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**Roots, Tentacles and Words: The Representation of Animals and the  
Environment in the Contemporary Works of N. Scott Momaday and  
Linda Hogan**

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## Abstract

### **Roots, Tentacles and Words. The Representation of Animals and the Environment in the Contemporary Works of N. Scott Momaday and Linda Hogan**

**Irati Lizaso Lacalle**

Scholars claim that the current environmental crisis is of anthropogenic origin: caused by humans. However, it is important to distinguish between the harm that western civilizations and the capitalist system has caused, in contrast to the lifestyle that Native American tribes, for instance, have as *members* of the ecosystem. Postcolonial peoples are not only not responsible for the various damages, but they are also particularly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change and globalization. The effects damage not only their land, but also their culture and identity, for which animals and the environment are crucial elements. Considering this context, this dissertation aims to understand how the current environmental crisis affects Native American culture and identity, and how these oppressed worlds that are interconnected are reflected in literature. To do so, contemporary literary works by N. Scott Momaday and Linda Hogan will be closely analyzed: the novels *People of the Whale* and *Power*, and the collections of stories and poetry *In the Bear's House* and *Earth Keeper: Reflections on the American Land*. Attempting to understand the multiple implications of these works, an interdisciplinary approach will be applied, combining Native American studies, ecocriticism and postcolonial theories into a more inclusive postcolonial ecocriticism. Moreover, a general contextualization of the history and culture of Native American tribes in the US will be made, as well as the influence that western colonialism has on them and their consequent oppression and detachment from nature. Along the research, animal metaphors and the representation of the environment will be analyzed. Relevant topics such as hunting and ancient beliefs will be also pondered on in the context of the loss of Native American identity and culture. Finally, a potential link between the environmental and Native American oppression will be explored.

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## 1. Introduction

*The power of humans depends on the powers of earth*

– Linda Hogan, *Power*

*We humans must revere the earth, for it is our well-being. Always the earth grants us what we need. If we treat the earth with kindness, it will treat us kindly.*

– N. Scott Momaday, *Earth Keeper: Reflections on the American Land*

According to a recent study (Larsen et al 2017), ‘the Earth is [nowadays] populated by an estimated one to six billion species’, from which Homo Sapiens ‘was merely a marginal species until about 12,000 years ago’ (Wienhues 2020, 1). Homo Sapiens are social beings, who need to bond with nature. As Terry Gifford affirms, humans and more-than-humans are ‘inextricably interdependent’ (2013, 59). Ergo, even if Anthropocentric ideas lead some humans to believe we are superior, we are no more than living organisms; our ‘well-being depends on the well-being of [our] social group and ecological support system’ (Murdy 1975, 1169).

Taciano L. Milfont et al. (2015, 17) bring up the words of world leaders and scholars that affirm that global warming is ‘the central challenge of our time’ as it threatens global peace. Moreover, as part of the current environmental crisis, we are experiencing a ‘mass extinction event’ (Wilson 2016, cited in Wienhues 2020, 1). This one, nonetheless, differs from previous ones: it ‘is of anthropogenic origin; that is, caused by humans’ (ibid). Although it is not an intrinsic consequence of human existence, it is undeniable that our system has negatively affected our planet. As William H. Murdy explains, ‘in

acquiring his present position of dominance, the human species has radically reshaped the face of nature', constructing man-dominated faunas and floras (1975, 1170).

So, despite being dependent on the well-being of earth, we are destroying our home. The beliefs and ideologies behind this destructive system and behavior could be numerous. Focusing on the relationship between humans and non-human beings, some possible causes will be explored below.

On the one hand, anthropocentrism, the belief of humans being superior to the rest of species, gives us power to control and rule everything around us. According to this idea, humans would be on the top of the pyramid, more specifically white men, ruling over animals, plants and other humans too. This human supremacy is considered one of the main issues regarding environmental destruction.

Marcel Wissenburg (2017) claims that the best way to protect nature 'against human (over-) exploitation' is to think 'in terms of the orthodox notion of non-ownership' (cited in Wienhues 2020, 160). In Ned Hettinger's words (1998), 'Earthen nature is a common heritage of all the earth's communities of life. No individual, nation, or species has lordship over nature in its possession and under its control' (cited in Wienhues 2020, 164). It is the reason why the notion of 'attributing original ownership of the Earth to humans' is problematic (ibid, 159). This idea of ownership derives from a privilege and results in ruling power over the Earth and the creatures that inhabit it. This is 'held by all humans together prior to any actual ownership backed by laws' (ibid, 161). According to Anna Wienhues,

humanity's common or collective ownership of the Earth, if interpreted as a property right, implies that all humans have (in common) a privilege to use the Earth (for example occupy, reap its benefits and so on) and a claim against nonhumans using the Earth. In addition, this right also includes a power to waive their claim against nonhumans and immunity against others altering their claim against nonhumans (2020, 168).

Moreover, this creates a power asymmetry and distinction between

those who can own and those who can be owned and exchanges as property, a division of the world in to human and non-human, subject and object, consciousness and mechanism, intrinsic and instrumental value, respect and use, those to whom the protection of justice can be accorded and those from whom it is withheld (Plumwood 2002, cited in Wienhues 2020, 167).

It was in Western philosophies where these ideas of superiority were predominant and widespread. On the one hand, Wienhues highlights a religious influence, as some readings of the Christian Bible interpret that the earth was given to ‘the children of men’ by God (2020, 160). In some readings, humans appear ‘as the culmination of God’s creation’ and thus are ‘commanded to exercise dominion over all of nature, which God gave to them for their benefit’ (Simkins 2014, 398). Ronald A. Simkins agrees that Western Christianity might be ‘the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen, but only because Western culture, the offspring of the Enlightenment, is so anthropocentric’ (2014, 399). In fact, as Wienhues (2020, 160) describes, this notion surfaced ‘throughout the history of political thought since the 17th century’ with Western philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and John Locke. The latter claimed that ‘God gave the Earth to men in common’ to justify private property (Locke 1689, cited in *ibid*).

These ideas ‘demythologized nature and gave rise to technological exploitations of the natural world and eventually to science. Nature had become a mere object that could be exploited with indifference’ (Simkins 2014, 398). Related to science, Murdy points out that although ‘scientific knowledge has given us power to do miraculous things’ such as transplanting organs, ‘at the same time we can poison the earth’s support system or engage in chemical, biological and nuclear warfare’, described as ‘monstrous things’ (1975, 1170).

Lastly, it could be said that due to technological and scientific developments, the domination of brutal capitalism and an increasingly individualistic lifestyle, for example,

the human species has overall become detached from its primal self. Ours has become 'a fully domesticated world from which all forms of wildness, whether human or nonhuman, have been extinguished' (Kidner 2014, 15). Although living conditions have improved in some aspects, the current profit-seeking system has, in the name of progress, forced us to follow an impracticable lifestyle in the long-run. Evolving from the 19th century, capitalism is now 'nearly fully integrated' in the world, resulting in 'the exploitation of natural resources and environmental pollution' (Næss 2006, 218-219). In fact, as Petter Næss states, 'capitalism and long-term environmental sustainability are incompatible' (2006, 198). Because of its expansive essence, according to Marx, capitalist economy will inevitably cause an 'increased consumption of natural resources' (ibid, 215-216).

David W. Kidner states that industrialism does not only lay 'waste to the natural order' but '[molds] us towards an anxious individualism and [generates] an "empty self" that yearns to compensate for the loss of wildness and cultural meaning through consumerism and immersion in the distractions provided by the media' (2014, 10). As a result, children now can 'grow up with almost no experience of wild nature' (Kidner 2014, 10). Peter Kareiva (cited in Kidner 2014, 15) describes 'human' as 'self-centred industrialist individual who has no concern for or empathy with anything or anyone else'. Kareiva asserts that 'most of the world's nearly 7 billion people don't care about biodiversity' (ibid). This loss of empathy towards non-human beings results in their objectification; seen as products that can be used and destroyed. Nonetheless, apart from the external effects, 'the cultural values that make us human' are in danger: 'the ecological crisis is basically a crisis in human evolution' (Murphy 1975, 1171). Hence, a respectful and symbiotic relationship between the environment and humans is the key for the survival of the Earth and human values.

A generalization of humanity has been made so far to encapsulate anthropocentric ideologies. However, it is relevant, as Kidner points out, 'to distinguish between the potentially positive ecological influence of tribal groups and the invariably destructive actions of nonindigenous settlers armed with chainsaws and tractors' (2014, 15). Gomez-Pompa and Kaus (1992) remark this distinction between the 'scenarios

where humans are part of the ecosystem, and those that involve “modern production systems [that] have advanced technologies, from chemical fertilizers to hydroelectric dams, that are external to the local environment” (cited in Kidner 2014, 14). Ergo, there is an important difference between ‘tribal peoples [who] have lived nondestructively for centuries as *members of an ecosystem*’, enhancing ‘ecosystemic diversity’, and ‘industrial humanity’ who have lived as ‘conquerors’ of nature, destroying it (ibid). Consequently, these tribal peoples themselves are ‘as threatened by industrialism as any other part of the ecosystem’ (ibid).

Indigenous peoples’ lives are culturally and practically ‘embedded within a *preexisting natural realm*’ (Kidner 2014, 14-15). According to Tim Ingold (cited in ibid), for a tribal person, knowledge of the world is ‘gained by moving about in it, exploring it, attending to it, ever alert to the signs by which it is revealed’. That is, learning means ‘acquiring the skills for direct perceptual engagement with its constituents, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate’ (ibid).

As aforementioned, the destruction of nature is a human consequence; yet ‘is generally the result of invasion by outsiders equipped with modern technologies’ (Kidner 2014, 15). On the contrary, tribal peoples who live in harmony with nature, would not be considered part of this oppression, and furthermore, they would themselves be victims of the destruction of the environment.

An example of this repression would be the Native American community, whose relation to nature is very tight. Being historically discriminated against, some ancient Indian American values have survived, for which animals and the environment are crucial. The environmental destruction and loss of human wildness directly impacts these peoples. The imposed western culture and ideology, as well as the colonial legacy have resulted in a loss of their identity and roots. Their westernization affects not only how they interact with nature and animals, but also how they understand themselves.

In this global context of crisis and hopelessness, in response to all the sociopolitical issues, movements that fight against racism, sexism and environmental

destruction have gained momentum. Literature and art can accurately serve as a medium to express our fears and concerns, as a form of escape or a way of protest and asking for change. In particular, as a consequence of environmental emergency, the destruction of our world has also been reflected in literature. For instance, deriving from a pessimistic perspective of the future of our planet, the dystopian literary genre has become popular. Here, the consequences of the global crisis of values and the feared cataclysms are portrayed, often aiming to raise awareness. In the Native American context, for instance, Ojibwa writer Louise Erdrich portrays in her dystopian novel *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) the climate change issues as well as women's rights violations.

On the other hand, some Native writings put emphasis on the past and the old values of their ancestors. Native American roots are closer to the natural world than most Western societies and their literature has reflected it. From ancient oral Native tales to contemporary books, the relationship between humans, non-human animals and nature is a recurrent theme in their literature.

Considering this context, the aim of this dissertation is to analyze whether the environmental and socio-political tendencies of the last decades have affected Native American culture and identity, by looking at the portrayal of animals and nature in contemporary literary works by N. Scott Momaday and Linda Hogan. Ergo, this research will aim to conclude on whether the damage caused on these two realities is interconnected.

Despite the close relationship between these two worlds, a detailed and interdisciplinary approach that unites modern Native American literature and the environmental crisis has still not been widely examined in academia. In particular, these two authors have not been compared, and there is very little or no research on their recent works. Due to the topicality of both the environmental and Native American affairs, it is important to expand on these contemporary phenomena. Moreover, this interdisciplinary approach could provide a new and more contemporary understanding of the connection between Native American identity and nature.

Due to the limitations of the paper, an in-depth analysis between the correlation between the representation of nature and animals in Native American literature and the present context will not be possible. Thus, the aim will be to lay the theoretical foundations for the understanding of this connection and provide room for further research.

This paper aims to understand the importance of animals and nature in Native American literature and culture, and the effect of social and environmental context in the literary representation of these elements. The focus will be on how the current environmental issue is linked to Native American culture and identity, and it is expressed through literature.

