

Beasts of burden: How literary animals remap the aesthetics of removal

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Abstract

This essay explores three genres of Native storytelling and their echoes in contemporary literatures of removal. The Five “Civilized” Tribes—the Choctaw, Seminole, Creek (Muscogee), Chickasaw, and Cherokee Nations—have not only been shaped by the memory of removal but also by the process of telling it as history, of feeding an American appetite for tragedy, which maps their displacement on its material, cultural, and political axes. In the U.S. historical imagination, removal thus exceeds the bounds of event and condition to form an aesthetic within the larger arena of trauma discourse. By invoking each genre and its alter-species figures, Five Tribes authors enact a decolonization strategy that takes aim at this removal aesthetic as well as the colonial Eurowestern cartographic consciousness that undergirds it, which construes Indigenous people and non-human animals as lacking any sovereignty in a U.S. landscape. By articulating Native ecologies and place-making practices, authors unravel Eurowestern models and attend to what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) calls “a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power” (p. 98) as reflected in popular representations of removal, specifically the Trail of Tears. At stake in contemporary stories for Five Tribes communities is a process of remapping home spaces under the historical and present condition of removal, a cartographic act that expresses Indigenous knowledge, thereby countering aesthetics of removal.

Keywords: *Native/Indigenous literature; Indian removal; ecology; geography; cartography*

“Tribal people have deep bonds with the earth, with sacred places that bear the bones and stories that tell them who they are, where they came from, and how to live in the world they see around them. But of course almost all tribal people have migration stories that say we came from someplace else before finding home. The very fact that tribal nations from the Southeast were so extraordinarily successful in making so-called Indian Territory a much beloved home after the horrors of Removal...underscores the ability of indigenous Americans to move and in so doing carry with them whole cultures within memory and story.”

—Louis Owens (Choctaw-Cherokee), *Mixedblood Messages*

Introduction

Native Americans are no strangers to exile. Forced relocation—whether overt, as in Indian removal, termination, and boarding schools; or more artful, as in the systematic dispossession of the allotment era—has been the most consistent hallmark of U.S. federal Indian policy. The irony that coerced emigration has forced diverse Indigenous peoples, collectively typecast as whooping nomads, to roam the Great Plains is not lost. Of the many, no episode remains more recognizable to broader U.S. society than the Trail of Tears, thanks to its memorialization in a steady tide of literary and film treatments and portrayals in visual art. After the “First Thanksgiving,” the few events of Native–U.S. history that appear in primary and secondary educational materials involve tragic violence, ingredients for crafting the manifestly destined narrative of a settler nation. The Trail of Tears, where fifty thousand were forcibly relocated to Indian Territory, stands as only one of many removal events—alongside the Long Walk of the Navajo and the flight of the Nez Perce, for example. But in the discursive terrain of what Dian Million (2013) calls our “trauma economy” (p. 8), the Trail has secured the tragic motif of Indian removal through its scope, as well as the evacuation of political context, to become another whitewashed “vanishing Indian” swan song.

Due in part to a marketability lent by its place in the American historical imagination, the Trail of Tears has been a focal point of cultural expression among the Five Tribes—the Choctaw, Seminole, Creek (Muscogee), Chickasaw, and Cherokee Nations—who found benefit in telling the stories of their displacement. Five Tribes people have not only been shaped by the memory of removal but also by this process of telling, of feeding the American appetite for tragedy, which maps their dispossession on its material, cultural, and political axes. Removal exceeds the bounds of event and condition to form a discourse, an aesthetic all its own, within the larger arena of trauma discourse. This is nowhere more evident than in the range of the Trail of Tears’ modern representations: around Jerome Tiger’s Trail of Tears paintings in the 1960s swirl portrayals in newspapers, magazines, and textbooks; sculptures and museum installations; religious circulars and even children’s books. These have produced a static representational field rooted in historical fantasy rather than transformative storytelling. Such an aesthetic limits narrative possibility and visionary peoplehood.

Some tellings do transcend conventional misrepresentation. Five Tribes artists and authors have recently charted new paths, expressing cultural and political continuance in the face of ever-persistent fantasies of Indigenous absence. Despite their distinct cultures, many express a relation through common oral story genres that feature non-human animal figures, which precede and subvert colonial histories, ideologies, and methodologies. These genres—the creation or origin narrative; the tricky (not necessarily *trickster*) or wisdom tale; and the ghost story, known as the “amazing” story (*asquanighdi*) among Cherokees—help map sovereign, multilocal Indigenous home places and critique the imperialist spatial paradigm in which states consume and then codify territory by disparaging Indigenous modes of negotiating space. This absolutist paradigm underpins removal logic but remains susceptible to transitive counter-narratives. Each genre explored here bears a signature decolonizationⁱ strategy, enacted through story, which unravels what Fanon (1990) calls the ongoing colonial “order of the world” (p. 27)—in this case, a Eurowestern ecology and cartographic consciousness. Indigenous literary animals,ⁱⁱ which express originary non-human presence and kinship, don’t just tell stories of displacement but warn us of the dangers of such stories.

“Exile” signifies a state of displacement, the absence of a home since lost. It is also a poor name for the condition of removed peoples, for it solidifies the relationship between colonial power and “victim.” It may work as part of the language of colonization to deny Indigenous sovereignty and survivance in an economy of sympathy.ⁱⁱⁱ Daniel Justice (2006) asks, “What is home? ... Can we belong to a place we have never been, or a place we know only through our dreams and imaginations? ... Whatever home may be, its roots can draw both rich nourishment and withering poison from the stories we carry about who we are, about our relationships with the world, and about our imagined pasts and dreamed futures” (pp. 45-46). Removal wounds these relationships; colonial histories of removal wound them further. Yet through an ecological sense of peoplehood, “the system of relationships between the People and the rest of Creation” (Justice, 2006, p. 20), Five Tribes people maintain storied connections to their many homelands and chart new ones. Furthermore, I argue that recent Five Tribes literature demonstrates that non-human animal stories are necessary for rethinking narratives of colonial dispossession.

Indigenous mapmaking practices are rooted in unique cultural traditions. Native maps operate not just as tools of physical orientation, as their Eurowestern counterparts do, but also more deeply as storied pictures. They provide direction because they depict social and spiritual relationships between people, other species, and their environments through time and space. Indigenous cartographic conventions, as they manifest through story traditions, shape responses to all aspects of Native life. Yet, since they sit at a more intimate node between culture and environment, they are especially significant during forced migration, which seeks to sever such relationships. In these cases, story and geography reveal a new interdependence: Native story traditions function as mapmaking practices at heart, as they serve the manifold role of cultural sustainment during emigration, establishing a link to former homelands, and emplacement in a new environment. Gerald Vizenor observes in *Fugitive Poses* (1998) that Native stories are

“visual memories” of homes lost (p. 170)—as well as dreams of how new places might be transformed. This is especially true of “totemic” stories, which in Vizenor’s parlance (not Lévi-Strauss’s, for whom *totems* were arbitrary, mere analogy) express through narrative a particular investment in the lives of other species and an understanding of their importance to human cultural survival (1998, pp. 172-178). Such stories express deep ecological kinship, a shared destiny on this planet. This kinship contradicts and unravels Eurowestern or Judeo-Christian hierarchies of species, where human and animal destinies remain separate.

