, people yelling, having a great time, I guess. But I had a different reason for being there, hungry, worried that maybe something had happened to my mom because I hadn't seen or heard from her in days or even weeks. My mother was a big woman and every now and then, I would find her, dancing with some drunk or sitting at the bar in her own drunkenness. This was mostly something I would do during the day in broad daylight because C street was a scary place and it was dangerous at*

*night. My eyes had to adjust quickly to the darkness in the hope I might find her. Oftentimes, the bartender would chase me off with, "get the hell out of here."*

*More often than not, I would not find her. "Vayate a la chingada cabron."*

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Indigenous identity is deeply connected to a sense of place. If land holds stories, it also holds a sense of identity. This relationship is complicated by colonial modes of displacement and fracture as made evident in the bi-national, diasporic Yaqui community. In many cases Yaqui individuals are separated from the homeland by borders, making Yaqui identity a complex site of conflicts as one navigates the greater socio-political environment, as well as the desire to return home. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa, borders are a place in which to contextualize and theorize identity. Anzaldúa does this by detailing the environmental, social, and political history of the U.S. Southwest, paying particular attention to her homeland, Texas. The formation of the physical border between the U.S. and Mexico is mirrored by the internalized borders that come to shape and define Chicana and Mexican identity. These identities function as embodied sites where language, being, flesh, culture, land, and country are socially constructed by the dominant white culture to be oppositional and in a constant state of conflict. Anzaludúa's work is a navigation of the borders and fractures inflicted by colonial violence. This navigation is deeply rooted to place, and as Anzaldúa traces the history of the lines that define her, she also refuses them. By doing so, Anzaldúa crafts a new narrative space through which to form and define identity, generating important concepts that serve as identity markers. This is an important and applicable concept for the Yaqui people, bi-national and diasporic as they are. The *new mestiza* finds a precursor in the young woman from the story of the talking tree, whether she is defined as prophet or poet.

In some versions of the Talking Tree myth her name is Yomumli (Giddings 1993). Occasionally, she is described as twin girls, and at times she is called a Sea Hamut (Flower Woman). Regardless, in every recorded version, the wise one is young and female. According to Ramón, Maapol lives with her father in the wilderness, significantly, near the sea, a place that Yaquis often associate with danger and power (Sands 1983:64). The wise one breaks traditional Yaqui gender conventions: she prepares for her trip by gathering a bow and arrows (male hunting equipment), and she makes the long trek inland without accompaniment. Maapol's association with the wilderness is reinforced by another detail in Ramón's story: she journeys to the country of the Surem with an army of dangerous and frightening insects. (Erickson 31)

This wise young woman is a poet/prophet of the future. Through her wisdom, strength, and communion with the more-than-human world, she gains the insight to prepare her people for the displacement and violences that will come with European contact. She ushers in the era of a new consciousness by preparing her people for division. She prophesies exile and the apocalypse, but her warning allows the people to prepare, fortify, re-conceptualize, and seek the return.

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### MY SIS

*Well anyway, back to that beautiful sunny day in Fresno at that same park years after having been there once before. After Pinedale, racist Washington state, fleeing to Mexico, getting dumped in the Sonoran desert, where fare on a Greyhound to Madera and all that would come with living there. I FOUND MY SIS .*

*It's funny how clear my recollection of that very moment, when I saw my sister that day standing alone, remains in my mind. She looked like any one of so many other hippie looking young people just walking around aimlessly. I don't really want to say I know exactly how she was dressed but I do remember her leather purse with the long strap hanging around her neck.*

*I recognized my sister immediately even though it had been years since I watched my mother do the sign of the cross on her forehead, arm's, and heart . My sis looked puzzled and had no idea why she was performing this ritual upon her and I was puzzled too.*

*And now, here she was. I could not control myself at that point and began yelling, "Mom, mom, there's Ginger, there's Ginger." Immediately my mother tried to cover my mouth and told me to "shut up" and began to drag me away. I was having none of that and before you could count to one, I had broken free and was running towards my sister.*