To answer this question, the following literary works will be used. On the one hand, the novels *People of the Whale* and *Power* by Linda Hogan, and on the other hand, N. Scott Momaday's collections of stories and poetry *In the Bear's House* and *Earth Keeper: Reflections on the American Land*. Both Momaday and Hogan are renowned Native authors, who are key figures regarding the preservation of Native American heritage. With a great dedication to their ancestors, these writers focus on their roots as part of the Kiowa and Chickasaw nations, respectively. Although they belong to different Native US tribes and generations, many of their works have a common feature: animals and nature are recurrent topics. The animals they identify with are various, and they depict their close relationship to them. These four chosen works particularly concentrate on the great importance that animals and land have in the identity and culture of their people. Moreover, they have a strong topical message and historic-cultural background which makes them relevant to the research.

In regard to methodology, a close analysis of these primary texts will be conducted, with a particular emphasis on the portrayal of nature and animals, and how the protagonists interact with them. Attempting to understand the multiple implications of these works, an interdisciplinary approach will be applied, combining Native American studies, ecocriticism and postcolonial theories into a more inclusive postcolonial ecocriticism.

Using this perspective, this dissertation will look at the main symbols and metaphors behind the natural elements and animals in the chosen works, and the role they have in human behavior and Native American Identity. In order to fully understand this representation, a general introduction to the history and culture of Native American tribes in the US will be made. Furthermore, the current environmental crisis and the socio-cultural situation of Native US communities will be put in context, as well as the influence that western culture has on them and their consequent oppression and detachment from nature. Along the research, animal metaphors and the representation of the environment will be analyzed. Relevant topics such as hunting and ancient tribal beliefs will be pondered on in the context of the loss of Native American identity and culture. Finally, a potential link between the natural and Native American oppression will be explored.

## **2. Context**

### **2. 1. *Native American Literature***

When defining Native American literature, one must go very far in history, as ancient oral tradition and storytelling are one of the main pillars of Native American cultures. Before the arrival of Columbus in 1492, 'there were thousands of narratives, ceremonies, songs, and speeches performed by experts trained in performance and interpretation' (Porter and Roemer 2005, 4). That is why, according to Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, we should refer to Native American literature as 'literatures' in plural, especially regarding oral literatures (ibid). Other scholars such as Melanie Benson Taylor claim that 'in truth, there is no such thing as "Native American literature"' (2020, 2). An overgeneralization is usually made on the many different cultures and regions that the term 'Native American' encompasses. There are estimations of 'more than three hundred cultural groups and more than two hundred languages in North America when Columbus arrived' (ibid). Nowadays, there are more than 560 federally recognized tribes, and a several hundred 'hoping-to-be-recognized' (Porter and Roemer 2005, 19). Therefore, although Indian American or Native American literature are used as general terms, it is also important to acknowledge that each author's context and cultural

background is different (Porter and Roemer 2005, 8): there are as many Native American literatures as there are authors, tribes, modes of textual production and readers (Taylor 2020, 16). In agreement with these points of view, Kenneth M. Roemer describes Native American literature with two words: immensity and diversity (2005, 4). In fact, the 'many forms of spoken, sung, and performed literatures' together with the 'more than two hundred years' of written texts in English, reflect the richness of these literatures (Porter and Roemer 2005, 9). Despite the interesting history and development of these peoples and their literatures, this paper will focus on contemporary fiction, for which it is crucial to contextualize the literary development of the last century.

As a pivotal point, in the 1960s and 70s, Native American writers started publishing 'an unprecedented range of innovative poetry, autobiography, fiction, non-fiction, journalism, and mixed-genre works of undeniably high quality' (Allen 2005, 207). This increase in literary works written by Indian American authors has been regarded as the Native American Renaissance. Also considered as a 'rebirth' of their culture, this movement 'corresponds with the political awakening of the Native American peoples' (Mochizuki 1997, 143). It did not mean to be a movement, yet it became a transformative one, together with other social justice movements of the time (Lee 2020, 265). Many incidents encouraged this awakening, such as the foundation of the American Indian Movement in 1970 (Mochizuki 1997, 143). Some scholars compare this renaissance to the Harlem Renaissance, the golden era for African American artists, which took place in the 1920s and 30s. According to Kaeko Mochizuki, 'the political and cultural awakening of the Native American peoples owes much to the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance and, later, the encouragement of the civil rights movement of the 60s' (1997, 147).

For the Native American community, this movement brought a cultural rebirth, which revived the interest in their history and heritage; they began to look at previous artistic and cultural expressions, such as the oral tradition or Native rituals. Yet, some critics have struggled locating and interpreting texts prior to the Native American Renaissance; Taylor (2020, 4-5) argues, using Deleuze and Guattari's words, it was because they were

“murmuring spaces” of history, ‘where Indigenous subjects [were] repeatedly suppressed but incompletely silenced’.

In fact, we must bear in mind that the discrimination and cultural cleansing that Native Americans have suffered, and continue to suffer, have a very ancient origin. Looking at numbers, the estimated population in North America in 1492 ‘range from approximately one million to more than eighteen million’ (Porter and Roemer 2005, 12). However, by the 1900s, ‘diseases and military encounters had reduced the population to approximately 250,000’, and Natives had lost much of their land ‘through military defeats, treaties, legal and suspect leases, purchases, and misguided policies’ (ibid). Some scholars such as Eric Cheyfitz use the term ‘genocide’ to refer to the combination of cultural erasure, resource exploitation and other crimes committed by colonizers over the centuries: the ‘genocide on which the United States is built: a stolen Native land’ (2020, 465). Another relevant historical period that determined the future of Natives was the westward expansion of the nineteenth century. Affected by the Gold Rush, the Manifest Destiny and the Indian Removal Act of 1830, many tribes’ lands were stolen, and they were forcibly displaced and brought to reservations. Cheyfitz claims that although slavery ended, ‘this process of land grabbing and violent displacement has not’, as similar cases were experienced during Trump’s mandate (2020, 465). In front of all these injustices and more, Natives have shown resistance (Cheyfitz 2020, 469).

Although not always created with this intention, Native literature will become a form of activism. As Silvia Martínez-Falquina argues, ‘ethnic creative writing often incorporates a critical response to Western authority’, which also reminds that the ‘so-called minorities have not usually had the same access to theoretical voice as those in power do’ (2017, 79-80). These literary works will draw interest and sociopolitical awareness within the Native communities, but also outside them. Due to transformations ‘created by social justice movements of the time’, i.e. ‘the Black Civil Rights movement, the United Farm Workers union, or the Red Power movement’, educational institutions across the US ‘felt pressured to revise and diversify their curricula’ (Peterson 2020, 272). Consequently, in the 1970s, anthologies of Native writers started to be launched and Native literary works achieved mainstream critical recognition (ibid, 272-273).

Moreover, with the popularity of Native texts in classrooms in the US, 'the need for literary criticism that focused specifically on Native authors gained traction' (ibid, 274). Thus, in 1978, *American Indian Fiction* (University of New Mexico Press), written by Charles Larson was published, which then led to 'the emergence of scholarship devoted to Native literatures', which helped to facilitate the presence of these works 'in mainstream cultural and educational institutions' (ibid).

Regarding the development of the movement, some experts such as Kenneth Lincoln believe that the Native American Renaissance has had several peaks. The first peak (60s - 70s) would be represented with N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968) as the main work, and authors such as James Welch (Blackfeet) and Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) (Mochizuki 1997, 144-145). The second peak is marked by Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and the third one by Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984) (ibid). Paula Gunn Allen (1986) describes that the Native American Renaissance mainly prospered in the 80s, with a 'growing number of films, plays, dance performances and scholarship devoted to themes of American Indian life and thought' (cited in Mochizuki 1997, 145). Moreover, the feminist and nativist perspectives invaded Native literary works, as well as academic movements, as consequences of American Indian Activism and Civil Rights movement (Porter and Roemer 2005, 2). Lastly, according to Mochizuki, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) 'can be regarded as the fourth peak of the Renaissance in the early 90s for its uncompromising renderings of the modern history of Native Americans and the institutions of the United States' (1997, 156).

Nowadays, A. Robert Lee (2020, 265) describes we are in a 'post-Renaissance' period. In Stephen Graham Jones' opinion (2017), the generation of the Native American Renaissance had different issues to the ones the community have today; thus, trying to fight for the same things they fought for would be denying any progress was made (cited in Lee 2020, 265-266). Among the main problems that Native communities face currently are racism, unemployment and risk of homelessness, mental health risks (depression, anxiety, alcoholism, suicide), and intergenerational trauma (Muehlenkamp et al. 2009, 134). Moreover, due to attempts to westernize and Christianize these peoples and silencing their stories, many Native Americans struggle to understand their

identity (Martínez-Falquina 2017, 84). Unclear definitions of what it means to be an American Indian brings both identity and bureaucratic problems. In consequence, both Indians and non-Indians 'emphasize different Indian identity criteria, especially blood quantum, tribal membership, community opinion, commitment, and self concept' (Porter and Roemer 2005, 19). The Indian identity becomes an issue through its two dimensions: external and internal identities (Martínez-Falquina 2017, 81). 'The appropriation and objectification of the former, under the shape of discriminating stereotypes, has greatly determined — and is still determining — the latter' (ibid).

Linda Hogan herself describes in her autobiographical work *The woman who watches over the world: A native memoir* (2001) how greatly has America changed from 'a world and its sacred inhabitants, rock, plant, and animal, where all was respected and loved, and in its rightful place', to a world where sacred animals were killed, killers like Buffalo Bill became heroes and the 'knowledge that had evolved over tens of thousands of years was suddenly interrupted, forbidden, and untaught' (Hogan 2001, 63). Hogan defends that the reason for the struggles Native Americans have to face today is clear: 'it is a hard country, with fallen hearts. These are history's body evidence' (Hogan 2001, 64).

In addition, linked to the main topic of this dissertation, Joni Adamson (2001, xv-xvi) claims that 'Environmental racism' is another topical issue. According to Adamson, the bases of contemporary Environmental racism result from 'colonial philosophies of unlimited progress and unchecked development that rely for their authority on privileged Western scientific notions of objective truth and control of nature, and that sanction the sacrifice of people and their surrounding environments' (ibid). Consequently, '60 percent of African American and Latinos, and more than 50 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans were living in areas with one or more uncontrolled toxic waste sites' (ibid). Thus, as this essay will further explore, it could be argued that the environmental destruction is linked to Native Americans' oppression.

As stated above, the link between landscape and community identity is very tight in many of the Native American tribes. In general, in Native religions there is a particular spatial emphasis; sacred places are very important. Moreover, there are 'organic ties

between storytelling and place', as well as a 'central belief that the "environment" is not a place way out there but instead a place in the middle, a community home' (Porter and Roemer 2005, 18). Furthermore, as Hertha D. Sweet Wong defines, 'Indigenous identity is fundamentally relational': it is 'linked to place, tribal histories and family, kinship and social networks both internal and exogenous' (2020, 287). For example, when an Indigenous uses "I", it is embedded in a "we", the plural form which 'includes not only human beings but all beings – mineral, plant and animal – in the natural world throughout time' (ibid). Ergo, natural spaces are essential parts in the lives of Natives.

These ideas directly clash with the contemporary western view of the earth. Momaday narrates in *The Man Made of Words*:

We may be perfectly sure of where we are in relation to the supermarket and the next coffee break, but I doubt if any of us knows where he is in relation to the stars and the solstices. Our sense of natural order has become dull and unreliable (cited in Porter and Roemer 2005, 19).

The detachment from nature is a fact in today's occidental world. This, together with the destruction that environmental racism and the general environmental crisis bring, directly harm the identity and beliefs of Native tribes. As a form of activism, Indian American literature reflects the political struggle between contemporary issues and a strong inspiration from the past, 'shifting to meet expectations both mainstream and traditional' (Taylor 2020, 2). That is why, according to Wong, Native writers, artists and activists feel the need to remark the distinctions between the beliefs of non-Natives and Indigenous people (2020, 287).

Taking the previous information into account, this dissertation will try to conclude whether the issues of the past and the present are different. Momaday and Hogan developed their careers during the Native American Renaissance and made this movement grow. Today, they still are prolific writers, whose works have topical value, and reflect the contemporary concerns, which, according to Graham Jones, should be different from the ones they wrote about in the first waves of the Renaissance. Thus,

although Hogan's and Momaday's previous works have been widely studied, their recent literature lacks an in-depth analysis and postcolonial ecocritical approach, which this essay will aim to cover.