“Totemic” stories continue to play a special role for Five Tribes people since their migration to present-day Oklahoma, when their relations to specific non-human neighbors were severed or changed. Indigenous animal stories have been abused by Eurowestern institutions, who have often commodified them for entertainment or deemed them “myth” or “folklore”—considered separate from “religion” or “knowledge”—according to Enlightenment ideas about sociocultural evolution and late-modern primitivism. This debasement has lent itself to the development of the Trail of Tears motif: species related to the Five Tribes through these totemic relationships have been largely erased, especially from non-Native, realist depictions of removal. Only beasts of burden are represented, such as horses, which matter beyond their function as transportation for food, belongings, and the sick and dying. Native artists and authors have begun reasserting the importance of all human–non-human animal relationships to homemaking for contemporary Native American people.

The three animal-story genres explored here bear significance to postmodern literatures of removal. Five Tribes authors invoke these narratives and their alter-species figures in an explicit act of decolonization, as it attends to what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) calls “a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power” (p. 98) as expressed in histories of removal. In the context of creation and origin narratives, mud-divers like Turtle, Duck, Water Beetle, and Crawfish delineate a rhetoric of sovereign rights to land by establishing continuity of time and space, a conjoined homeland. Because these divers generate land through human–animal community, they express a non-hierarchical sovereignty that defies Eurowestern understandings of space and species. Certain principal figures of Five Tribes ‘tricky’ stories, on the other hand, like Crow and Turtle, differ from more-familiar Rabbit in their adoption of specific rhetorics of resistance to external political threats rather than customs and codes of behavior. And in amazing stories, uncanny figures like owl witches and Raven Mockers symbolically warn against internal social threats by their trespassing of spiritual and natural order. These narratives reflect an Indigenous cartographic consciousness, for which Diane Glancy’s *Pushing the Bear: A Novel of the Trail of Tears*, a classic “Trail of Tears” novel, will serve as a roadmap for exploration. Finally, I will trace the genres through contemporary literary works by Eddie Chuculate, Joy Harjo and Louis Owens, to see how Five Tribes authors deploy bi-regional Native strategies to counter a colonial discourse which has displaced and erased them for so long.

Cartographic consciousnesses

The Five “Civilized” Tribes are linked in name, but their deeper kinship is rooted in a common experience of Southern Appalachia, as well as interactions between their communities for centuries before colonial contact.^{iv} Creek scholar Tol Foster (2008) promotes a regional approach to cultural study, arguing that this “celebrates adaptation by communities,” to both natural and social environments, and “foregrounds interactions and conflicts between [them]” (p. 273). For example, Diane Glancy’s historiographic, *Pushing the Bear* (1996), hinges not only on nineteenth-century political tensions between the Cherokee Nation and U.S. federal and state governments, but also on internal tensions among North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia Cherokee factions, as well as intermarried Muscogeans and Native freedmen. Transported to post-Trail space, the stories in Eddie Chuculate’s *Cheyenne Madonna* (2010) likewise play out within the complex racial and ethnic landscape of eastern Oklahoma in the 1980s. Each text lies near one end of a historical continuum, along which Five Tribes people seek wisdom through regional explorations of their removal past and present.

Experiences of displacement from homelands, as in the Trail of Tears, lend distinct temporal and spatial fluctuations to regional frames, because land and environment are central to Indigenous peoplehood and storytelling. Daniel Justice (2006) emphasizes the necessity of understanding this aspect of Five Tribes cultural consciousness: “One story about [our] relationship to land is well known to many Eurowesterners, if only by the negative example of the ethnic cleansing now called the Trail of Tears.... to understand nationhood in Cherokee literary tradition, we must also examine the complicated relationship between the People, the land, and the forces of removal, as Cherokee stories have long been concerned with this relationship” (p. 47). When, in *Pushing the Bear* (1996), a Cherokee holy man wonders whether his “words will only work on land where [he was] born” (p. 128), his doubt emphasizes the importance of environment to Native knowledge and storytelling. Corresponding stories reorient people to their original relations, a delicate recovery always at odds with the ideas Eurowestern narratives propagate about them.

Orientation remains a key part of the process. The troubled story of removal turns upon mapmaking, which profoundly shapes (and is shaped by) conceived relationships with specific environments. The political clashes of the removal era were rooted in a desire by much of the U.S. government and citizenry to override Indigenous cartographies with one of Eurowestern tradition, which depends on the doctrine of discovery to achieve complete absence of Native people and other species as landed political agents. Chief Justice John Marshall delineated the doctrine in the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823): land title founded on the basis of “discovery” by an agent of a Eurowestern state would take precedence over all Indigenous rights to land. This was especially true during treaty negotiations in the Southeast in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Cartography became an institutionalized political strategy, another “empirical” weapon in the arsenal of Eurowestern colonialism, which sought to tame the continent by mapping it according to its conventions.

Eurowestern cartography customarily involves a process of appropriating space by first naming it. Peter Nabokov (1998) notes that this relies, first, on representing a space in two-dimensional visual form and, “only then...striding over or settling what was thereby already your own(ed) conception” (p. 242). This understanding of land ownership proceeding from representation, without regard for its inhabitants prior to circumscription on a map, directly contributed to removal pressures in Georgia during the 1830s. In *Pushing the Bear*, Glancy’s female protagonist, Maritole, similarly notes that, “the white men had divided [Cherokee] land among their states and called most of our places by English names” (p. 9). The decision about whether to call places by their Cherokee or English names during removal is an essential one for Maritole—it’s a decision that each of the novel’s dozen-plus narrators must contend with. Does the military detachment march from Fort Cass at Charleston, or from ოოᄁᄁᄁ (Ustanali)? For Cherokees, the two are very different *places* that share roughly the same physical *space*. This struggle is played out in Glancy’s authorial process, also: her frequent deployment of Tsalagi (Cherokee) words—which almost none of her book’s audience can decipher—bears important consequences for Cherokee peoplehood in resistance to continued cultural erasure.