*She was as surprised and happy as I was. I came running towards her as quickly as any kid could run. We hugged and kissed and she squeezed me as tightly as she could. And standing back, almost not able to hide her expression of someone who got caught doing something wrong and then failing to escape her captors, stood Watusi.*



*In the remaining time that followed, the time left spent in Madera, I did get to see my sister. She brought me my first suitcase phonograph, and better yet, my first Beatles album. She sent me a greyhound ticket to*

*Fresno and bought me a nice warm jacket which I absolutely cherished. I don't think I had a jacket before that. We walked around downtown Fresno and we went to the ice capades.*

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Although migration and return are narrative themes in Yaqui histories and memories, it is important to recognize that the displacement that instigates the desire to return is rooted in colonial violences that also mark Yaqui narratives and conceptions of identity. Erickson writes that “Evidence of a strongly honed consciousness of the prevalence of struggle and opposition in Yaqui experience is reflected in individuals’ narratives of the past, as the paired themes of suffering and endurance surface time and again” (80). This narrative theme aligns with Anzaldúa’s concept *La facultad*. According to Anzaldúa, it is a critical sense developed by those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe (60), a sense honed most strongly by the marginalized:

*La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant “sensing,” a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, besides which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world. (60)

*La facultad*, due to its relationship to lack of safety, finds its defining precursor in fracture—in colonial induced traumas. These instincts, imaginings, symbols, images, and excruciatingly aliveness are the building blocks for stories. They generate the presence of creative, restless motion. They know the taste of pain and the ache of visions beyond it. They compel searching and seeking and self-deconstruction. They require tools, such as endurance,<sup>21</sup> tribalography, and

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<sup>21</sup> “Endurance appears to be a significant component informing a poetics of Yaqui ethnicity, a sort of expressive form or style, an aesthetic logic that permeates significant cultural practices” (Erickson 81).

survivance to shape them into a habitable, expansive readable space that can contain the many conflicting crossroads of Indigenous history and identity—that can lead travelers reaching into the past and the future.

The prophet/poet in the talking tree story reflects a tradition of Indigenous women who theorize and contextualize colonial displacement, assisting her people by offering them the tools and knowledge to rebuild, re-conceptualize, and survive. *I Am Woman* by Lee Maracle combines poetry, narrative, and sociology to analyze Native history, identity, and relations. Maracle does extensive work thinking about Native womanhood. She details the racism, violence, and oppression that Native women endure from white people and especially from Native men. Maracle writes “Our communities are reduced to a sub-standard definition of normal, which leads to a sensibility of defeat, which in turn calls the victim to the table of lateral violence” (18). Maracle’s work uncovers and deconstructs this lateral violence, which is the product of colonialism. The antidote for this destruction is re-construction, although Maracle acknowledges that “We have so few tools available for the re-construction of our houses...yet re-build we must” (21). One of the tools of reconstruction is story. The precursor to re-building is return:

Whether they attest to Yaquis’ strategies of work or enlistment of describe the utter resolve to walk home over mountains and across a desert, stories of return maintain an important place in the Yaqui ethnic imagination, demonstrating that identity is determined not solely by structural factors or by victimhood to the powers that be.

Rather, narratives illustrating the will to return from exile confront a nation’s ‘topography of power,’ proving that agency counts for something, that Yaqui identity is also shaped by the courage and determination of individuals. (Erickson 51)

The act of returning is narrative, personal, and spatial. It is an agential act that defies the world-killing mechanisms unleashed on a homeland. These stories of return can also be acts of rewriting and retracing oneself back into identity, place, communion, and connection.