## **2.2. Biographies**

N. Scott Momaday, born in 1934 in Oklahoma, is considered the forefather of the Native American Renaissance. His father, Al Momaday, was a Kiowa visual artist, and his mother, Natachee Scott Momaday, was 'of mixed Scottish, French, and Cherokee descent' (Allen 2005, 208). Although being raised in the dominant culture, Natachee decided to 'actively reclaim her Indian identity', which inspired Momaday in his search for his own self and identity within his multicultural background (ibid). Both of his parents worked as teachers in several Native reservations, and Momaday was exposed to other Indian cultures, languages and art (ibid, 209). Momaday graduated in political science from the University of New Mexico in 1958. Thanks to his parents, art and literature has been very present in his life (ibid). Following a literary path, Momaday 'completed a master's degree in creative writing at Stanford University in 1960, and then earned a PhD in literature in 1963' (ibid). While working as a professor in several US universities, he has published a large number of literary works. To mention some, his first novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968), several collections of poetry such as *Angle of Geese* (1974), *The Names* (1976) a memoir, and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969).

Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1969 with his debut novel *House Made of Dawn*, considered one of the novels that propelled the Native American Renaissance movement. According to Chadwick Allen, the themes in the novel 'resonated with non-Indian audiences of the time, and they could be labeled as "modern" and "universal" rather than exclusively "Indian"', which was key for its success (2005, 207). In Mochizuki's words, this novel portrayed the two main themes of the first period of the Native American Renaissance: on the one hand, 'a hero's recovery of his ethnic identity by heroic, ritualistic death', and on the other the 'protest against a society based on white-male supremacy' (Mochizuki 1997, 145). Moreover, 'the style of the novel flows

as musically as traditional songs and chants, corresponding with the themes of belonging and pride' (ibid). As a result, Momaday became a reference for the Native American community, and his works became part of the activism, because they represented heterogeneous Indian identities, away from the stereotypical ones (Allen 2005, 208). In the decades of the 60s and 70s, following the rise of identity consciousness among Indian Americans, Momaday investigated the past and heritage of his tribe. He tried to learn as much as he could from the Kiowa elders and ancestors, an inheritance that is reflected in all his works and which he has devoted much of his life to preserve (ibid).

Allen claims that 'more than winning the Pulitzer Prize', Momaday's primary contribution to the Native American Renaissance has been combining 'politically charged representations of vital indigenous identities' and writings 'of undeniably high aesthetic quality' in diverse genres (2005, 218). In his works, Momaday emphasizes the 'enduring connection between indigenous ancestors and contemporary American Indians', an idea that has shown the activist and influential potential of his work (ibid).

Linda Hogan, born in Denver in 1947, is one of the most respected and influential American Indian poets. Daughter of Charles Henderson (Chickasaw) and Cleona Bower Henderson (white) (Van Dyke 2005, 97). Regarding education, Hogan obtained a Bachelor 'as a nontraditional, commuter student', as well as a Masters in English and creative writing from the University of Colorado (ibid, 98). Hogan has been a professor in several universities, such as the University of Minnesota and the University of Colorado, where she lectures and gives readings, especially to Native American groups (ibid).

As a writer, she was inspired by Momaday during the Renaissance. Especially, Hogan drinks from 'Momaday's use of the ceremonial power of words to effect positive change' (Wilson 2005, 149). As scholars have pointed out, Hogan's work is centered on the preservation of the environment (Van Dyke 2005, 97). Her fiction work *Mean Spirit* (1990), finalist for 1991 Pulitzer Prize, for instance, is set in the Oklahoma oil fields in the 1920s. Apart from portraying the 'mistreatment of the Osage', the Native people that

were killed to obtain the oil, Hogan also writes about the destruction of the environment in this novel (ibid).

Apart from an environmentalist advocate, she is regarded as a feminist writer. According to Porter and Roemer, Hogan is 'best known as a novelist of historical fiction that portrays critical turning points in tribal-regional history and concentrates on ecological and women's issues' (2005, 318). In Annette Van Dyke's words, 'Hogan works to restore the traditional Native American balance between male and female power that was disrupted by the coming of Euro-Americans', using the 'wisdom from nature and female powers of regeneration' (2005, 97).

Some of the relevant works of this prolific writer are *Solar Storms* (1995), *The Woman Who Watches Over the World: A Native Memoir* (2001), *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World* (1995) and *The book of medicines: poems* (1993).

Overall, it is her poetry that has been mostly analyzed in academia, in particular her works from the 1990s. The environmental cause is present in most, if not all, of her works; as the analysis of her two fiction novels *People of the Whale* and *Power* will demonstrate.

### **2. 3. Tribal Beliefs and Differences**

Before moving on to the body of the paper, a point should be made to clarify that this essay, coming from a white European perspective, does not aim to romanticize, stereotype, or overgeneralize the image of Native Americans. No offense or condescendence is meant through the statements, hypotheses, or words used along the text. Native American is used here as an umbrella term, however, acknowledging the cultural, linguistic, historical and identity differences between the tribes it encompasses.

As Jenny L. Davis points out, diaspora is ‘an essential element in our understandings of historical and contemporary Indigenous realities’ (2018, 6). Davis claims that

all North American Indigenous communities could be said to be diasporic for one or all of the following reasons: (1) they are no longer located in their homelands (due to relocation), (2) they are not authorized to exhibit political control over the entirety of their original territories, and/or (3) they do not have access to full political sovereignty, even if they may practice various levels of tribal sovereignty (Davis 2018, 7-8).

Such circumstances deepened with the campaign that President Andrew Jackson began in the 1830s to relocate Native American tribes, in which more than forty-six thousand people were ‘removed from their homelands in the Southeast’ (Davis 2018, 10). Leaving 25 million acres for white settlers to occupy, more than forty-five tribal nations were relocated in the current state of Oklahoma, designated ‘Indian Territory’ (ibid). The consequences of these policies were not just about land or location, they had a negative impact on the identities of individuals, causing traumas, as well as disrupting the access to ‘institutionalized power, space, and sovereignty’ (Davis 2018, 11). In fact, many tribes are still struggling to recover their legal status as nations (Taylor 2020, 2).

In order to fully understand the implications of the relocation in Native identity, it is necessary to remark how tight their link to the land is. For example, in the Navajo culture, earth is referred to as “nihima” (our mother), as they believed that ‘the earth gave birth to all living creatures’ and also sustained their life by providing with food, protection and sustenance (Witherspoon 1977, cited in Cheyfitz 2020, 470). Thus, being respectful and grateful towards the earth is rooted in Native culture, which was reflected in their actions, such as only killing what was needed to eat, and offering prayers before hunting any animal or harvesting plants (Sun Bear 1991, 10). As Sun Bear describes, ‘the Indian regarded himself as a keeper and caretaker of the land for future generations’, in contrast to the western people ‘who have so rushed to make a profit and pile up ulcers that they have now polluted and wasted the land and do not know whether there are

enough natural resources left to last out the next few decades' (1991, 7). The American Indian was, and still is an 'extreme conservationist' (Sun Bear 1991, 10). That is why, even today, the original homelands are pillars in the identity and culture of the tribes. For instance, Davis states that the Chickasaw make trips to the homeland regularly to visit, including yearly organized tours for the elders (2018, 10).

Apart from the close link to the land, it is also necessary to remark the relevance that some animal figures have in the tribes. In fact, some animals are often considered sacred beings and equals. Due to the dependence that some tribes had on them to survive, they grew a spiritual connection with them. For instance, Momaday describes how the horses became a revolution for Indians, as helpers that eased their buffalo hunts (Momaday 1969, 31). The buffalo, of which every part was used for food, tools or clothes, was also important for the Kiowas, who sacrificed them for the Sun Dances (ibid, 10). In fact, he remarks that after the buffalo were gone, affected by the impact of white invaders, they were forced to eat their horses (ibid).

The close associations with nature and animals that Native Americans have 'are sources of native omniscience and consciousness' (Vizenor 1995, 667). Theories such as nativism, animism, naturalism and realism have been used to interpret literature in this regard (ibid). For instance, Momaday is known for creating a 'a sacred landscape of bears and eagles in the myths, metaphors, and traces of native ceremonies' (ibid, 667-668). Specifically the bear is an important figure that will be further elaborated in this essay. Momaday emphasizes the relationship between his Kiowa heritage and the image of the bear, the reason why he dedicates an entire book to him: *In the Bear's House*. In fact, the bear is an animal that is recurrent in Momaday's broad bibliography, many times mentioned in the myth of the bear, the seven sisters and the Big Dipper.

Momaday and Hogan, belonging to Kiowa and Chickasaw tribes, respectively, share a common historical background, together with many other Native American peoples. However, a broad description of the tribes they belong to is important to complete the context in which the works analyzed in this paper are created.

On the one hand, the Kiowa were originally nomadic Plain tribes (Bryant 1991, 89). However, with the arrival of the Spanish and the horses, they became buffalo hunters on horseback (ibid). During the nineteenth century, they were forced to travel for hundreds of miles to reservations (Momaday 1969, 3). Since 1868, they have shared the reservation with the Comanche Indians in southwest Oklahoma, and currently they number approximately 3,000 (Bryant 1991, 89). About spirituality, the Kiowa believe in the value of dreams and visions and the supernatural powers they give them (ibid).

The Chickasaw were river and forest people, originally spread along more than 38,000 square miles along Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee (Dyson 2014, 1). In the last years, the Chickasaw Nation has invested on properties and grown their income, including 'more than eighteen casinos, a gourmet chocolate factory, a bank, a book press, and a number of public radio stations' (Davis 2018, 14).

To sum up, it could be said that, although each tribe has their own historical and cultural heritage, overall, they have some common beliefs, and have, in a similar way, been victims of oppression and discrimination.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

With regard to the theoretical framework, it is important to properly delineate the approach of the analysis. As mentioned before, the main study fields will be ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, and both combined as postcolonial ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism is a relatively new movement that studies the relationship between literature and culture and the physical environment (fauna and flora), bringing the environmental issue to the foreground (Glotfelty 1996, xviii). The term 'ecocriticism' is said to be first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (ibid, ix-xx). Rueckert defined this field as 'the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature' (ibid, xix-xx). Other terms that are used as synonyms are ecopoetics, environmental literary criticism, and green

cultural studies (ibid). The bases of this study lay on the 'fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it' (ibid, xix). Moreover, it is inspired by the common awareness and concern about the environmental limits and the damaging effect of human actions (ibid, xx).

Cheryll Glotfelty claims that related humanities disciplines such as history, philosophy or sociology have been 'greening' since the 1970s (1996, xvi). The same way other social movements such as civil rights and women's rights impacted literature in that era, the environmental movement also had an influence, yet it was not identifiable as 'a distinct critical school or movement' until the mid-eighties (ibid, xvi-xvii). The field of environmental studies grew with initial works such as *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources* (1985) and the foundation of *The American Nature Writer Newsletter* (1989) by Alicia Nitecki (ibid). Since then, the movement has grown, especially in the last years as a response to the aggravation of the environmental crisis and the strengthening of the environmental movement.

However, several scholars criticize that ecocriticism has been 'predominantly a white movement' (Glotfelty 1996, xxv) and lament that 'the dominant discourse of the field continues to be marked by an Anglo-American and a national framework rather than engaging broader contexts' (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 10). Following this idea, Carine M. Mardorossian points out that 'mainstream American ecocritics have traditionally shored up a notion of wilderness and pristine natural purity' as an escape from 'the social and environmental pollution of modernity' (2013, 984). Ecocritics such as Timothy Morton and William Cronon have helped to understand that the national imaginary of nature and the wilderness 'is a legacy of Romanticism and the Sublime, or, in the United States specifically, of the myth of the frontier' (Mardorossian 2013, 986). Yet, as Paul Wapner puts it in his essay "Leftist Criticism of 'Nature'", the natural world is not 'simply a physical entity that is "out there" or given', but 'an idea that takes on different meanings in different cultural contexts' (cited in Mardorossian 2013, 986). Conservationist ethics of environmentalism are often associated with 'a reprehensible social ideology' that wants to 'protect nature from immigration, diversity, etc.' (Mardorossian 2013, 987).