In this way, mapped absence was a first step toward permanent removal to Indian Territory. Mapmaking proved essential in undermining Indigenous sovereignty and tribal land/resource claims, a kind of self-justifying endeavor according to Eurowestern traditions. On the one hand, Peter Nabokov (1998) sees cartography as a tool used to subject Natives to “the bloodless process of territorial diminishment through repeated remapping of their aboriginal estate” (p. 247); yet, Native scholars tend to contest cartography as a ‘bloodless process’ and instead see it as an inextricable component of violent removal policies that Justice rightly calls a “physical, brutal, bloody attempted elimination of a people” (Justice, 2006, p. 60). Cartographic encounters between Indigenous Americans and Eurowestern governments have always been flash points for military action, whether in the form of colonial militias and frontier armies, or government forces like those that helped raid the homes of Five Tribes people before escorting the families to concentration camps, referred to as “emigration depots.” The privileging of Eurowestern knowledge practices inflicted damage on Native peoples well before the nineteenth century, however. Nabokov (1998) emphasizes that, “even more debilitating to Indian territorial interests than the disparaging of their own cartographic discourse may have been the accompanying demotion of their cartographic practices” (p. 242). These include oral/mnemonic mapping practices, which work in concert with unique visual codes to express a geography of lived experience of environment, one embedded in language, ceremonial cycles, and storied relationships to other species. This Native presence has generally contradicted Eurowestern ideas about environment as mere economic resource or religious/art subject. Mishuana Goeman (2012) notes that “[r]eclaiming Native cartographies is key to decolonizing the spatial disruptions caused by settler colonialism and to promoting broader forms of spatial justice” (p. 90). The disparagements of colonial discourse have served to disrupt Indigenous space by first disrupting the unique relationship between Indigenous language and place-making.

Native and Eurowestern cartographies are related by their mapping of physical as well as political and cultural space, and by their embedded nature within local epistemologies. We must be careful to avoid essentialist criticism that reifies colonial separations and binaries—nevertheless, conflicting ideologies in the two models form the core of the cartographic contact problem. David Turnbull (2000) identifies mapmaking as the system by which cultures both organize space and organize other knowledge by spatial means, and “unpacking such a transparent, lived-in, dual spatiality necessitates a fairly difficult reflexive exploration since it involves the attempt to understand the spatiality of knowledge from within the knowledge space that has been coproduced with that knowledge” (p. 91). Eurowestern cartography, however, makes the mistake of mediating and conflating territorial (political) and scientific (natural) discovery, undergirding the fantasy of accuracy in representation, as well as its authority over nonwestern cartographic representations. Turnbull (2000) recognizes the inherent contradiction of a “scientific representation,” leading him to claim that “all maps are lies” (p. 101)—dangerous lies, because they legitimate aggressive political and military action.

Conversely, American Indian mapmaking traditions generally do not claim scientificity, and make very little attempt to hide their conventions. Traditional Native cartographies require a familiarity with a community-oriented “oral geography of the region” (Warhus, p. 8), to which their maps always refer and are always secondary to. A lack of understanding about how Native cartographies function led Eurowesterners to consider Native maps “primitive” because they did not represent things “to scale”; visual representations instead reflected cultural and economic significance, as well as cosmological relationships between Native people and the lands and species represented. Native people in Southern Appalachia favored the “sociogram” style specifically, in which the social (including alter-species) takes precedence over the spatial, and the two are blended in a single representational system. In *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (2013), Goeman makes a similar claim about the supposed unempirical nature of Indigenous maps: “The relationship among the individual, community, and other bodies is a driving force that demands we rethink mimetic representations of the map as delineations of closure formed in modernity’s propensity toward “objective” science. Remember, bodies are mobile and not fixed identities” (p. 120). These “mobile bodies” and their “driving force” reflect Indigenous geographies’ openness to motion and change, which lends itself to disrupting fixed, unadaptable ideologies. Fixed models of organization, after all, poorly reflect the shifting nature of lived experience; they are always at odds with it.

Geographies of lived experience represent social interactions, but they tend not to represent relationships to distant, abstract institutions of power. Native American place names have reflected the active relationships of humans, non-human animals and other natural agents—think *Tennessee* (a Yuchi/Cherokee word believed to mean “winding river”) versus *Georgia* (after King George II of Great Britain). This and other differences indicate a Native cartographic consciousness, something like what Peter Nabokov refers to as “Native American cartographic memory” (p. 246). But mnemonic mapping, for Native peoples, does not merely produce psychic artifacts of the past, nor does it merely inform the present. In his seminal ethnography, *Wisdom*

Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache, Keith Basso reports how the Apaches of Cibecue understand the relation between environment and story in the development of mnemonic geographies: one woman observes, “The land is always stalking people. The land makes people live right. The land looks after us. The land looks after people” (p. 38). A Native cartographic consciousness operates in the present moment, reinforcing codes for social and ecological behavior. It remains a way of orienting oneself within and of understanding an environment and its many residents, always built upon a lineage of cartographic practice.

Further, such practice is rooted first in orality rather than print for Five Tribes peoples, as for many Indigenous groups. The Five Tribes had all charted similar, regional oral geographies, which, while grounded yet circulated through adaptable story traditions and cosmologies. This circular process allowed Southern Appalachia and then Indian Territory to shape Native lifeways and cartographic practices, even as those lifeways and practices shaped the land. These geographies come into being when “maps *for* proper action...overlap with maps *of* landscape” (Nabokov, 1998, p. 257). Oral story traditions have not, however, been a disadvantage for Five Tribes cartography: a dependence on story and memory allows access to cosmological and cultural maps for expatriates, those stripped of all possessions and environment. Maps-in-story may then be laid over new landscapes to form geographies that conceptualize new home spaces by way of the past. This homemaking process relies intimately on tribal traditions—even as it works within popular aesthetics and forms that address wider U.S. audiences.

Contemporary Five Tribes stories express specific strategies for cultural and political continuance that necessarily refer back to their peoples’ rhetorical resistance to Indian removal, when tribal representatives argued their ancient presence on lands the U.S. and state governments wished to expropriate. But continuity is never static, for the earth is not static. Daniel Justice observes that Five Tribes peoples have origin stories that articulate movement into the region as well those that stress permanence in Appalachia. It is in these migration stories where “the specter of removal first begins to haunt the people of the Five Tribes” (2006, p. 48). The oral traditions of the Five Tribes (and others removed with them, such as the Yuchi and Lumbee) all reflect this “contradiction” of migration and primordial residence. Reverberations of removal in contemporary artistic expression only further reflect their relationship to the land, just as migration marks the land itself: Diane Glancy recognizes that the footprints of those on the Trail are a kind of presence inscribed “in the earth,” which though ephemeral do have some affect on the earth’s ever-changing condition. Human footprints are not unlike the inscriptions of Buzzard, after all, when he swooped down to shape the Appalachian Mountains with his wings in the earth-diver stories.

Eurowestern cartographies struggle with the earth’s transitional spirit, and this spirit is consequently a natural power source for peoples of oral story traditions. Kimberly Blaeser (1997) writes that, “landscape[s] endlessly transform...through days and seasons, so no static map can give an accurate rendering.... The safe flat map of human existence is every moment forced to waver in the ephemeral space of an alteration, like a wash waiting to be filled” (pp. 123-124). In

Owens' *Dark River* (1999), the river embodies this very contradiction of constancy and movement, and it is therefore a key environmental connection to protagonist Jacob Nashoba's Mississippi Choctaw home: "The river laid claim to all of the land and people, cutting deeper into the earth at every moment, ceaselessly changing and moving but remaining constant" (p. 263). Change is key to continuance. Change is adaptation, but it is also the sort of growth that sets roots deep into soil: an organic foundation. Shorty Luke, *Dark River*'s Apache "story thief," reminds the anthropologist who was adopted into the community because of his performed hyper-Indianness, "You're forgetting that change is traditional, too" (p. 213). Cultural stasis is somehow sterile, unnatural.