Crafting and tracing stories of return can be as arduous as crossing mountains. As agential storytellers, sometimes the stories and histories that we craft, recover, and return to need a complex and humane fusion of imagination and alteration. Maracle writes, “I, too, have taken the stories of my life and others’ lives and added some pure fabrications of my imagination, rewriting them as my own. Rather than distorting the facts, I have altered their presentation. They are presented as I saw them, from my own emotional, spiritual and visual perspective” (33). Maracle posits an arresting comparison between the mindful alteration of facts vs distortion of facts. Maracle acknowledges and embraces her position as a viewer and the way that this position altered her experience and perception of events, but recognizes that this does not diminish the value or power of her interpretation or the need to create stories. Maracle even goes so far as to claim and embrace the authority of rewriting. “Fabrications of imagination,” like an epitomizing non-event, embed a story with more layers of meaning. While rewriting and altering facts can be dangerous, sometimes to excavate buried truths, the presentation of facts must be altered. They must be embedded in different perspectives for their full dimensions and repercussions to be felt. Sometimes facts are not enough, they are too small to contain the emotional, spiritual and visual elements of truth. The facts of colonialism are not enough. The lived and embodied experiences of its victims must be spoken, crafted, rendered, and storied. Facts are the stepping stones to the nuance, complexity, and layers of identity and voice. Yaqui people have been engaging in this rewriting since time immemorial. In the talking tree story, Yaqui storytelling arguably offers us an example of prewriting–storying that predicts the trauma

and devastation of colonial contact but promises a narrative and spiritual practice of survivance and return. Return is a tracing that takes us back. The only way to return is to desire it.

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CANDEE

*I was to meet my brother's new bride.*

*Truth be told, nobody in my life has had a more positive influence or been more helpful in showing me what love and caring about others means than my sister Candee. When I first met her at my very young age, I remember being surprised at how pretty she was and she was too nice to be true. I met her downtown at a store that I had been in many times before and lo and behold, the owner of the store who had never spoken a word to me all of a sudden was offering us a ride to my house. I could see he made my new sister nervous but we took that ride home.*

*I'm not really sure how long she stayed with us, but it must have been a week at least. It wasn't long enough. That cold dark square shaped house was all of a sudden warm and happy. I think it must have been quite a shock for such a young girl to find her mother in law lying wounded on a nasty old couch in a filthy old house and a happy, cute little guy like myself aimlessly just trying to exist from one day to the next. She made food, we ate, we laughed a lot and we walked to the grocery store together. We talked and she always showed an interest in me. She also helped care for my mom. And at night, we would lay in my bed and we would talk and laugh until we fell asleep. Those were my happiest days in Madera.*

*And then one day she had to leave. I knew it made her sad to leave me there and I could tell she was worried about me. She was already loving me like a big sister. And I was also very sad to see my sister go. I had experienced something I had never known before and for the first time in my life, I knew what it was like to be loved by someone and I knew the heartbreak that comes with missing someone.*

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Embedded within Yaqui tradition, as well as Maracle's and Anzaldua's approaches to Indigenous identity and storytelling, is the desire to define, name, and narrate their stories on their own terms of understanding and perspective that results in a sense of agency and empowerment. In "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," Eve Tuck composes an open letter to Indigenous communities encouraging them to move away from the damage-centered

conception of themselves that has historically been generated by colonial research narratives and towards a conception based on desire. Tuck is concerned with the “long-term repercussions of thinking of ourselves as broken” (409). Tuck defines damage centered research as a documentation of pain or loss within an individual, community, or tribe (413). This kind of research “looks to historical, exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy.” More concisely, it is “research that operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation” (413). While Tuck admits this kind of research had its moment of necessity, the danger is when “evidence of ongoing colonization by research—absent a context in which we acknowledge that colonization—is relegated to our own bodies, our own families, our own social networks, our own leadership” (415). *ivegrowntiredofthisstoryandineedtobringittoanend* The antidote for this is desire: “desire based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives” that documents not only pain “but also wisdom and hope” (416). Desire is about “the *not yet* and, at times, the *not anymore* and contains a ghostly element (417). It is “not mere wanting but our informed seeking” (418). An essential component of desire is that it must hold space for contradiction and complexity. People must be allowed to be, feel, and represent multiple, conflicting things at once.