Ergo, some purely environmentalist ideologies can be problematic. Seeing the environmental cause as an isolated movement, the consideration of other essential rights together with environmental ones is faded into the background. Although branches such as ecofeminism, queer ecology and eco-socialism, among others, have arisen in the last decades aiming to link ecocriticism and other academic disciplines, there is still a gap that purely ecocritical studies cannot cover. That is why, Glotfelty expects this field to get more 'interdisciplinary, multicultural, and international' and encourages scholars to work in that direction (1996, xxv). Agreeing with Glotfelty's proposal, in this dissertation an interdisciplinary approach will be used.

To work on the chosen Native literary works, Native American studies will be taken into account. Experts on this field of research have dealt with disciplines such as history, culture, politics, spirituality and sovereignty, for instance. The complex history and ongoing cultural and political oppression have predominantly brought academic publication about those themes. In the area of ecology, it is undeniable that the Native Americans' condition as a discriminated minority is a determining factor in their relation to the environment. Many scholars agree that 'race is often a powerful indicator of environmental inequality', combined with other social categories such as gender, age and socioeconomic status (Vickery and Hunter 2016, 37). Jamie Vickery and Lori M. Hunter (2016, 37) point out that more vulnerable communities such as Native Americans become 'paths of least resistance'. In fact, even five centuries after colonization began, 'the relationship between Native Americans and today's dominant culture remains exploitative as non-Natives continue attempts to gain access to land, water, minerals and other raw materials from tribal governments' (Vickery and Hunter 2016, 38).

As a result of the environmental destruction caused by the capitalist system, 'Native American lands have increasingly become targets for unwanted land uses such as dump sites, nuclear and weapons testing facilities, and resource extraction' (Vickery and Hunter 2016, 38). Even, in some cases, due to their vulnerable economic position within the ongoing colonialism, tribes see themselves in situations where they have to 'approve environmentally harmful development' in exchange for economic and employment

opportunities that will ease their path to self-determination (Vickery and Hunter 2016, 41-42). Some documented environmental issues Indian Americans have to face include lead poisoning, military weaponry testing, waste disposal and vulnerability to climate change. These communities that have not contributed as much to the damage of our planet are the most vulnerable and are 'experiencing the most harmful effects of a changing climate': issues of food security, traditional knowledge, climate adaptation, tribal control of resources and government restrictions on hunting and harvesting of tribal natural resources (ibid, 44). These consequences are not just affecting their survival, but also their culture and spirituality, as species on which they depend in this regard are being affected (ibid, 45). Moreover, Mardorossian agrees that 'the Western imposition of its environmental agendas on the Third World is an extension of an imperialist mindset set on "enlightening" the non-West' (Mardorossian 2013, 985).

Thus, it can be clearly seen that today's environmental crisis is closely related to Native peoples' oppression. As a result of this reality, more research has been conducted in regard to ecology and Native American studies. For instance, Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place* (2001) is said to be 'the first ecocritical monograph to articulate the importance of oral and written Indigenous literatures that were confronting EuroAmerican conceptions of "nature" and "place"' (Adamson and Monani 2017, 5). In this work, Adamson brought to light that 'constructs such as race, class, and gender cannot be separated from concepts of "nature"' (ibid).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Bureau of American Ethnography systematically collected and published 'the oral archives of cosmological narratives told from North to South America, the Caribbean, and Africa' (Adamson and Monani 2017, 6). These were very relevant reports that were, for example, consulted by many US tribes throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to argue for land rights claims in court' (ibid). Moreover, Native American writers such as Momaday or Erdrich were referring to them to gather information and stories about their tribal groups and be able to 'piece together cultural and ecological knowledge that had been scattered or lost over years of systematic oppression and racism' (ibid).

Thus, it could be said that Native Americans have many points in common with other ethnic minorities that have suffered systematic oppression and racism. Even still, postcolonial studies, which includes African, Asian, Caribbean and other silenced and marginalized geographic zones, 'have largely ignored Native American issues in the United States', as Cheyfitz points out (2002, 405). This scholar criticizes that, due to literary and political theory reasons, 'Native American studies have remained ambivalent as to their potential position within a more inclusive, or aware, postcolonial studies' (ibid). Postcolonial studies look at the stories of European imperialisms since 1492 and their impact and legacy on the colonized people and lands. Although the prefix 'post' means 'after', in this case postcolonial does not mean colonialism has ended or it is past; postcolonialism is 'a condition that emerges with the beginning of colonial encounter and occupation', but 'not necessarily its demise' (Tripathy 2009, 42). Even though US Native American history would fit in that scheme, 'postcolonial studies have virtually ignored the predicaments of American Indian communities', and US Native peoples have rarely been included in any of the postcolonial studies works (Cheyfitz 2002, 406). Thus, it is indispensable to situate Native American literatures within a postcolonial context, as there is an ongoing colonialism of the Indian tribes (ibid).

Following this idea, Native American studies and postcolonial studies will be combined in this research. Additionally, focusing on the specific area of the environment and the close link both with Native American and postcolonial theories, this essay will include an ecocritical approach. However, as remarked before, the ethics of white mainstream environmentalism do not seem to blend well with 'the poetics of hybridity that dominates postcolonial studies today' (Mardorossian 2013, 984). Despite these limitations, a more specific postcolonial ecocritical theory appears to be more appropriate, instead of only focusing on a homogeneous perception of ecocriticism.

Postcolonial ecocriticism might be more accurate to comprehend the implications of colonialism in nature and colonized nations; how Native American oppression is linked to environmental destruction. As Cheyfitz claims, the postcolonial perspective is more inclusive and aware (2002, 405); a 'new era' outside of the ecocritical canon dominated

by American critics (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 14). In fact, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley appreciate that the inarguable threat of global climate change reminds 'American critics, activists, and consumers that they can no longer afford to dismiss postcolonial concerns about the environment, or to argue that these concerns do not exist' (2011, 26). DeLoughrey and Handley also argue that 'to deny colonial and environmental histories as mutually constitutive misses the central role the exploitation of natural resources plays in any imperial project' (2011, 10). Postcolonial ecocriticism is heavily influenced by political ecology; it is 'a politically oriented branch of environmental humanities' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, viii-ix).

Thus, it can be said that human rights and nature rights are linked. The mainstream environmentalist discourse has silenced the colonial past, only giving voice to a predominantly western white public, so colonized people have felt there is no space for them and their specific issues in this movement. Moreover, homogenizing abstractions such as 'anthropocentrism' are also not accurate to speak about causes of global warming, because it is not the entire humankind that has caused it, but white western man and its destructive behaviors. That is why an intersectional approach is so important.

Despite the clear relationship between these realities, the movement that is bringing together environmental justice, postcolonial ecology, and Indigenous studies has just started developing in the present century (Adamson and Monani 2017, 6). Some of the main referential works, in which the analysis will be built upon, are Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, and Environments* (2010) and DeLoughrey and Handley's co-edited *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011).

Some of the main ideas that these scholars incorporate in these theories include the following. First and foremost, the difference between the mainstream ecocritical discourse and postcolonial one is highlighted. In short, the postcolonial perspective has provided an ecological imaginary that is 'not derivative of the Euro-American environmentalism of the 1960s and 70s' (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 8). That is, the

Euro-American perspective, or 'Northern environmentalisms of the rich' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 2), 'has been produced by privileged subjects in the northern hemisphere', becoming a normative and homogeneous perspective on 'the complexity of ecocritical work', which, from its privilege, has tended to marginalize the long history of 'race, class, gender and colonial inequities' (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 9). The historian Ramachandra Guha emphasizes the division between these thoughts and critiques that deep ecology has been problematic: it supports biocentricity, focuses on wilderness preservation, romanticizes some ancient beliefs, has shown 'a lack of concern with inequalities within human society' and has overlooked more pressing environmental issues such as global militarization and the growing 'overconsumption by industrial nations and by urban elites in the Third World' (cited in DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 21). Conservationist perspectives are controversial because they often contribute 'to the displacement of poor communities who [happen] to live in the targeted conservation wilderness areas' (ibid). Furthermore, some postcolonial states are pressured to preserve 'charismatic megafauna', which benefits elite tourists who idealize nature as a treasure to enjoy from a white privilege consumerist position, rather than benefiting the local peoples who depend on that nature for living (ibid).

On the contrary, postcolonial ecology (the 'environmentalism of the poor'), associated with the global south, offers a view of the systematically silenced realities, together with 'indigenous, ecofeminist, ecosocialist, and environmental justice scholars and activists, who have theorized the relations of power, subjectivity, and place for many decades' (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 9). Postcolonial thought acknowledges that the 'dualisms of culture/nature, white/black, and male/female were constituted through the colonial process' and that since the European male is distanced from those 'others', it is crucial to point at the origin of these hierarchies (ibid, 24-25).

Along with humans, postcolonial ecology considers the land as a nonhuman victim of the 'violent process of colonialism' (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 8). For instance, Beverly Ormerod describes the Caribbean nature as 'filled with sorrowful reminders of slavery and repression' (cited in ibid, 8). All the historical traumas have been reflected in literature with the environment as a symbol to represent them (ibid). Thus, 'a gesture

of destruction against land and sea, then, simultaneously becomes an act of violence against collective memory' (ibid).

Environmentally, colonialism and globalization have affected the sense of place, denying local land sovereignty and causing pollution, deforestation and many other degradations of the environment (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 4). Regarding spirituality, the ancestral beliefs were replaced through what Donald Worster describes as 'Christian imperialism' that erased the spiritual qualities from nature and distanced nature from human feelings, 'promoting a view of creation as a mechanical contrivance' (cited in DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 7).

The forest wilderness is a predominant space in ecocritical literature, both as 'a geographical and imaginative space where the Western individual subject might retreat from the social pressures of urbanization and modernity', and as 'sites of refuge for the escaped slave and places of folk authenticity in nationalist movements' (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 31). However, 'the large body of work produced by postcolonial writers about the sea (or the land-sea relationship)' emphasizes the need for the inclusion of maritime spaces in the 'land ethic' too (ibid, 32).

Postcolonial studies also connect with Animal Studies, as non-human animals are also 'included as fully equal subjects' in this pursuit of global justice together with other marginalized groups, because their lives and our own 'are inextricably and complexly intertwined' (Nussbaum, cited in DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 32).

In summary, postcolonial ecocriticism emphasizes that the domination of nature translates into the domination of humans, as theorized in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's 1945 *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (cited in DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 16). Going to the roots of the issue, postcolonial ecology points out what American ecocritics cannot recognize: colonization and globalization have radically altered the geography. Ergo, the US 'has actively and aggressively contributed to what many now acknowledge to be the chronic endangerment of the contemporary late-capitalist world' (Huggan and

Tiffin 2015, 1); yet this fact is 'rarely commented on by American ecocritics' (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 17).

Moreover, this environmental crisis is not only bringing the loss of wilderness and species extinction, or the rise in temperatures in Euro-American countries; it is especially destructive for postcolonial nations. A recent United Nations' Global Humanitarian Forum report calculated that 'global climate disruption causes 300,000 deaths a year due to increased drought, flooding, and other environmental consequences' of which ninety-eight percent 'are occurring in postcolonial nations' (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 26). Thus, due to several factors, postcolonial communities are shown to be the most vulnerable to brutal consequences of the environmental crisis.

To face this situation, it becomes indispensable to bring the relevance of politics and activism into the forefront of the ecological movement, and postcolonial ecocriticism 'involves an "aesthetics committed to politics"' (Cilano and DeLoughrey 2007, cited in Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 11). This field takes into account a wider historical and socio-political understanding and '[overrides] the apolitical tendencies of earlier forms of ecocriticism that often seemed either to follow an escapist pastoral impulse or to favor an aesthetic appreciation of nature for its own sake' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 11). In fact, postcolonial ecocriticism 'preserves the aesthetic function of the literary text while drawing attention to its social and political usefulness, its capacity to set out symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world' (Huggan and Tiffin 2007, cited in *ibid*, 14).

Therefore, it is clear that human well-being and the health of the physical world are connected, and that 'human political and social inequities cannot be successfully and sustainably resolved without some engagement with the more-than-human world' (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 25). Hence, ecocritical studies should be theorized accordingly, aiming to destroy the hierarchies between the human and non-human, as well as including postcolonial perspectives, 'without falling into a shallow green transnationalism that may romanticize "primitive ecological wisdom"' (Moore, Pandian, and Kosek, cited in *ibid*, 20).