This apparent contradiction springs not just from the moving earth but from *people*, we who tell stories, who are also always changing and reimagining relationships with the land and other species. Indigenoussness doesn't require an eternal presence in a single location; rather, a *sense* of eternity in a specific *relational* "location" is vital. Justice (2006) argues that the Native principle of peoplehood "is adaptable to multiple spirits and sacred landscapes. The emphasis is on the totality of relationships, not simply the participants; this gives us room for the possibility of what Craig Womack calls 'multiple homes' that are as much dependent upon our visionary imaginations as are our physical locations in the world" (p. 49). This is, of course, significant for Native peoples marked by dispossession. The sum relationship that Justice refers to is foregrounded in contemporary stories, as authors (re)map homelands in accordance with their longstanding relationships to non-human animals. Vizenor (1998) notes that Eurowestern cartographic practices have helped to colonize both the land and other species: these too have suffered "simulations of separation" (pp. 142-143), which to Native people violates an originary bond between them. This sets the stage for removal policies, which view humans and other species as unconnected and thus unconcerned with each other.

These relationships exist for Indigenous people in a way that manifests in the mapping of spiritual, sociocultural and geographic space. The authors whose works serve as examples here reflect three different geographic reinscription methods; each addresses a specific relationship, whether external or internal to Native communities. The first of these is the creation or origin story, the primordial link to far-off dispossessed homelands. In *Dark River*, an old Apache woman stresses the importance of origin stories when she speaks of Jacob as an exile: "some people...[are] too far from where they began, too far from their homes, too far from their people. ...They forget the stories they need" (Owens, 2009, p. 254). The creation story is the original relation, the *first* story. As the most essential story that brings together land, people, and non-human animals, the creation story is perhaps the most expressly geographical, too.

Animal creation narratives: Sovereignty through relation to land

Five Tribes creation narratives span the southeastern U.S., from nations in Oklahoma to those that evaded removal and remained in the East. The Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee in western North Carolina provide a good example of these narratives, with heavy

reverberations in the form, motif, plot, and setting of their stories. This mirrors the relation between the interwoven but distinct Western and Eastern Tsalagi dialects, where unique environments have shaped the language culture of a divided people. The publication of two recent collections of stories reflects this cultural dynamic of removal: Barbara Duncan's *Living Stories of the Cherokee* (1998), a collection of tales from the Eastern Band; and *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars' Club* (2012), written and edited by Cherokee scholar Christopher Teuton, who compiled material from four Western Cherokee storytellers. Though their versions of the mud-diver creation story differ, formation of *the land* only occurs through a cooperative act by a community of species. Alternatively, in Judeo-Christian tradition, "creation" denotes a hierarchical relationship wherein God creates, Man categorizes and names, and other species receive these designations—another "simulation of separation" that disjoins ecosystems and imposes hierarchies. Because Indigenous creation is at once an act of community and place-making, these narratives reaffirm and reify bonds to homeland and for dislocated peoples this means affirming a link to past and present home spaces. Goeman (2013) notes, further, how "remembering [these] important connections to land and community is instrumental in mapping a decolonized Native presence" (p. 29). Contemporary iterations of communal creation stories prove vital to valuing re-located Indigenous sovereignty beyond what colonial geographies would command.

Among Five Tribes peoples, story creation thrives as a communal art practice, just as the primordial process of world creation. Storytelling communities—called *sgadug*, among Cherokees—form and resist a "mainstream society that has to bureaucratize in order to create community" (Teuton, 2012, p. 3). Decolonization, as demonstrated through creation narratives here, involves using story-space to imagine and then project sovereign futures. Teuton (2012) hints at a profound relationship between belief and imagination, exemplified by the Turtle Island Liars' Club: "Among Cherokees, telling 'lies' refers to storytelling generally, but in particular to telling stories that stretch imagination and belief" (p. 7). "Lying," as it turns out, allows storiers to bend the rules of bureaucratic space, with its divisions and dislocations, and the colonial narratives that legitimate it.

Cheyenne Madonna by Muscogee-Cherokee author Eddie Chuculate is a literary exploration of late twentieth-century life in Indian country and also of Five Tribes migration and homeland. Its stories speak to (post)removal experience and self-reflexively to representations of removal: Jordan Coolwater, protagonist through most of the story cycle, follows in his uncle's footsteps to become a "famous Indian artist," trying to avoid reproducing Trail of Tears-themed prints for the Tulsa Indian art market in the 1980s. His early paintings follow the aesthetic conventions made famous by Jerome Tiger in the sixties—accordingly, this is the celebrity period of Jordan's career. He will grow beyond these conventions by the end of the book; but the first story, set in Jordan's childhood, begins with a turtle coming onto land, which presages his turn away from an empty, sentimentalist Trail of Tears aesthetic. Chuculate immediately evokes the mud-diver stories: a turtle captures young Jordan's attention as she emerges from the pond he's fishing in and then comically tries and fails to climb her way up the clay bank. She falls

onto her carapace but eventually rights herself, only to have Jordan throw a dirt clod at her as he watches how she “stubbornly [goes] nowhere in the plenty of time” (Chuculate, 2010, p. 12). Chuculate couldn’t reiterate the connection between turtle and soil more emphatically if he’d gathered it up in his hands and thrown it at his reader, too, like dirt. More importantly, story and land are linked here by their figurative constancy.

Turtles and terrapins are counted among the mud-diver figures in Five Tribes cosmologies, and as such they have both spiritual and aesthetic lives. For Chuculate, the turtle functions in multiple ways: her comic difficulty reflects Jordan’s cultural lack of direction early in life, but her awkward success foreshadows Jordan’s aesthetic maturation in the final story, “Cheyenne Madonna.” Here, an adult Jordan vows to craft his greatest piece, “and it wouldn’t be for a collector, museum, or gallery. He picked up his hammer and chisel, hefting their familiar weight and balance, and struck the first blow” (Chuculate, 2010, p. 143). Jordan finally turns from the kitschy, tourist-art aesthetic he had always mocked yet obeyed, to a tribally-based and balanced aesthetic signifying landed cultural sovereignty. Jordan’s relation to the turtle is a comic yet sad turn on the Five Tribes earth-diver creation story, one that speaks to the importance of story traditions for cultural continuity, as well as to the process of mapping unfamiliar spaces and relations by way of common tales.