*iwanttosaysomethingaboutallthehardshipsandpainicausediwantto  
explaintheunexplainableaskforgivenessforeverandsomehowcreateaworldwhereallisforgivenand  
forgottenbutofcourseitdoesnotworkthatway*

Story is an ideal space to hold and explore desire because, as LeAnne Howe notes, Native stories take on a non-linear, “splintered storytelling style with multiple characters and multiple points of view” (216). This style does not just allow for the creation of multiple character perspectives but multiple layers, states, and versions of self. Storytelling is about informed self-

seeking. It is about the desire to capture and communicate complexity, contradiction, self-determination, wisdom, and hope. Stories allow us to carve out a narrative space where multiplicity can thrive and come to peace with itself. Therefore storytelling generates a pathway to self-discovery; it is a creative act that can unlock access to the nuances of identity, which leaves a space open for exploring and knowing the divided or bordered identities that Anzaldúa writes about. Desire contains the *not yet* of unhealed fractures and the *not anymore* of things both lost and reconciled. The gaps and absences of colonial fractures induce the seeking nature of desire. Fracture is related to desire as “the part of us that *hankers* for the desired and at the same time the part that *learns to* desire” (Tuck 418) ourselves and the stories that extend before and beyond our time and sight. Desire is a hunger compelling us to trace the lines left behind us by survivance.

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*THE HOBBS (Foster Home 1)*

*There is one memory in time spent in that house that I always remember with a smile and a warm feeling in my heart for my wonderful sister. Apparently, my sister and I had been left alone in the house for a few hours. She was cleaning and I was whining about running away when she said “you really want to run away, you really want to run away?” I absolutely remember the conversation and the look on my sister's face. She looked tired and frustrated at the same time. Stress on a young girl's face. I said, “I really do.” She left and came back with a broomstick, a red bandanna tied in a bundle at the end of the broomstick with clothes inside, handed it to me and I was fucking gone out that door.*



*I felt so good, I will never forget that feeling. Warm sun in my face, a huge smile. I must have been running 60 miles an hour. I remember reaching the street corner when all of a sudden, a hand was reaching out and grabbing me, stopping me in my tracks. My sis. She had no idea how serious I was about getting the hell out of there and I could see the worry in her face that I almost did get away. But she loved me and was always gentle with me as though I was her baby brother. And I always was.*

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#### IV.

##### Tracing Lines

###### ***Trace, n.***

The way or path which anything takes; course, road; esp. in ***to take one's trace***, to make one's way, take one's course, proceed.

Vestiges or marks remaining and indicating the former presence, existence, or action of something; *singular* a vestige, an indication.

A mark or impression left on the face, the mind, etc.

###### ***Trace, v.***

To trace its origin or history; to go *back* in time, to date *back*.

In *Fugitive Poses* Gerald Vizenor defines transmotion and its relationship to memory, story, motion, and survivance:

The sovereignty of motion means the ability and the vision to move in imagination and the substantive rights of motion in native communities. Native transmotion is an instance of natural reason, and an aesthetic creation, to be sure, but not a literal simile of nature as a resistance to civilization; transmotion is motion and native memories, and not mere comparatives or performative acts. The sovereignty of motion is survivance, shared power, and performative transmotion is an ethical presence of nature, native stories, and natural reason. The sovereignty of motion is mythic, material, and visionary, not mere

territoriality, in the sense of colonialism and nationalism. Native transmotion is an original natural union in the stories of emergence and migration that relate humans to an environment and to the spiritual and political significance of animals and other creations. Monotheism is dominance over nature; transmotion is natural reason, and native creation with other creatures. (189)

According to Vizenor, motion is an inherent right and it is a sovereign act. Motion, in a Native sense, allows for the evolution and survivance of Native communities. Transmotion is ethical and aesthetic. It carries “stories of emergence and migration.” Transmotion is the hand moving as it writes across the page, the eye following the words as the mind reads. Transmotion is the way we move imaginatively and seekingly as we craft and consume stories about our families and ourselves. Transmotion is the line we follow into the past in order to guide us as we render our futures. Humans are always making lines. The lines we make (on the land, between people) and the lines we write create narratives of displacement, motion, and belonging. We are always tracing lines that other people have left behind and trying to map ourselves into place, home, and identity. Yaqui people have been drawing holy lines of refusal and been victims of unnatural boundary lines since colonial contact. The violent fracturing lines left behind by colonialism are painful to trace. But there are also other lines to trace like refusal, desire, story, survivance, and love.