Attempting to understand the multiple implications of the chosen works, this essay will look at animal and environmental representations uniting ecocriticism, postcolonial ecocriticism and Native American studies, three fields that might have not been linked before to analyze Native literature. Although connections between Native American cultures and the importance of the environment have been looked at, this three-dimensional perspective has not been used to compare and analyze contemporary Indian American works of authors such as Momaday and Hogan. In brief, this research expects to draw conclusions on how the interconnectedness of the oppressions reflects in literature.

#### 4. Analysis

The first primary text will be Linda Hogan's novel *Power*, located in Florida, narrates through the voice of Omishto, a 16-year-old Native, the struggles between the indigenous traditional ways and the colonizing powers that are triggered by the killing of the endangered Florida panther. The young protagonist will dig into her identity and origins and understand the clash between the two worlds.

Similarly, *People of the Whale* portrays the division between the Native and the western world, which arises, in this case, from the conflicts regarding the traditional Whale hunt. The symbol of the whale serves to portray the identity crisis that the main character Thomas Just goes through after his traumatic experience in the Vietnam War.

The Bear is the main animal protagonist that gives name to N. Scott Momaday's collection of imaginary dialogues, poems and passages. *In the Bear's House*, decorated with his own illustrations, Momaday explores various themes such as storytelling, myths, prayers and dreams, among others, in which the Bear serves as a unifying thread.

Lastly, *Earth-Keeper: Reflections on the American Land*, Momaday's last publication, is a collection of poems and thoughts about the relationship between humans and nature,

and the future that awaits us. This work combines descriptions of animals and sceneries with Native stories and contemporary concerns.

Taking these books into account, the analysis will be divided into two main chapters, dealing with the relationship between humans and non-human life. The focus will be on the depiction of the interconnected oppressions between Native Americans, animals and nature in the chosen works.

#### **4. 1. *Non-Human Life: Animal Metaphors***

The first chapter of this dissertation will be dedicated to non-human sentient beings: the symbolism behind animal representations in the works. As aforementioned, anthropocentric ideas of superiority build a hierarchical relationship between humans and non-human beings, which result in a destructive coexistence. Both animals and the land are used as a resource, objectified and treated without compassion, not acknowledging the crucial role they play for all the living beings on Earth. The following chapter will try to understand the interconnectedness between animals and humans in the context of Native American culture. Although many different non-human animals have a relevant symbolic role in the chosen works, such as dogs, fish, turtles, jellyfish, snakes, frogs *et cetera*, there are some main ones that become strong protagonists, as this chapter will further explore, and serve as metaphorical representations of different themes.

Beginning with Momaday's works, the bear (or Bear) is the main character. In a broad context, Page Bryant points out that the bear is a special animal that is 'greatly respected by many Native American tribes' (1991, 23). The bear is the embodiment of strength and power, as well as fairness and courage, and is sacred, for instance, for the Indians of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska (ibid, 23-31). Momaday's relationship with the bear can be 'traced across four of his major works, which span the thirty-year period of his career' (Allen 2005, 214). Throughout this trajectory, Momaday has explored his sense of self in relation to the Kiowa history, culture and landscape (ibid). In an interview with Charles

Woodward, Momaday confesses to be spiritually connected to this animal, as it is part of the Kiowa experience. In particular, he identifies with the bear because he is 'intimately connected' with the story of Tsoai-Talee, and as a result he claims to 'have this bear power' and he '[turns] into a bear every so often' (Woodard 1989, cited in Vizenor 1995, 673).

In the introduction of *In the Bear's House*, fully dedicated to the bear, the Kiowa affirms:

Bear and I are one, in one and the same story. My Indian name is Tsoai-talee, which in Kiowa means 'Rock-tree boy.' Tsoai, 'Rock tree,' is Devils Tower in Wyoming. That is where, long ago, a Kiowa boy turned into a bear and where his sisters were borne into the sky and became the stars of the Big Dipper. Through the power of stories and names, I am the reincarnation of that boy (Momaday 2010, xi).

Understanding this statement within the context of Momaday's other publications, Allen claims that it represents 'the culmination' of a long exploration 'of his personal, familial, and communal relationships to American Indian sacred geographies and oral traditions' (2005, 217-218).

Apart from being a symbol of Momaday's self-development, the bear connects with the primitive part of humans that is linked with nature. That is why Momaday claims that when transforming into a bear, 'you feel a greater kinship with the animal world and with the wilderness' (Stevens 2001, 606). In *Earth Keeper* the Kiowa says: 'I am an elder, and I keep the earth. I am an elder, and I am a bear' (Momaday 2020, 14): the bear is his alter-ego, an earth keeper like himself.

Lastly, regarding the symbolism behind it, Patricia Haseltine claims that the bear, as an animal-other that 'confronts predatory colonization and assimilation through transcendence into a cosmic order', represents a cultural and personal resistance that links with the Native American reality (2006, 82). Becoming a bear 'is an aesthetically channeled choice resisting assimilation into a mainstream American culture that undervalues respected creatures of nature like the bear' (ibid, 87). So, the Bear is firstly

a representation of wilderness and the power of the animal itself, also of Momaday's Kiowa heritage and the close relationship between Indian American tradition and nature, and lastly a symbol for resistance against colonization and western ideologies.

In *Earth Keeper*, Momaday describes the beauty of animals in a romantic way; nevertheless, emphasizing their importance on earth, their power and their rights too. Animals are allies in Momaday's eyes: they are also earth keepers and have helped humans in several ways. For instance, he speaks of the horses as a gift, 'an offering from the earth' that helped Native Americans to move 'from darkness into light', and therefore deserve respect (2020, 17). Dogs have also 'looked after us. They keep the earth' (ibid, 20). That is why, acknowledging the value of animals in our world, Momaday is concerned about the extinction of species because of the environmental crisis and writes:

My father, when he was a boy, (...) could hear the howls of prairie wolves. They are gone now. I would like to have seen them. Your grandfather told me that they were handsome, with long legs and beautiful yellow eyes, wild and searching. I try to see the wolves in my mind's eye, but I can only imagine them. I wish I could describe them to you. My father's voice had trailed off. Will I tell my grandchildren, I wonder, of animals they will never see? (2020, 42).

Momaday is not the only one worried about the contemporary issue of loss of species; Hogan's story about the Florida panther is the best representation of it. In the first place, the Florida panther is 'one of the most publicized endangered animals in the United States', and it is subject to threats such as habitat destruction, road collisions and poisoning in real life (Schwab and Zandbergen 2011, 859). That is why, *Power* is dedicated: 'For the Florida panther. May their kind survive' (Hogan 1999). The cat, as Ama describes in the novel, is their relative, as they belong to the Panther clan, and they get spiritual power from this totem animal (Hogan 1999, 3) (Schweninger 2008, 194). In Taiga language, the name for the Florida panther is 'Sisa', which means 'godlike, all-powerful' (Hogan 1999, 73). According to the Taiga, 'Sisa was the first person to enter this world. It came here long before us' (ibid, 15), she is 'God of Gods' (ibid, 84).

For these reasons, the panther is sacred for the tribe, and Ama feels particularly connected to it: 'Ama loves the panther. It grieves her that it's endangered and sick because she worships the cats. She said one was born alongside of her, to give her strength' (ibid, 16). However, her connection goes further: when Ama kills the sick panther, Omishto says 'You have killed yourself, Ama', to which Ama replies: 'I know it' (Hogan 1999, 67). Thus, the panther is an alter-self of Ama. What is more, the panther's sickness and endangerment parallel the state of the tribe: 'there are so few of them, as few as there are of us. Thirty of them left, maybe less' (Hogan 1999, 58). Native American tribes are here put alongside an endangered species, both being oppressed and threatened by white men, but they still survive and resist.

Furthermore, as Lee Schweninger highlights, the sickness of the panther derives from 'a sickness much larger and widespread': the sickness of the earth and human values (2008, 198). Hogan narrates:

If they saw the face of it, that skinny cat dead on the black grasses, they would no longer believe or have hope. They would lie down on the ground and never get up again in this world where the cars pass through on the cut roads and the roar of machines breaks through the swamps among the dying fish. If I told, would the trees here bear fruit? Would the fish return? I think not (1999, 167).

Omishto describes 'the cut-up land', the panther and her people as 'diminished and endangered' (Hogan 1999, 69). Because of this, Ama's hunt of the panther becomes controversial. Ama 'has committed a terrible act; she has sinned against the earth, the animals who are our allies, the one who was our ancestor. She has broken natural law' (Hogan 1999, 169). However, Omishto concludes that perhaps the panther 'is better off dead, and dead by her hand, too, the woman who loved and worshiped it' (ibid, 69).

The two Hogan's novels that this essay analyzes reflect the oppressions that non-human animals suffer in real life, facing environmental issues as well as human threats. Remote from the panther, the whale is another sacred animal protagonist, whose life is closely

connected to Native Americans. This majestic animal is sacred to Indians of the Pacific northwest and Alaska, being their major source of food, these peoples hold whales in the highest regard (Bryant 1991, 165). In *People of the Whale*, this animal is directly linked to the tradition of the A'atsika tribe, for whom hunting the whale has been the means to survive for centuries. Yet, the traditional hunt that was holy and always practiced following spiritual rituals and a deep respect towards the animal, is broken with the arrival of technology and the influence of white men.

Thomas' grandfather Witka is a representative of the old values: he 'used to enter the cold sea naked and converse with whales, holding his breath for long periods of time' (Hogan 2009, 10). In the tribe, '[the whales] were sights to behold, and were watched with awe and laughter. The whales have always been loved and watched' (ibid). However, this harmony has been broken, the mutual respect has disappeared, and this results in bad and painful choices. That is why Hogan's narration constantly shifts from past to present, comparing how the ancient values of respect and love towards animals that the tribe had have been corrupted by money, drink and the influence of war: 'the others had been drinking and it made Thomas despise them, his own people (...) The killers didn't love that whale or sing or care for it the way it was supposed to have been done' (Hogan 2009, 112). As this paper will further explore, the traumatic impact of war has affected the view of the tribe men towards their culture and animals, in particular the hunting of the whale. Their dehumanization is reflected in the way they treat animals and others, as is the case of Thomas or Dwight.

Although the story in *People of the Whale* is fictional, in fact, it is quite close to reality. In her interview with Rachel Stein in 1999, Hogan speaks about the issue of hunting in her novel *Power*, which took inspiration from various sources, amongst which is the case of the Makah conflict over whale hunting. Hogan confesses being truly concerned about the current division of the tribe regarding the whale hunt: 'some traditionalists don't want to kill the whale', while other traditionalists want to do it only 'if it is done in a traditional way', having 'direct relationships with the whales', but 'young men are not spiritually ready to kill a whale' (Stein 1999, 116-117). Now, some people want to do it 'for financial reasons, others for spiritual reasons', 'and the guys who have the machine

guns who are going to shoot a whale; they already have, even when they didn't have permission' (ibid, 117). Therefore, it could be said that *People of the Whale* was also inspired by this case, due to the several similarities that can be found between the stories, and thus Hogan is trying to raise awareness of a real problem.

Apart from the whale, the octopus also acquires strong symbolic meanings in the novel, as the holy creature that is present at the time of Thomas' birth and grants him a special life (Hogan 2009, 16). Thomas' mother brought her newborn son to the octopus cave and asked the animal to 'watch over him', convinced that 'the octopus would be the spirit-keeper of her son, because she thought like the old people used to think, that such helpers existed and they were benevolent spirits' (ibid).

In sum, it can be said that there is a clear message that Momaday and Hogan try to communicate: the human and animal connection is strong and necessary, and it should be kept, as ancient Native beliefs claim. The human-animal interconnectedness is also seen in oppressions, as the next chapter will try to illustrate.

#### **4. 1. 1. *Linked Oppressions: Speciesism and Racism***

'People love and pity animals; we also use, abuse and fear them' (Klaits and Klaits 1974, 1). Although perception varies among cultures, due to the widespread western anthropocentric perspective, non-human animals are not seen as equals, and are as a result discriminated against, objectified and used for human benefit.

Besides, Wienhues argues that Native American beliefs include 'nonhumans within the realm of morally considerable entities' (2020, 9). Even though these tribes have also depended on animals and have traditionally used them for their survival, they overall express a strong feeling of respect and compassion towards them. Indigenous peoples often see animals as brothers, as part of the same family, they have grown a spiritual connection. For instance, the Ojibwe tribe recognize the wolf 'as a literal relative' (Carrol and Lawson 2017, 129).