Chuculate opens *Cheyenne Madonna* with a standalone story of first contact, a play on the colonial-era genre of the “relation,” which European explorers in the Americas sent back to their monarchs to report on the natural abundance and strange, savage inhabitants of the “New World.” “Galveston Bay, 1826,” which precedes Jordan’s stories, articulates the significant bearing the past has on the present, establishing this for the remainder of the text in both historical and personal senses—its main character, Old Bull, will even echo in the name of Jordan’s adult love interest, Lisa Old Bull. As a riff on the colonial encounter, “Galveston Bay, 1826” ironically stars only Indigenous characters. The only Eurowestern presence in the story comes in the form of two brief mentions of white ghosts, “out west on the other side of the mountains” or on the horizon riding “big ships with billowing sails” (Chuculate, 2010, pp. 9, 11). The focus of the story is instead Old Bull’s encounter with an unnamed Indigenous people, who dance with turtle-shell rattles, a ceremonial practice historically unique to the eastern and southeastern U.S. When Old Bull returns to tell the story of his journey to his people, he doesn’t feign scientific accuracy, as most colonial relations did, according to a Eurowestern cartographic consciousness. The tradition within which Old Bull speaks instead thrives on the changeability inherent in the environment and in the telling and retelling of oral stories, not static written accounts.

Importantly, Old Bull’s cartographic journey to the “big water” at Galveston Bay is heavily marked and mediated by other species. His party is of course carried the many miles over the southern Plains by horses; but the story opens with a private observation of wolves and coyotes, and as Old Bull travels he has increasingly intimate encounters with antelope, rattlesnakes, locusts, and swans. When he enters the unfamiliar land of the Gulf Coast at one end of the journey, it is populated by strange animals, including birds with bright yellow and blue

feathers and orange beaks, and a giant fish with “slick, leathery skin instead of scales” and serrated teeth (Chuculate, 2010, p. 7). Old Bull repeatedly charts his journey—rather, the story he will tell when he returns—by the non-human animal figures that he meets along the way. Beginning with the feel of locusts on his face and the wind from the swans, his journey to distant lands is marked by creatures that grow progressively stranger to him. Old Bull loses all direction during the hurricane in Galveston, when he is physically separated from his horse in mid-air, and he only returns home with the help of another horse on his return trip. When he arrives, he is wearing a necklace of shark teeth, evidence of distant, strange species. These encounters reiterate the orienting power that literary animals possess.

The creation motifs in *Cheyenne Madonna* express a landed sovereignty through their animal figures’ intimate familiarity with the earth. And not just any earth: Cherokee storyteller Kathi Smith Littlejohn begins her version, “How the World Was Made,” by emphasizing a particular kind of environment: “This is another legend about mud./We like legends about mud” (Duncan, 1998, p. 40). Though many species bear significance, mud-divers like the turtle are unique for their storied relation with the soil, often the earth is formed through bottom-clay from their hands. Five Tribes earth-diver stories typically involve a discussion about the problem of needing new space and then a competition, with loon, beaver, muskrat, duck, crawfish and water spider also challenged to bring up land from the bottom of the waters (Grantham, 2002, pp. 15, 92 and 104). The successful diver often perishes during the act (especially turtle and crawfish), and the others harvest the mud from its feet to make the land (Duncan, 1998, pp. 40-43). Other Five Tribes creation stories feature these same figures, such as the Nanih Waiya mound origin story, where the Choctaw and Chickasaw descend from a crawfish who crawls up onto the mound from a cave (in other versions, the Creek and Cherokee originate there as well.) The earth is formed by a community of earth-divers, and a sacrifice stresses how the people believe their identities to be “inscribed...on the landscape” (Purdue, 2007, p. 10). Other Indigenous ecologies from displaced peoples, like the Abenaki in the Northeast, reveal a similar relationship between species and space: the concept of the “common pot” operates as both an embodied geography and an ethic, as it articulates a landed ecosystem that nourishes itself through an inter-species network that fits into the “bowl” or valley created by, in this case, the Great Beaver (Brooks, 2008, pp. 5-7). All of these creation narratives rely on a non-human animal mediator, inseparable from the land, and the stories are therefore a tangible bond to dispossessed homelands, as well as an articulation of cultural sovereignty—a “continuance of stories” that expresses presence and not absence (Vizenor, 2009, p. 1)—through the earth. The mud-divers embody this bond for Five Tribes people.

Tricky animals and wisdom tales: Sovereignty through political resistance

Native trickster figures and stories vary widely by region. The “trickster” has not been a recognized category within Native American story traditions, as evidenced by the multiple

animal figures that bear so-called “trickster” traits. *Trickiness* is a quality that encompasses a number of strategies for a number of different ends, enacted by widely different animal persons. Generally, the trickster story is understood to pass on, in comic fashion, information for appropriate behavior. LeAnne Howe (2001), instead, refers to the Choctaw trickster genre as the “wisdom tale.” Arnold Krupat (2009) argues that classic, transgressive trickster figures are neither “consistent” nor “continuous” with those of colonial-era oral narratives, but Native scholars like Vizenor disagree. What Krupat misses in his analysis is the diversity of tricky figures, as well as how their cultural, social and political contexts have changed through time; both of these obscure the figures’ inveterate presence in Indigenous story traditions. Krupat (2009) rightly recognizes one important new context when he notes that tricky figures are part of a “powerful imaginative dramatization...of what life beyond the constraints of colonialism might be like” (pp. 11-12). Though they have been transformed since Eurowestern contact and each respond to colonial forces in unique ways, “tricksters” still rely on balance over opposition—they are transgressive only to oppositional frameworks—fueled now by what Justice calls the *decolonization imperative* (Justice, 2008, p. 150). Privileging opposition over balance (opposition, perceived as “disorder” by colonial hierarchies) has always been one source of colonial ideology and oppression; Five Tribes’ wisdom tales invert this by privileging balance.

Rabbit is the best known and most-studied trickster of the Five Tribes story traditions, known variously as Chukfi, Chufi and Tsisdu among the Choctaw, Mvskoke and Cherokee, respectively. Other tricky Five Tribes animal figures have been cut out of the trickster category because they don’t fit the Eurowestern mold: these figures are less interested in enforcing custom or right behavior by negative example, as rabbit does; they are instead more interested in mapping tricky routes through external political landscapes. Turtle and crow more often take up this mantle. All three, however, are what LeAnne Howe calls the “ultimate survivors” and are thus emblems of continuance in dislocation that chart “particular trajectories of resistance” (Baringer, 2001, p. 31). These stories serve to pass on political wisdom and *possible* strategies, rather than claim overt, guaranteed solutions; they are about working against political order, toward justice and a restoration of natural order. Crow tends to achieve this through storytelling, wit and laughter. Turtle, on the other hand, achieves her ends through wisdom and persistence. Lastly, rabbit succeeds by chance and a kind of openness to possibility. Five Tribes tricksters seek imaginative solutions to unapproachable problems, in order “to render possible within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted” (Turnbull, 2000, p. 92). They are not ‘spirits of disorder’ but rather spirits of an order older than the political. Postcolonial interpretations of these stories reflect new understandings and relationships to the political and social history of removal, while holding to “true” tellings of a too-often romanticized past and oral tradition.