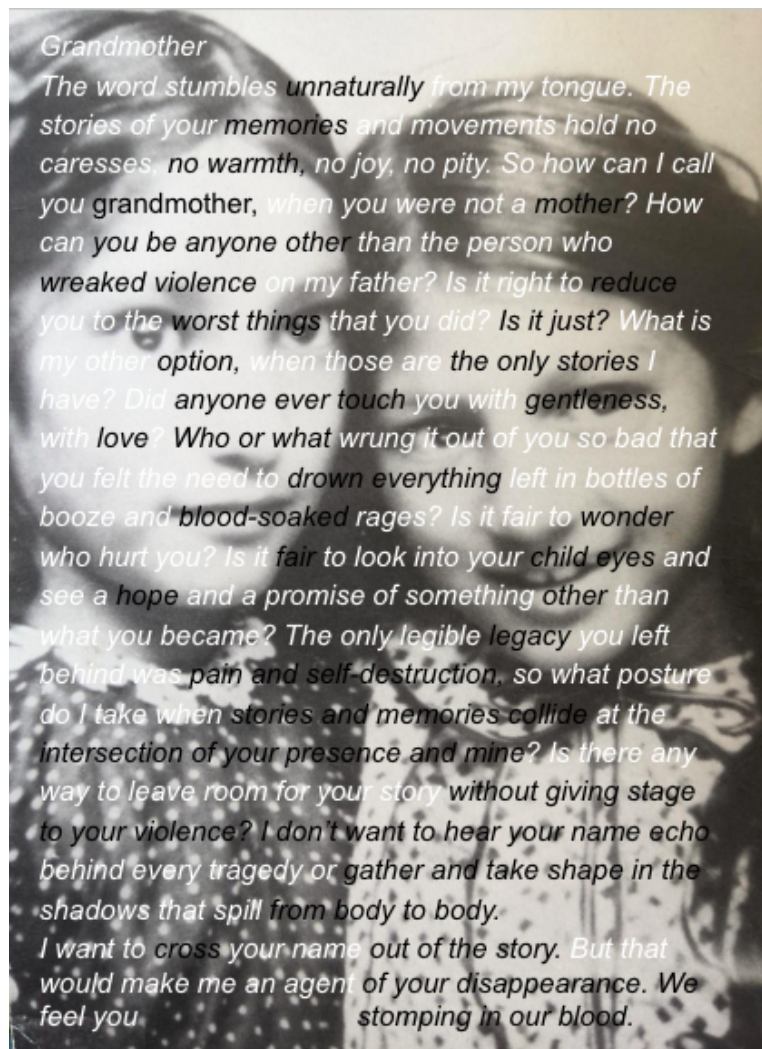
*Love Interrupted by Acts of War*

In *Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape*, Lauret Savoy goes on a spatial, temporal, and geographic journey as she travels across America to piece together the fragments of her Black, Indigenous, and European ancestry. Savoy employs both incisive historical analysis and poignant musings. Savoy writes “I’d like to believe imagination could be sparked by familial memory” (27). Imagination is an essential tool for navigating the past, especially for those pasts that have been fractured by colonization, displacement, and trauma. To know those you never had access to, or had only an incomplete access to, sometimes requires imagining them into being through the loving alchemy of story. In the fractures left behind by their absence, in the fragments we are left with—the fading letters, the blurry memories, their material possessions, the black and white photos—pieces come together to form an inchoate presence that is undeniably full even when the unknown ones who came before us can’t speak for themselves. Stories are in the blood, like memory. They ebb and flow and they beckon us to

trace the often extremely fragile histories left in the wake of those whose desires and survivance summoned our personal beginnings. As Savoy writes:

The past and its landscapes lie close. They linger in eroded, scattered pieces, both becoming and passing into what I am, what I think we are. Perhaps the shadows of unnumbered years have touched me in choices made, in backward yearnings, in fears as well as dreams. Perhaps they form the natural and unnatural histories of my soul. (181)