In the works of Momaday and Hogan, animals and the environment are not secondary characters; they acquire a relevant role. They have a voice, they shape humans, they change their lives, these humans live within them and with them, and thanks to them. In these books, the human protagonists highly empathize with animals and nature, and they become their voice. Both the Kiowa and the Chickasaw authors emphasize that the earth and animals are in danger: not only due to the natural consequences of global warming, but also oppressed by human beings.

The oppression that non-human animals suffer has been often linked to the one that ethnic minorities suffer, mainly, from a postcolonial ecocritical perspective. Plumwood (2001) expresses that speciesism has often been linked to racism: 'environmental racism, speciesism and the 'exploitation of animal (and animalised human) "others"' is justified in the name of a 'human- and reason-centered culture that is at least a couple of millennia old' (cited in Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 5). Thus, combining western racist and speciesist discourses, both animals and those humans under the 'other' and the 'animal' category are alike oppressed (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 154). The discriminatory discourses have compared ethnic minorities such as Native Americans to animals in a derogatory way, describing them as savages and treated consequently. Apart from being treated 'like animals' by dominant groups, throughout history human individuals and cultures have been victims of genocide and slavery, under the category of the 'other' (ibid, 152).

With colonization, European powers got into contact 'not only with new fauna and flora, but with people whose racial and cultural characters seemed equally exotic. These beings walked about half naked, decorating their bodies with paint, plumage, stones or shiny metal' (Klaims and Klaims 1974, 7). As a result of this 'exoticism', 'Indians and other "savages" were regarded as curiosities in Europe and even were kept in zoos together with specimens of bizarre fauna' (Klaims and Klaims 1974, 8). The anthropocentric ideology of colonization sees 'indigenous cultures as "primitive", less rational, and closer to children, animals and nature' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 5). Thus, European invasion was justified based on the duality of the savage 'others' versus the civilized colonizers, the animal versus human, and the need to replace the 'primitive' indigenous cultures with civilized ones (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 18).

Huggan and Tiffin claim that when analyzing the consequences of colonialism, the focus must not only be regarding human inequalities but also that 'the very category of the human, in relation to animals and environment, must also be brought under scrutiny' (2015, 18).

After all, traditional western constitutions of the human as the 'not-animal' (and, by implication, the 'not-savage') have had major, and often catastrophic, repercussions not just for animals themselves but for all those the West now considers human but were formerly designated, represented and treated as animal (ibid, 18).

Exemplifying this theory, in Hogan's *Power* Ama suffers from racial discrimination during the trial, and the author compares it with being treated as an animal:

I can see that if they convict her now they would feel the weight of their own sins through history, of their own prejudice, that they are racist toward someone who is nothing like them.

And the judge (...) said, "What's the big deal about a cat? Why's this cat such a big thing?" On his face, I see it's not the crime he hates, but her. And the jurors study her, a woman so unlike them as to exist in another world, another time. She is their animal (Hogan 1999, 136).

Thus, animal discrimination is directly linked to racial or ethnic discrimination including Native American peoples. In this regard, Benton-Banai compares the wolf and Indian tribes:

Both the Indian and the wolf have come to be alike and have experienced the same thing. Both of them mate for life. Both have a clan system and a tribe. Both have had their land taken from them. Both have been hunted for their hair. And both have been pushed very close to destruction. We can tell about our future as Indian people by looking at the wolf (1988, cited in Carroll and Lawson 2017, 130).

These examples demonstrate that, as Gerald Vizenor claims, 'the creatures in native literature are seldom mere representations of animals in nature or culture, wild, domestic, generic, or otherwise'; instead, they reflect how the humans that write them think about and relate to them (1995, 678). Ergo, both Momaday and Hogan clearly see themselves represented by

animals and spiritually connected to them, but also as victims of systematic oppression that has historically discriminated against them both. Thus, a reshaping of the relation between humans and animals must be conducted. Postcolonial studies must include non-human species together with environmental concerns and topics such as colonization, racism and indigeneity (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 6).

#### **4. 1. 2. *Hunting and War: Ritualized Deaths***

Linked to the oppression and mistreatment of animals and as a show of human superiority, the topic of hunting often arises. From an Animals Rights perspective, hunting is condemned; yet some contexts justify hunting as a means for survival or cultural rituals, such as the case of hunting in the Native American context. In particular in Hogan's novels, controversial points of view about hunting are brought to the fore. Although environmental rights, animal rights and Native rights are often connected, it is true that in some occasions, confrontations occur. Western animal use and killing cannot be made equal to Native cases. As Huggan and Tiffin (2015, 154) argue, it is hypocritical to condemn when an individual belonging to a minority such as American Indians or a postcolonial nation harms an animal following their beliefs, when western society exploits and kills animals for other reasons. Ergo, the act of hunting or sacrificing an animal for a cultural, identitarian or survival reason in the case of Native Americans cannot be judged at the same level as the systematic oppression that western capitalist system imposes on animals.

Hunting is a common topic that unites the four chosen works. This ancient rite is not portrayed as a simple act by Momaday and Hogan, but it has strong connotations that help to bring to the surface many questions and issues. As the following lines will further explore, in the chosen books, hunting acquires both positive and negative connotations. On the one hand, hunting can be seen as a way of blending in nature, connecting with ancient beliefs and belonging to the tribe. However, on the other hand, hunting can become a mistake, affected by the influence of western thought and the loss of Native values that corrupt the respectful rituals of hunting.

Huggan and Tiffin (2015, 10) provide some background information about hunting as not only a means to survive for Native American tribes, but also a ritual that is relevant for their culture, and also useful for warfare. While colonizers held hunting as ‘a pastime, an upper-class social ritual, not a survival necessity’, for Indian Americans this practice was necessary (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 10). Moreover, far from western hunting rituals based on beliefs of human domination and superiority, Native Americans had a different relation with the animal prey (ibid). ‘Aware of the power of animal spirits, native hunters treated their prey with respect and performed rituals defined by reciprocity. Although not quite a relationship of equals, the connection between Indians and prey was not essentially hierarchical’ (ibid). Vizenor also expresses that Native people ‘learned as hunters, and later as authors, never to let a wounded animal suffer’ (Vizenor 1995, 666). When hunting, the hunter should get closest to the natural instinctive state and ‘[become] one with the animal’ (ibid). The western hunter is not aware of the skill and experience of blending with nature, but they only ‘focus their attention on the act of killing’ (ibid).

Momaday and Hogan also exemplify how Indian American perspective of hunting diverges from western perception. In *Power*, for instance, ‘[Ama] never kills anything unless she has to’ (Hogan 1999, 126). Being a recurrent theme in his collections, Momaday reflects how much hunting means for Native American culture and survival:

My ancestors were hunters. For a long time they hunted on foot. It was hard work, and it took most of the hunter’s time. He had to stalk his prey, and he had to kill it with a lance or with a bow and arrow. Great skill was required in the hunt, and everyone relied on the hunters for food. It was a question of survival (...) The hunters could afford to kill only what was needed. And always the hunters and the people gave thanks for their bounty, and they asked forgiveness from the animals that were killed. There was time to dance and celebrate the earth (2020, 22).

Some romanticized and detailed hunting descriptions appear both in *Earth Keeper* and *In the Bear’s House*, such as the passage “The Bear hunt” where the Kiowa writes: ‘brooding around at last to forgiveness and consent; the silence was essential to both [bear and hunter], and it lay out like a bond between them, ancient and inviolable’ (Momaday 2010, 87). These

passages show how important it is to follow the rules that the tradition marks, in order to honor the prey as it deserves and maintain a horizontal relationship with nature and non-human animals.

The hunt was over (...); it was over and well done. The wound was small and clean. (...) He took out his pouch of pollen and made yellow streaks above the bear's eyes. (...) He disemboweled the bear and laid the flesh open with splints so that the blood should not run into the fur and stain the hide. He ate quickly of the bear's liver, taking it with him, thinking what he must do, remembering now his descent upon the rock and the whole lay of the land, all the angles of his vision from the ridge (Momaday 2010, 90).

Symbols such as pollen, mentioned here by Momaday, are also present in the ritual that Ama performs after killing the panther: 'she made it a bed of leaves in a circle of twine, she offered it tobacco and food', 'she even offered it pollen and corn'; that is, Ama 'did the correct thing' and 'followed the old traditions of caring for the hunted cat, the prey, of giving it the proper respect' (Hogan 1999, 70). In sum, after hunting, Native tribes carry out different rituals to show respect and gratitude to the sacrificed animal.

Because of the aforementioned notorious differences between western and Native hunting practices, it can be said that the animal-human relationship is conditioned by culture, customs and beliefs. Thus, the imposition of western ideologies has highly affected the relationship between humans and non-human animals, as a whole, as in hunting in particular. Hogan portrays this in a clear way:

the men cut it, laughing, talking about its sex organs, calling it names, all the love for the animal missing, and he thought, Jesus. They are like the men at war (...) Thomas was ashamed of them. Now he hated his own men (...) some of them drinking in the boat that day, smoking marijuana, one had put beer in the blowhole of the whale with irreverence and stupidity (...) They didn't apologize to the spirit of the whale, nor did they sing to it or pray as they said they were going to do (...) maybe they'd lost all feeling because they'd had to in order to survive in a place where kids shot guns, killed dogs, and died of alcohol poisoning (Hogan 2009, 95).

It can clearly be seen that, affected by westernization, some members of the tribe have detached themselves from the ancient traditions of hunting, and have become completely disrespectful not only towards their own people and beliefs, but towards nature and animals.

In addition, related to the effect that western thought has on Native Americans, Hogan raises the question of morality and legality. Hogan's novel *Power*, apart from being a bildungsroman of the protagonist Omishto, is mainly about the hunt of the endangered Florida panther and its consequences. Hogan admits she got inspiration from the 1983 case in which James Billy, an influential Seminole tribal council leader, killed an endangered Florida Panther (Castor 2002, 41). Not only did he not kill it as part of a traditional ritual, but he also disrespected the panther, cooking and eating it, as well as taking trophy photos of it (ibid). In contrast to this disrespectful behavior, Ama considers the panther a sacred animal, yet she kills it. Soon after the killing, Ama is arrested and judged following American law, being finally released. However, she is judged a second time, now by the Taiga elders, who condemn her to walk for four years in exile.

In the eyes of the American legal system, 'killing a panther is a federal offence unless it occurs on Indian territory and can be justified for traditional religious reasons' (Castor 2002, 41). Thus, as Ama's act can be justified within Indian exceptions, she is not found guilty. This law might oppose Indian rights to environmental protection laws, especially regarding endangered species. Yet, as Laura Castor points out, 'the central issue at the first trial is that the white people are not able to acknowledge that Ama has been made the scapegoat for their own cultural attitudes and actions that have threatened the existence of the panthers' (2002, 45). Ergo, it is western impact that really threatens the existence of the panther and its habitat, and not the religious sacrifices of the Taiga (ibid). Moreover, lots of panthers have been killed 'since the highway went in' (Hogan 1999, 123), and some others as a result of scientific tracking system errors (Hogan 119). Therefore, Hogan portrays that the true conflict is between the powerful colonizers and 'those who are designated as "others"' (Castor 2002, 45). After having said this, it could be said that it is not appropriate to judge Native cultures and hunting practices from a western moral perspective, without considering the context, and acknowledging the true root of the issue.

Lastly, looking at the symbolism behind hunting in the books, *People of the Whale* in particular provides an interesting parallelism. In the novel, hunting is not only a representation of the ancient values or the decay of these values by the influence of white men, but it also serves as a simile of war. Specifically, the whale hunt triggers Thomas' war trauma. During the hunt, his son Marco expresses that the whale is too young and friendly, yet Thomas mechanically shoots it: 'Once again in my life, I fired, he thought, against my will. It was not by design but by habit, fear, adrenaline. Maybe even memory' (Hogan 2009, 112). Thomas is clearly traumatized by the Vietnam War in which he fought, 'fear was his constant, his daily habit formed years ago. By noise, bombs, the smell of chemicals in the air' (ibid, 99). Similarly, the war has detached Thomas from his native connection to the sea that 'he no longer sees the jellyfish as the ocean pulse or heartbeat' but 'as parachutes floating men down from a plane or copter' (Hogan 2009, 163).