In *A Map to the Next World* (2000), Joy Harjo’s tricky crow storytellers are most assuredly mapmakers. They know the storied secrets of direction, yet humans have forgotten their language. Crows understand that “instructions on the language of the land” are written in the Muscogee story-map, and this is why Harjo consults them before leaving Okmulgee,

Oklahoma, for Los Angeles. In “the power of never,” Harjo describes them as “resident storytellers” with “strident and insistent voices” and “cousins in California, and [they] gave [her] names and addresses, [and] told [her] to look them up” (2000, p. 47). Yet, Goeman (2013) argues that, “Harjo’s map does not imply “real” or “objective” space that categorizes, contains, and isolates humans by representing homogeneity within its border...” (p. 143). Instead, the crows unlock the secrets of rubber snakes and scarecrows and urban racism, and they share their stories freely. Soon after Harjo has moved to Los Angeles, she finds herself without direction, and again she consults a crow in “The Path to the Milky Way Leads Through Los Angeles”:

So what are we doing here I ask the crow parading on the ledge of falling that hangs over this precarious city?

Crow just laughs and says *wait, wait and see* and I am waiting and not seeing anything, not just yet.

But like crow I collect the shine of anything beautiful I can find. (2000, p. 45)

In these poems and tales, Harjo invokes Removal-era stories shared by the Muscogee and Cherokee, tales that have continued into the present. Harjo’s crow takes on a kind of originary presence and tricky wisdom as we remember the *Tseg’sgin’* stories, which feature the crow as more than just a simile but as an agent armed with the natural wisdom of laughter. People of the Five Tribes know a series of stories about a man named *Tseg’sgin’*, or “Jack the Devil.” Jack and Anna Kilpatrick collected some of these in *Friends of Thunder: Folktales of the Oklahoma Cherokees* (1964); here, *Tseg’sgin’* is a “symbol of trickery and deceit [but also] of opportunism at the expense of others” (p. 99). Pronounced ‘jek-sin,’ his name deliberately plays on “Andrew Jackson,” the super-villain president who betrayed the Cherokee, Creek and Choctaw, his former friends and allies in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, with the horrors of Indian Removal.^v Five Tribes storytellers did not write Jackson into their story traditions as a weak figure, however: *Tseg’sgin’* is a dangerous fool, a man who abuses animals to gain money and false esteem. He is a “trickster” who does not impart wisdom but destroys everything he touches.

In the tale “*Tseg’sgin’*’s Fortunetelling Crow,” shared with the Cherokee folklorists by a man named Anisgay’dih’, *Tseg’sgin’* mistreats a crow for his own purposes. He does not tame and teach the crow, as the Cherokee *Anitsisqua* (Bird) Clan was once known to do; instead, he captures and imprisons it by tying one of its legs, and then claiming it can reveal secrets: “This crow is a fortuneteller. He’s telling me that someone is trying to steal your wife.... I won’t charge you too much for him” (Kilpatrick, 1964, p. 109). From the start, the Cherokee storyteller makes it clear that *Tseg’sgin’* is out only for money, and his binding of the black crow recalls the economic and racial facets of colonial oppression of Indigenous and African Americans by the United States. *Tseg’sgin’* baits his target with a private knowledge of the wife’s affair, and he devises a way to trick her husband into believing the crow will reveal such a secret: when he knows the wife’s lover is hiding under the house, *Tseg’sgin’* pinches the crow’s leg, making it

caw in pain—this causes the lover to flee, and the husband to believe *Tseg'sgin's* lie and purchase the crow. *Tseg'sgin'* offers no tact in revealing the woman's secret, but he shows no regard in his dominance of the crow, betraying it like Andrew Jackson did the Five Tribes. Vizenor (2009, p. 229) locates native cultural continuity in the tricky triumph of comedy over tragedy, and this tale is no exception: the crow repeatedly caws when not pinched, almost giving away the wrong secret and causing *Tseg'sgin'* to fail, as he must repeatedly order the bird to be quiet (Kilpatrick, 1964, p. 109).

In her collection of poems and tales, Joy Harjo casts crows as secret-keepers and fortunetellers. But they are also storytellers. They tell stories about the world around them, as well as about themselves. In Harjo's "the crow and the snake" and "the power of never," crows exist as actors in their own right. One crow, who lives in her apartment building in Los Angeles, bears some superficial markers of urban ethnic minority, with his black feathers and slick black hair, and his love of hip-hop music. The phenotypic comparison between man and crow highlights the absurdity of racial discrimination and Harjo dares us to pander to racial stereotypes by observing details like the crow's suspected trade in drugs—but the crow is well-groomed, generous and considerate, proving himself to be "civilized" despite his circumstances, and his stereotypic markers become an ironic, trickster expression (2000, p. 47). Here, Harjo authors an animal figure out from the invisible margins, a tricky figure that invokes Creek and Cherokee oral traditions while also correlating with the distinct racial politics of Oklahoma and Los Angeles. Always the perceptive, laughing storytellers, visionary crows tease colonial dominance by uncovering and then revealing secrets of social and political power structures.

Turtle takes a different approach in tricky wisdom tales, one that involves insight and persistence in the face of long odds. Turtle's significance relates in part to her role in earth-diver creation stories: here, she is most concerned with establishing landed cultural continuity when such continuity would otherwise be impossible. In *Pushing the Bear*, a Cherokee woman named Quaty Lewis relates the story of "Trickster Turtle" (Glancy renders it in both Cherokee and English script), which involves a footrace challenge that will be familiar to many Euroamerican readers. In the Cherokee story, however, the footrace happens in Appalachia, over a series of mountains, and turtle faces off against deer, not rabbit (many figures in tricky tales switch roles, because, as Justice notes, it's "the totality of relationships, not simply the participants" that matter). Still a slow runner, turtle gathers a number of her kind and posts them at each peak along the course. When the race begins, deer can't understand why turtle always beats her to the top of every hill. In the final pages, Maritole, the woman whose voice anchors the novel, remembers the story she heard long before, but changes it in her retelling to reflect the new, embodied geography of removal: "Sometimes I thought about Quaty's story of the Trickster Turtle. I had heard Luthy telling it to her boys again. I told it now to the orphans. There was a turtle at the starting line in the old territory. There was a turtle at the finish line in the new. Our Cherokee nation had become two to survive" (Glancy, 1996, p. 233).

Animal agents undermine colonial dominance in part because they express a shared destiny with humans. In the case of the *Tseg'sin'* tales, animals like the crow are totemic figures

that articulate deep alliances between man and nature, against the colonial enemies of both, and are no mere trope of language. Yet, as actors in their own stories, Indigenous animal figures don't just anthropomorphically reflect the attributes and motivations of humans, but articulate their own struggles, desires, pleasures and pains. They demonstrate their own consciousnesses and agency.