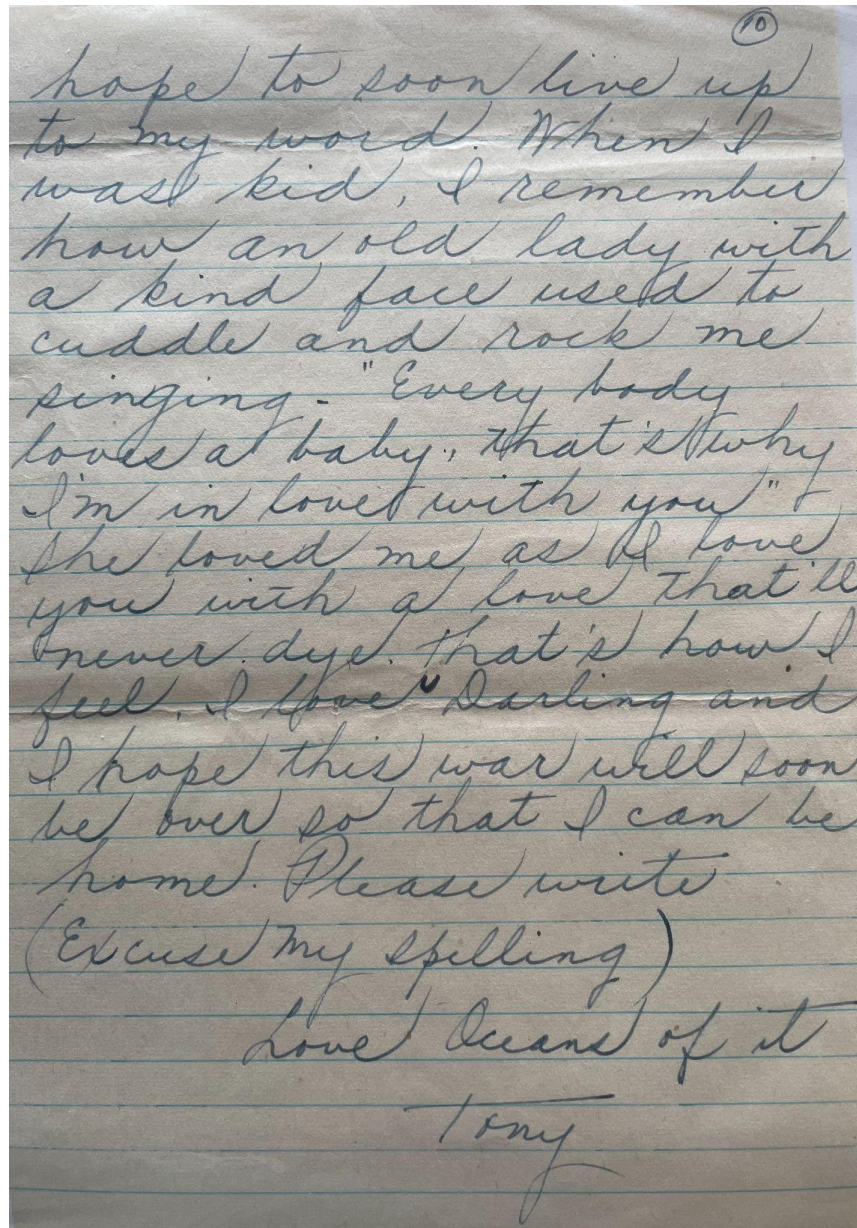
These backwards yearnings, fears, and dreams evoke a reading and searching of the spatial topography of the past. Sometimes we find empty pages and sometimes we find stories.