To sum up, it can be said that death is a recurrent theme throughout these stories: humans, non-human animals, nature, cultures, languages and beliefs are in danger of disappearing. The systematic oppression that colonialism and western powers have imposed on the 'others' has brought irreversible damage. It is clear that the bigger the influence of colonialism is, the bigger is the detachment from nature that colonized peoples suffer, adopting discriminatory and anthropocentric practices that harm the environment, animals, and even themselves. It is key to look at the portrayal of animals and nature in these works, in order to understand how the human-non-human relationship changes, and how it can reflect an identity loss.

#### ***4. 2. Belonging to Nature: Landscape and Seascape***

This second chapter is dedicated to the physical world: the environment. Within the context of Native Americans in the US, the meanings of land, place and nature will be looked at. The environmental crisis has brought the loss of habitats, pollution of the land and oceans and many more irreversible damages on the earth. The destructive behavior of western ideologies, starting from colonial times, has shaped the landscape in which Native tribes live, affecting their survival, as well as their culture and identity. In the following lines, a nexus

between human and non-human issues will be conducted, considering the environmental destruction, and addressing how natural decay links with human decay, as they are interconnected.

As aforementioned, the ongoing anthropogenic climate change is a result of a system in which humans use and abuse the environment in the name of progress. The consequences of this global warming affect the entire planet, from plants to animals, to humans, among which postcolonial nations are most vulnerable. Within postcolonial peoples, American Indians have been and still are victims of environmental damage: many Native lands have become dump sites, they face issues of food security, the government has restricted their hunting and harvesting rights, and the loss of animals and environment which are crucial for them has brought a downfall in their identity and culture.

Although not all these issues are reflected in their works, both Momaday and Hogan become environmentalist writers who, through their narrative, give visibility to the Native perspective within the environmental crisis context. In *The woman who watches over the world: A native memoir*, Hogan writes that the fates of non-human beings are 'interwoven with our own human fates in this world we humans have diminished because we have failed to understand how each thing connects with all the rest' (2001, 25). In the process of natural disconnection that humans have developed throughout time, 'what has been lost and must be recovered is actually a part of the human self' (Schweninger 2008, 185). That is why, for Hogan, reconnecting with nature 'means reconstructing a very literal part of that self', 'her Native American heritage [being] an important part of that self she seeks to connect with' (ibid).

This close connection to the environment is reflected in their works, in which the connection acquires various meanings. The environments that are described and in which the stories are set are different, yet they all connect with a deeper value. For example, Hogan's novel *People of the Whale* begins as follows: 'We live on the ocean. The ocean is a great being. The tribe has songs about the ocean, songs to the ocean' (2009, 9). Ergo, the first words of the novel are, on the one hand, personifying the ocean as a great being that is alive, and on the other, highlighting the connection between the tribe and the ocean. The tribe does not only 'live on the ocean' but their culture is created around it: their songs speak 'about the ocean' and they

also sing to it. Nature being a living force, it is affected by and responds to human actions: after Marco is killed in the whale hunt, there is a drought, because 'A wrong thing was done. Maybe more than one wrong thing' (Hogan 2009, 108).

Water is a symbolic element that is very present in Hogan's extensive literary trajectory, and it also acquires large importance in the story of the fictional A'atsika tribe. Rain, for instance, symbolizes life: 'drop by drop, the world will live' (Hogan 2009, 150). Thanks to water 'plants might even turn green' and 'bloom again one day soon' (ibid, 151). Apart from life, in this novel rain also becomes a truth bearer: the rain 'washed down and exposed the body of a whale' that people lied about, 'saying it had washed up and that it hadn't been killed' (ibid, 152). It turns out that 'the whale is riddled with bullets. Revelations. Near it is a crumpled empty pack of Marlboros and an empty bottle of whiskey' (ibid). Thus, the rain 'revealed recent human wrongs', which made the tribe 'understand why the rain and ocean left them, why the fish had gone away, the sun ruined their homes and gardens' (ibid, 153). So it is clear that nature is affected by human wrongs, and responds accordingly.

In the 1999 novel *Power*, Hogan also emphasizes the relevance of natural elements such as the rain or the wind, to which the tribal peoples are connected too: 'this was how the world was created, Ama told me once, out of wind and lashing' (1999, 42). Omishto speaks about the wind being 'life-creating air' that created the world (ibid, 84):

I see this place from in the beginning when it was an ocean of a world. Even sky was a kind of water. Land not yet created. And then a breeze of air, an alive wind, swept through, searching for something to breathe its life into and all it could do was move the water in waves and tides, and water didn't stand up. although it spoke (Hogan 1999, 83-84).

Furthermore, Omishto expresses that she feels watched by nature: 'It's what I felt watching me, all along. It knows us. It watches us. The animals have eyes that see us. The birds, the trees, everything knows what we do' (Hogan 1999, 59). Thus, nature is considered a powerful living force that deserves respect, as it is superior to humans:

Human creations don't hold a candle to wind. That's how I know something is greater than human will. And even though it's a tragedy, I feel better seeing how small we are. It makes me think that all our crimes against the world will be undone in just one rage of wind or flood (Hogan 1999, 99-100).

Hogan mainly reminds us that we depend on nature, that we owe our lives to it, and that we should leave anthropocentric ideologies aside and consider ourselves as part of it, and respect it horizontally. Hogan admits that as she gets older she is moving closer to the Native traditions 'of respect for other species, for the land, and for the water', which is the view that is reflected in her work (Stein 1999, 114).

Momaday's ideas about the land, equally, have grown stronger in him:

I am an elder, and I keep the earth. When I was a boy I first became aware of the beautiful world in which I lived. It was a world of rich colors—red canyons and blue mesas, green fields and yellow-ochre sands, silver clouds, and mountains that changed from black to charcoal to purple and iron. (...) It was a world in which I was wholly alive. I knew even then that it was mine and that I would keep it forever in my heart. It was essential to my being (Momaday 2020, 5).

In *Earth Keeper* he also recognizes the crucial role that nature plays in his life as a Kiowa man. Describing the American West, the native ground where he grew up, Momaday reflects about the connection between the land and his ancestors. As an introduction he writes: 'I, and [my ancestors], belong to the American land. This is a declaration of belonging. And it is an offering to the earth' (Momaday 2020, xi). On the other hand, *In the Bear's House* provides a more poetic and pure view of nature, from the perspective of Bear, who is the expression of wilderness:

I dream of berries and of the strange and beautiful things I have seen. I dream of high meadows to which my kin come in the spring and summer when the wind is fragrant with buckwheat and camas, and sweet roots are thick and tangled in the loam. I dream of lusty sows sauntering in the fields of flowers and of their cubs at play. I dream of clouds gathering at the

summits and of rain descending in curtains on the dawn (Momaday 2010, 19).

For Momaday, the land participates highly in the historical memory of his people, as this chapter will further develop, the land contains the stories of the past, and thus being connected to it is crucial. Moreover, the same way as Hogan, Momaday reclaims protecting and keeping the earth. In sum, these authors' different environments are given a spiritual value, and a request is made for them to be respected and worshiped.

#### **4. 2. 1. Perception of the Land in Native American Culture**

Some scholars argue that Native Americans have been stereotyped as the 'noble savage', nature lovers and romantic conservationists (Schweninger 2008, 37). However, as Schweninger points out, 'several contemporary American Indian authors argue that there does indeed exist an indigenous relationship to, appreciation for, awareness of, or understanding of the land that is significantly different from non-Indian relationships' (2008, 2). Both Momaday and Hogan defend in their literary works that Indian Americans have a unique relationship with the natural environment that non-Indians lack. For instance, in his essay "A First American Views His Land", Momaday explains that 'as a result of their long tenure in the land on the North American continent, Native Americans have developed a spiritual and moral relationship with the land', a connection that 'remains essentially unknown to non-Indian Americans today' (cited in Schweninger 2008, 132). Despite universal human dependence on the environment for survival, western perceptions of nature and traditional Indigenous beliefs differ remarkably. Hogan writes on her memoir:

I've concluded over the years that the two ways, Native and European, are almost impossible to intertwine, that they are parallel worlds taking place at the same time (...) There is something that we Indian people share at the deepest levels of ourselves, and it is a living, present thing (Hogan 2001, 27).

Examining this dichotomy, on the one hand, land's oppression originates in colonial influence of Christianity, science and technology (White Jr 1974, 45). These three aspects have given

western men powers which have gone out of control and have allowed the exploitation of nature 'in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects' (ibid). 'The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West': from a Christian perspective a tree is nothing more than a physical fact (ibid, 48). This belief has led colonizers and missionaries to '[chop] down sacred groves' for 'nearly two millennia', and destroy pagan animism and the spirituality of nature, replacing them with anthropocentric beliefs (ibid, 45-48).

What is more, through the colonial idea of *terra nullius*, the invaders assumed that the foreign spaces were not owned, and thus they could seize them, taking control of all the living beings that dwelled in them and using and transforming them as they pleased (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 187). In fact, European imports such as farming and pastoralism were regarded as 'necessary and "natural" impositions on, or substitutes for, the local bush or wilderness' (ibid, 7). As a response to all these assaults, Momaday defends that 'those who deny the spirit of the earth, who do not see that the earth is alive and sacred, who poison the earth and inflict wounds upon it have no shame and are without the basic virtues of humanity' (2020, 59).

Oppositely, Native tribes believed that space and land cannot be owned or bought. Momaday states that the conception of land 'in terms of ownership and use' is 'alien to the Indian. His cultural intelligence is opposed to these concepts' (cited in Schweninger 2008, 133). The Kiowa writer also states that Native Americans give a spiritual dimension to the earth, and therefore a moral value (ibid). Moreover, according to Momaday, 'one's spiritual self is intimately and reciprocally involved with the landscape. One's being has everything to do with one's relationship with the land' (ibid, 137).

Accordingly, in contrast to western thought, there is a deeper 'ethical regard for the land' that is rooted in Native cultures (Schweninger 2008, 2). Indigenous traditions consider humans as part of nature, and aim for a harmonious relationship with it, 'a way of life that had been suppressed by colonization' (Fatheuer 2011, cited in Cheyfitz 2020, 476). This balanced ancestral way of life, however, is not seen from a romantic or nostalgic point of view, but rather revolutionary, 'because it is certainly evident by now that the radical economic and environmental imbalances of capitalism are destroying the planet' (ibid).

Besides, the environment is not only seen by Native peoples as a home for them and the animals they cohabit with, but it is also linked to tribal beliefs. The environment is sacred for them, as it carries the memories of their ancestors and allows them to connect with the past. That is why, the process of colonization, which involved detaching Native peoples from their land, as well as imposing European values, language and religion, had a great impact on Native identity and memory. Jyotirmaya Tripathy highlights that the loss of memory 'was integral to the process of colonial oppression' (2009, 50). Ergo, 'dislocating natives from their culture was aimed through a loss of memory which would make them forget who they are and where they came from' (ibid). In Native American culture, forgetting the past is like a disease; losing their tradition and memory means losing 'a positive sense of self', that can only be recovered by remembering the past (Tripathy 2009, 50). So, as Hogan points out, the introduction of Euro-American beliefs in the tribes have brought not only a disconnection from the environment, but a disconnection from their own self (cited in Schweninger 2008, 2).

In the chosen works, both authors portray their attitudes toward land and sea, linked to memory and identity. For instance, Momaday's *Earth Keeper* is dedicated to 'the remembered earth'. This book is presented as a 'kind of spiritual autobiography': it is a journey through the story of Momaday, his people and his land. In this journey, the Kiowa writer highlights that the earth is our well-being, and so we must keep it (Momaday 2020, 11-12). Furthermore, 'the red earthen floor' contains the memories of the 'prayer meetings', the 'hymns sun in Kiowa', 'the voices carried on the prairie darkness to Rainy Mountain Creek and beyond'; these memories are ingrained on the land (Momaday 2020, 43). Thus, in order to remember, being an 'earth keeper' is indispensable: 'as long as there is land and as long as there is imagination, there remains the possibility of regaining an awareness of self' (Schweninger 2008, 137).

Similarly, Hogan's 2009 novel describes that 'the land is full of the blood of the ancestors', the blood of the people that 'were once massacred, infants bayoneted on these beaches and mounds' (Hogan 2009, 218). Ruth reflects on it, lamenting that 'she has read of this country, America, but she has read another history' (ibid). Land becomes then a faithful representation

of the past, as history has been written by those in power and have silenced the oppressed voices.