Vizenor recognizes that animal stories are “visual memories [and a] source of directions” (1998, p. 170), maps that—with a little luck—might lead others ahead into refigured narrative spaces free of external political oppression. These have the potential to free us from the sort of imagined defects that are naturalized by rhetoric, such as the “savagery” of Indigenous peoples, a claim that was re-made against the Five Tribes, despite its ironic hypocrisy, on the eve of removal. Tricky wisdom stories, enacting various strategies, function as acts of narrative resistance, a reaffirmation of the originary balance between nature and Native people against hierarchical Eurowestern ideologies. There isn't any explicit Jackson figure in Harjo's tales, but the shadow of *Tseg'sgin'* floats through the text to oppose its animal figures, whether in Tulsa or Los Angeles, symbolizing neocolonial institutions. As an abstract but specific political figure with a story of colonial betrayal, Jackson represents the imperialist spatial paradigm that has appropriated sovereign Native space for its own. The only antidote is the disobedient chortle of Native crow, the “strident and insistent voice...[that] add[s] the necessary dissonance for color”—or turtle's patient understanding, or rabbit's play—which might carry people of the Five Tribes into the “Next World.”

“Amazing stories”, ghostly animals: Sovereignty through natural order

One traditional Five Tribes story genre has been overlooked critically but carelessly overused in popular Southern Gothic fiction, because of its relationship to Indigenous mysticism and continuing primitivist beliefs about the superstitious *Indian* who holds some primordial key to the supernatural. The *asquanighdi* or “amazing” story—something like a ghost story—circulates in different versions. While the more elaborate form, which includes more powerful and specific protections against the supernatural antagonist, passes down from conjurors to their apprentices, a more generic version is told within broader Five Tribes oral traditions. In its public form, the amazing story serves to preserve a symbolic social order as it warns of trespass(e)s against the natural order.

The key to the amazing story is that its supernatural figures are not easily differentiated from their natural counterparts. Tellings contain information about how to identify different species of owls from their owl-witch impersonators, as Five Tribes peoples, like the Cherokee, “regard all species of owl as supernatural messengers. The favorite avian form of metaphorized witches and sorcerers, however, is believed to be [either *tsisgili*,] the long-eared owl [or *wahuhi*, the screech owl]” (Kilpatrick, 1997, p. 9, 88). It is the natural power of owls that make them popular transformations for witches. These identifications become important, because witches are considered to be “counterfeit humans” as well as animal impersonators (Kilpatrick, 1997, p.

10). Eastern Cherokee storyteller Robert Bushyhead relates his “Formula against Screech Owls and *Tskilis*,” in which he details how his father taught him to ward off witches. When Bushyhead reaches the warning against the owl witch, he notes that the formula is first and foremost intended to “find out whether it’s a real owl, or whether it’s a witch” (Duncan, 1998, p. 177). The amazing story is a meta-story about, in part, the passing of wisdom for identification and protection to successive generations.

In Owens’ *Dark River* the process is much the same. Discernment of the natural from unnatural remains the emphasis of the amazing story for Choctaw protagonist, Jacob Nashoba, who is followed throughout the story by the voices and traditional stories of owls: “If an owl called at night and there was no answering call, it wasn’t an owl but a spirit, a witch, something evil that had sought you out. [Jacob] knew this was true because the owl had called for three nights before his father’s death, had been there when he went to sleep and when he awoke” (Owens, 1999, p. 5). *Dark River* features a number of prominent non-human animal figures—as tribal game warden, Jacob has a special relationship with these other species—but aside from the association between Jacob’s surname, Nashoba (“wolf” in Choctaw), and Jessie, the young Apache man who dresses in a wolf suit to sell fake vision quests to white tourists, the owl is by far the most prominent non-human figure in the novel, and the only one that follows Jacob from Mississippi to the Southwest. Its moments of manifestation mark important events upon which Nashoba and the narrative turn.

Despite marrying a woman in the community and living on the Black Mountain Apache reservation for over twenty years, members note, “there’s still people [that] think of [Nashoba] as an outsider, not to mention a pretty strange cookie” (Owens, 1999, p. 59). But he first exiled himself by refusing to share with his new community the stories of his childhood home or of his time in Vietnam; and he continues this way, patrolling the Dark River alone, day after day. Jacob “believes himself guilty and troubled—an enemy of the people. He believes himself unworthy of wife, home, and happiness. He acquiesces to exile” (Ronnow, 2004, p. 143). His problem is the deep psychological trauma of cultural homelessness. The old Apache woman, who functions as a surrogate for his powerful grandmother, asks him, “Why didn’t you ever tell [us] about your own culture?... Did you forget everything, or don’t those Choctaw people you come from have stories?” His answer frames both the woman and his new home with regard to the amazing stories of his childhood: “[The *Chahta*] have plenty of stories. Stories, in fact, that tell me who you are” (Owens, 2000, p. 42). Jacob has identified the woman as a powerful force, a sorcerer, dream-sender, or *alikchi* (“healer”) among the Choctaw—akin to the Cherokee conjurors who guard against the owl witches and Raven Mockers. Jacob uses his grandmother’s stories to identify other threats in the Apache community, reminding himself, like Robert Bushyhead, that “Screech owls were witches. He was supposed to be afraid of *ishkitini*, [too,] the great horned messenger owl” (Owens, 1999, p. 42). Natural owls portend death, but they do not cause it like their impersonators, so their messages may be read, and internal social threats neutralized. In Owens’ text the great horned owl repeatedly comes to warn Jacob of threats, but only after he learns not to fear the animal messengers does he learn from them, escaping danger. Owl

presences allow access to old, familiar sources of wisdom in an unfamiliar environment. Other characters “seem to be trying to keep the story local, private, mythological; yet the human story is always inclusive of all oddities, all disruptions” (Ronnow, 2004, pp. 144-1455). Jacob disrupts the local community in a way that demonstrates how distant communities and places may be linked by story.

Amazing stories open a new, blended space in which dangers to an emplaced yet culturally fractured Indigenous community may be identified and addressed. Jacob understands, as an expatriate, that stories are his only access to this new space: “Every time he pointed to a place on a map and asked Tali, or Shorty Luke, or anyone else about it, he could tell that their replies contained only a fragment of what they knew. When he’d asked Tali about that, she’d said, “There are stories, Jacob, stories about every place and everything you see. Nobody’s going to just tell such things to a stranger.” And after twenty years he had remained a stranger...” (Owens, 1999, p. 50). Gretchen Ronnow (2004) argues that *Dark River* emphasizes “the ultimate uselessness of myth in holding a culture together” (p. 139), but Indigenous oral story traditions are much larger than myth. Jordan Coolwater remembers the owl stories when his car flushes one from a willow canopy, causing it to swoop across the road, “flashing in [an] other-worldly light”; and though he isn’t “superstitious about owls either way—good or bad,” he laughs at the way his wife Lisa closes her eyes when they pass the canopy later on (Chuculate, 2010, p. 128). The stories form a psychosocial connection that doesn’t need to rise to the level of myth in order to have cultural importance. Similarly, Jacob’s Choctaw stories have real-world efficacy, even before they blend with the mythic Apache Owl Man motif toward the end of the novel. When the places that Jacob uses to escape are revealed to him by real owl presence, as well as the *asquanighdi*, Owens suggests that many kinds of stories have the power to map home places and relationships, reprogramming the cartographies that cast removed peoples as exiles.