*Persistent Ghosts*

Quoting Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, in a discussion about the way Yaqui identity is appropriated in Mexican culture, Tumbago notes Batalla's description of Yaquis as a blank page allowing outside groups to inscribe their own agenda and message upon it (Tumbago 15). Lack of form for Indigenous people is predicated on ensuring their disappearance according to arbitrary state whims, and having them reappear when needed in static forms, such as the Yaqui warrior figure that is celebrated as a symbol of the Mexican revolution. The erasure of Indigenous identity that enables colonizers to fill imaginative, environmental, and political blank pages with narratives of damage, pain, and deficiency is meant to enclose, oppress, and contain Indigenous people in the flattened, unreal state of an Indian simulation (Vizenor 15). The blankness of the narrative page extends into physical space with geographic consequences. In *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* Mishuana Goeman argues that "The "closure" of blank spaces or mapping of territories is a strategy to limit Native legal rights, ownership of land, and tribal imaginations. It is a means of transfiguring Native land into colonial territories in the socioimaginary" (35). To be rendered blank and empty is another fracture. It is a narrative theft resulting in ancestral silence and archival absences. But the absence and silence produce a longing. Longing, like desire, is a line to follow. The blank page, like our environment, "wasn't just a surface we crossed, but a place built through intersecting histories, longings, and belongings" (Goeman 8). Tracing these intersections leads us to the stories that inform them. Jill Doerfler writes in *Those Who Belong* that "We create and re-create ourselves in the past, present, and future in story. The power of stories cannot be measured. The relationship between past, present, and future cannot be separated; it is unbreakable and calls to mind the ways in which familial relationships intertwine individuals together in enduring ways

across time and space” (ix). Through our narrative seeking we follow lines of time, words, stories, and land. A line is a rendering; a line is the beginning of a story. Desire moves the line.



hope to soon live up  
to my word. When I  
was a kid, I remember  
how an old lady with  
a kind face used to  
cuddle and rock me  
singing - "Every body  
loves a baby, that's why  
I'm in love with you"  
She loved me as I love  
you with a love that'll  
never die. That's how I  
feel. I love Darling and  
I hope this war will soon  
be over so that I can be  
home. Please write  
(Excuse my spelling)  
Love Oceans of it  
Tony

*Hope for the Future Amidst Oceans of Love*

*To the Next Generation,*

*Tell the story of your pain. Find the clear edge between being and unbecoming. Stand there. Gaze into the fullness of your unfettered existence. Embrace being with all of its burdens, doubts, and fears. You came here, you were brought here, you were made here. Shape courage with the labor of your mind and seek the language of your heart to articulate the wounds. Trace them back into the dreaming landscape of the past; trace them forward into the fragile ether of the future of all you long to be and yearn to leave behind. Excavate your vulnerability with precision. Find the mountains and valleys of your hurt. Let them stay there. Don't try to destroy them with anger or ignore them into oblivion. They will always remain. They have something to teach you—about yourself, about your mothers and fathers. You will always return to them, blindly or with wisdom. Let them breathe and lie in the star-specked dawn. Enter their atmosphere in a cosmic stance of listening. And then, reach forward, upward, within, beyond. Deeper, clearer. Tell the story of your pain—lovingly, compassionately, and unashamed. And then, write something new. Write something new for your descendants to trace. Carve something new for yourself, with yourself, out of these haunting spaces and fractured lineages. Write something new for yourself, in spite of whatever brokenness that follows you, as you are right now.*

*Don't expect ease; expect labor. Expect the sweat of your soul. Expect failure, defeat, mistakes, loneliness, and setbacks. Expect despair and regret and loss. But anticipate hope. Anticipate the discovery of light. Anticipate your potential, anticipate your resolve. Believe in everything and*

*everyone that waits for you. Believe in the things that were passed on to you and the things that are uniquely yours, the things in you that are wholly good. These are the things that define you.*

*Tell yourself the story of your highest desires. They will come to you from a deep internal sky. Your desires will arch across the night. Your voice will speak them and so will the voices of others, known and unknown, remembered and lost. Let desire, for your own living in its deepest and highest way, be your beacon, be your stars. Follow your desire, among and through pain, to a place of becoming. Tell yourself the story of your highest desires. Unbecoming does not always have to be a self-destruction. Unbecoming can be a rebirth that carries you through the night, through the sheen of time, into the embrace of the self that you desire.*

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