In *Power*, Omishto narrates that the old people 'live among tradition and memory' which is no more than 'the bones of something recalled real and whole' (Hogan 1999,154). She describes the lifestyle of the old people as 'a kind of paradise', 'even though it is surrounded by devastation' (ibid). The contrast is clear between living according to the old values and the globalized modern world:

it's like the people have stepped outside an ugly world and now they remain far away from it all, under the pale blue sky called remembering. It's where they hear what the creator tells them to hear and they hear it well because this sky is not full of the sounds of airplanes, this land is not cluttered with the sounds of cars or television. It's the place where they do what the creator tells them to do in spite of the world of old rags and parts of things that have fallen out of the ruined world all around them. And because of this, they still hold themselves in a beautiful manner: that's what we used to call it, "a beautiful manner." It's the way of living that holds tight to memory, creation, and earth. You can see this goodness of life on their peaceful faces, on their skin, even though not far from here are the old, rusted cars (Hogan 1999, 154).

It is clear that Omishto has connected with her tribal side and acknowledges that a life that involves remembering the past is a life lived in harmony with nature and the surroundings, which brings peace and happiness. Hence, in the present, looking back onto the past becomes indispensable, especially for Native peoples. As Tripathy points out, while 'western literature is individualistic', native literature 'is aimed at integrating the individual with the people', and 'provide a continuum of the past into the present, and present into future' (2009, 44). Transmitting the culture from generation to generation, through media such as storytelling, is the way in which ancestral Native heritage and history has survived. Despite the numerous attempts from colonizers to destroy tribal traditions, Native cultures are still alive: 'it is remembering (...) which is the essence of native identity' (Tripathy 2009, 51).

In relation to memory, the elders of the tribes play a key role. The old people are the ones who personify the ancient values and beliefs, they are the ones who live according to the natural laws, and the ones who still keep a strong bond with nature and animals. In *Earth Keeper*, Momaday reiteratively refers to the elders as the keepers of earth. He also regards himself as an elder, and therefore an earth keeper:

I am Tsoai-talee, Rock Tree Boy, and I will carry that name to the end of the world and beyond. I will keep to the trees and waters, and I will be the singing of the soil. In my truest being I am a keeper of the earth. I will tell the ancient stories and I will sing the holy songs. I belong to the land (Momaday 2020, 65).

Momaday drinks from his ancestors and their myths, and from the memory of the land. The old generations acknowledge that the land is part of their identity, and therefore they inspire to honor and protect it.

The elders in Hogan's novels are also the custodians of nature and tribal knowledge. In *Power*, Omishto learns 'from Ama how to survive and be friends with this land' (Hogan 1999, 19). While Ama is 'wild as the land' (ibid, 21) and embraces her Native identity, Omishto's mother 'has tried all these years to pass as white' (ibid, 151). The girl clearly understands the contrast between the white and the Indian worlds:

I always figured Ama was going to grow old like that, like a true Taiga Indian who didn't mingle with the white world, who knew the songs and dances of the past. She was going to be proud of what she is in a way the rest of us are not, in a way my mother has never (Hogan 1999, 23).

Similarly, *People of the Whale* portrays the ancient knowledge of the elders in contrast to the new generations that are facing a big loss of values. Thomas' and Ruth's ancestors 'had purity and purpose. They had songs for everything. They were honest, even in their treaties' (Hogan 2009, 45). In contrast, young men such as Thomas are suffering Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from the Vietnam War, which is affecting their Native identity: 'I am sorry to be a man. I am sorry to be a human being. I used to think it was other people. But I am one of

them. I became one. I even killed Americans. I had to' (Hogan 2009, 274). After having lost his faith and becoming completely disconnected from his people, he realizes that the only way to return to a peaceful life and living according to the values of the tribe is looking up to his ancestors such as his grandfather Witka:

I'm changing history now. I am going to be remembered as the man who could kill but doesn't. As the man who one day said I'm going to be like the old people, I'm going to be like the ancestors. If I ever have to kill a whale I will prepare for a year. I will have good thoughts. I will love the whale (Hogan 2009, 270).

These examples manifest how memory and land connect to Native identity. Regarding these aspects, the old people become bearers of ancient customs, they become the representatives of memory and land: they carry the ancient values of respect and harmony towards the environment and animals. The process of remembering involves going deep into the roots of the tribes and their values, which are still ingrained in the memories of old generations but are slowly disappearing. The loss of values, or in other words, the removal of them by western powers, goes hand in hand with the detachment of nature and consequent destruction too. The historical oppression of Native peoples is linked to the oppression of the land.

#### **4. 2. 2. Colonial Legacy: Detachment and Destruction**

*Would it have been a different world if someone had  
believed our lives were as important as theory and gold?*

Linda Hogan, *Power*

Despite the efforts of generations of Native Americans to transmit and keep their values, there has been a clear loss. The invasion of colonizers and the continuous influence of western Euro-American thought has had a negative impact on Indigenous cultures and their particular way of understanding and connecting with the world. Furthermore, due to the environmental crisis, the destruction of the non-human world is affecting Indian Americans

as a vulnerable postcolonial community. The concept of 'environmental racism' helps to understand the interconnectedness of these two issues. Defined by philosopher Deane Curtin, environmental racism is 'the connection, in theory and practice, of race and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other' (cited in Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 4).

As a result of history, Native tribes are suffering a detachment from nature and animals: the sacredness and respect for the living world is losing its strength. Hogan uses the word 'betrayed' to describe how the earth is as a result of the relation of humans toward nature:

People used to believe that what rises up from the ground, or falls from the sky opens its eyes and is alive, like first walkers and trees and birds. Now it seems it is the whole world that has fallen. Not the way light falls on the trunks of trees, not just shade and shadow cast by the light of sun, either, not even the first beginnings of life down in the tangle of roots and seeds. It has all fallen, this poisoned, cut world. It has fallen in a way that means this place is taken down a notch. Unloved and disgraced and torn apart. Fallen, that's what this world is. And betrayed.

Some say we, too, are fallen. We are Taiga Indians and no one has heard of us (Hogan 1999, 84-85).

Hogan is clearly linking human and environmental oppressions in these words. She claims that not only the earth is 'fallen', but the Taiga tribe too, which in this case serves as a metaphor for a broader group of Native peoples. This adjective might possibly encompass all of us: human values of kindness have fallen, we have destroyed nature, and by doing so we are destroying ourselves.

The Kiowa writer also describes the contrast between the world in the past and today:

On one side of time there are herds of buffalo and antelope (...) The waters are clear, and there is a glitter on the early morning grass. You breathe in the fresh fragrances of rain and wind on which are borne silence and serenity. It is good to be alive in this world. But on the immediate side there is the exhaust of countless machines, toxic and unavoidable. The planet is

warming, and the northern ice is melting. Fires and floods wreak irresistible havoc. The forests are diminished and waste piles upon us. Thousands of species have been destroyed. Our own is at imminent risk. The earth and its inhabitants are in crisis, and at the center it is a moral crisis. Man stands to repudiate his humanity (Momaday 2020, 44).

Young Omishto also describes that her land has been poisoned and polluted ‘with the runoff of the farmers and cane growers’ (Hogan 1999, 18), although she can still remember ‘not long ago when the water was very sweet and you could eat the fish here’ (ibid, 111). However, the destruction of the environment is not a recent case, but as Ruth points out in *People of the Whale*, ‘the breaking went back further, to the Spanish, the Russians, the British, the teachers and American missionaries’ (Hogan 2009, 106). Thus, as postcolonial ecocritical theories point out, colonialism is the root of the oppression that links Native Americans and the environment: ‘history is the place where the Spaniards cut off the hands of my ancestors. The Spanish who laughed at our desperation and dying’ (Hogan 1999, 73).

Momaday argues that in the modern version of the past dichotomy of the Indian and the white man, American Indians have lost the connection to the land, and non-Indians still lack it (Schweninger 2008, 138). The legacy of colonialism has westernized Native Americans in an environmental sphere, together with many other aspects. The anthropocentric western ideology that is disconnected from nature is one of the reasons for natural exploitation and destruction, and a main cause of the present environmental crisis. So, as humans globally move towards a socially individualistic and destructive lifestyle, Indian Americans see themselves dragged by it too.

Currently, in a globalized and industrialized world, humans are alienated and completely detached from nature, as Momaday criticizes:

How many lifeless things are placed each day between us and the living earth? A friend in Brooklyn told me that his little son had gone out to watch workmen breaking up a sidewalk. He was fascinated to see earth under the cement. He had never seen it before (2020, 39).

This problem derives from the clash between tradition and modernity, western and Indian; yet it has become a conflict between natural and unnatural. Facing such context, Momaday and Hogan become advocates for the restoration of the ancient relationships of humans with the earth and non-human living beings that were erased by colonizers, hoping to end with oppression and devastation. These Native authors ultimately support that it is the Indian American lifestyle that '[holds] the promise of a sustainable, ethical, and viable relationship with the natural world' (Schweninger 2008, 201).

Momaday claims that 'it is the present and the possibilities of a future that must concern us', as we have already damaged our world, 'and we must be held to account' (2020, 57). He reflects about the responsibility of our generation to maintain and transmit what his ancestors gave him for the future generations:

Those who came before me did not take for granted the world in which they lived. They blessed the air with smoke and pollen. They touched the ground, the trees, the stones with respect and reverence. I believe that they imagined me before I was born, that they prepared the way for me, that they placed their faith and hope in me and in the generations that followed and will follow them. Will I give my children an inheritance of the earth? Or will I give them less than I was given? (Momaday 2020, 40).

These words reflect Momaday's wish to adopt the values of the ancestors, their empathy, their respect and love for the environment, and responsibility towards what surrounds us.

In brief, Momaday and Hogan use literature as a form of activism to warn about the damages that western ideologies are causing, and to reclaim a need for a stronger movement that acknowledges the link between the environmental and Native American oppression. Through the metaphorical representations of the ocean, the land and water, these authors reflect what is happening to Native peoples. As a result of colonization, natural disasters, extinction of species and postcolonial discrimination are a reality. In fact, in the last 150 years, more species have gone extinct than since the Ice Age, and over 2.000 Indigenous nations have disappeared. This shows there is 'a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity' (LaDuke, cited in Schweninger 2008, 36-37). Thus,

recalling the old values of empathy towards animals and nature today is a key strong political statement. This is the side that these two authors have taken: human behavior towards the planet and all living beings needs to be changed before it is too late.

## **5. Conclusion**

To conclude, after looking at how Hogan and Momaday depict their contemporary concerns about humans, nature and animals and their interconnections, the initial question is answered. Evidently, the damage caused on the environment directly affects Native Americans in several ways, due to the link they share, which contrasts with non-native industrialism. Deriving from colonial and anthropocentric beliefs, the oppression that these postcolonial nations suffer is systematic and directly connected to the oppression that non-human beings suffer. The contemporary environmental crisis arises new issues and concerns within the American Indian community, which are clearly portrayed in literature. The colonial legacy has put in danger Native peoples, their culture and identity, as well as many animal species and habitats, and the relationship between them. Drifting from respect and harmony to detachment and destruction, Native American behavior towards the environment has been negatively affected by western ideologies.

Facing this context, Hogan and Momaday use their words to create awareness and advocate for change: there is another way to relate with nature and animals, based on horizontality, and it is the only way to a better future for the earth. These authors, together with many others, portray the contrast between past and present human-nature relationship, to criticize the corrupted Euro-American perspective that has caused the decay of Native ancient values. Therefore, it is undeniable that the Native Americans' condition as a discriminated minority is a determining factor in their relation to the environment. That is why, these books can be taken as activist and protest literary works, which, through the representation of nature and animals, portray the Native American experience and mirror sociopolitical and environmental issues of today.

This dissertation has aimed to link concepts, theories and ideas that had not been previously related in academia. The results have shown that in fact environmental, postcolonial, and Native American theories are interconnected and that it is crucial to apply an intersectional methodology to fully understand the implications of the analyzed literary works. Due to the limitations of the paper, a more in-depth analysis has not been possible; yet it leaves room for further research on the area. This research should aim to include Native American literature in postcolonial ecocritical theories, because, as this essay has demonstrated, Native American culture and identity is clearly affected by the damage that the earth is suffering, and this interconnectedness needs to be further explored.

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