Despite Ronnow’s claims, Jacob is not the prime danger to the Black Mountain community. In fact, he is the only protector of the community from itself, in that he helps identify and unearth internal social threats. And though Jensen and his assault rifle-wielding militia antagonists pose the most immediate physical danger to most characters in the novel, Xavier Two-Bears, the greedy tribal chairman who takes bribes from trophy poachers—a crime against Indigenous ecological ethics—allows Jensen onto Black Mountain land in the first place. Only *Ishkitini*, the great horned owl, leads Jacob to safety when Jensen and his crew decide to hunt him for sport (Owens, 1999, p. 190).

Though he doesn’t at first want to remember his Choctaw grandmother’s owl stories, for Jacob they are a storied link to that community and place. The owl stories, in correlating with the non-human animals it is his job to protect as well as with Owl Man stories, provide a kind of story-bridge, linking the Dark River with the river he remembers from childhood: “Each time he heard an owl call in these distant mountains so far from that Choctaw world, he tried to remind himself that it was just an old woman’s stories; owls were a crucial part of the ecosystem, even protected by the federal government. It didn’t help that the Black Mountain [Apache], too, had stories of owls. Owls tore out hearts and flew away with them in the night” (Owens, 1999, p. 5).

Jacob “was tied to nothing in the world except a childhood vision” of the Choctaw Mississippi homeland where he was born and his grandmother’s stories (p. 111).

Unlike owl witches, Raven Mockers (*kalona ayelisgi*) are specters of the dead, supernatural or ghostly entities that “renew their life force by devouring the blood, heart, or entrails of the living.... [They] are known to be particularly tormentful of their human prey” (Kilpatrick, 1997, p. 9). When they take flight, Five Tribes people have described how they trail sparks from their wings and cry like ravens. While “to the Cherokee sensibility, witches (whether male or female) represent the ultimate expression of human depravity and antisocial deviance,” Raven Mockers represent a deeper and more unnatural threat, one that even witches fear: among the Chickasaw, Raven Mockers are known as *hoollabe*, or the “spoilers of sacred things” (Kilpatrick, 1997, p. 10). Though unnatural, living members of the community may still be identified as Mockers, just as witches—but Raven Mockers steal the souls of their victims, making them particularly feared. Glancy’s Raven Mockers do this very thing, feeding off the life of the weak and dying en route to Indian Territory. But despite the danger and fear engendered by Raven Mocker stories, sharing them actually helps sustain the will of the Cherokees, and in their most desperate moments they “cry and moan” for “the Raven Mocker or Great Spirit or the Christian God” to take them (Glancy, 1996, p. 141). Because of their inclination and ability to spoil sacred places, Raven Mockers become important symbols during the removal of people from their homes. Their inclusion in the same breath as the Great Spirit and Christian God reflects the desperation of the Cherokees crying out for reprieve.

Children are taught to respect natural as well as social order by hearing owl witch and Raven Mocker stories, but they also may learn to seek out and excise threats. In *Dark River*, Tribal Chairman Xavier Two-Bears, his work marked by the cries of owls, betrays Black Mountain’s human and non-human animal communities for economic gain—this reflects community betrayals like that of Elias Boudinot and John Ridge, who defied Cherokee law and signed away Cherokee lands without tribal consent in the Treaty of New Echota. Alan Kilpatrick observes that “another defining characteristic of the Cherokee witch...is the idea that these malevolent creatures are generally regarded as “violators of social space”... What binds these incredible narratives together is the belief that the parasitic nature of witches drives them to invade and despoil socially sanctioned areas” (Kilpatrick, 1997, p. 11). They threaten the kinds of multidimensional spaces available to members of communities, those that Jacob had no access to at Black Mountain, despite his requests, until he accessed the stories of a distant home.

The amazing story has reverberations in other art forms, where more recent Trail of Tears treatments by Indigenous artists feature owls or ravens, following above the procession like a pall or eating the recent dead, respectively.^{vi} These paintings and the animals in them articulate fear, but also continued presence rather than disappearance, in a way that images of hundreds of crying Natives on foot, on horseback and in wagons do not. Part of this operates in perspective and direction, so that the processions no longer recede to a vanishing point, the way they have in so many modern depictions. Owl and raven figures coincidently stand in for both intracommunity perversions, forces that threaten peoplehood and cultural continuity, as well as

mythic forces rooted in Five Tribes story traditions that inherently maintain cultural bonds. It's only appropriate that these figures show up before and during times of crisis, such as the course of forced removal, when community bonds strain under the weight of the physical and psychic suffering of so many people. During apogees of colonial oppression like Indian removal, Indigenous peoplehood depends upon the circulation of stories about their human and non-human communities in order to thrive in the undercurrent, from where it may resurface as part of renewed cultural, political and geographic terrain.

Conclusion

Five Tribes authors continue to work against the popular tragic narratives that have marked their nations since the removal era. However, charting transformative courses against the forces, histories, and aesthetics of removal requires more than negotiation and further promises of sovereignty for Indigenous nations, promises that have never been kept. The core problem lies in the failure of Eurowestern cultural and political institutions to recognize Indigenous ecologies, cartographies, and story traditions by which they orient themselves and map new home spaces on the lands in which they now live. Sovereignty stands on a foundation of cultural survivance within a discursive economy of trauma; for Five Tribes people, a new anti-removal discourse must be fueled by the decolonization imperative in its re-articulation of originary kinship relations with the land and other species. Colonial institutions will forever be confounded by these relationships, as they are eternally and glaringly absent in Eurowestern traditions. The colonial hunger for land and the disappearance of Indigenous peoples is evidence of this absence and a refusal to see the earth as a living, changing force—a profound source of power for the earth-divers and tricky animals. But the transitional landscapes and transformative maps in totemic stories may ambush this colonial refusal. They may open up new possibilities as they come upon it like a river in “a wash waiting to be filled.”

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ⁱ G. Doxtater argues that emancipating and deploying Native knowledges is "the beginning stage of the decolonial era, [and] commences the process for reengaging Indigenous knowledge with a practiced culture rather than merely a performative culture" (2004, p. 629). Nelson Maldonado-Torres sees this as an epistemological (and political) position of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries: "The decolonial ... points to a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as a fundamental problem in the modern (as well as postmodern and information) age, and of decolonization or decoloniality as a necessary task that remains unfinished" (2011, p. 2). See also Mignolo, 2000, p. xxii.

ⁱⁱ See Vizenor, 1998, pp. 119-123.

ⁱⁱⁱ Though widely deployed by historians and legal scholars (see Gibson (1976), Bolton (2003), Magliocca (2003) and Sturgis (2006), etc.) and in popular educational usage (as on Gale/Cengage Learning's "U.S. History in Context" website) to refer to the removal of the Five Tribes, important early texts that include frequent usage of the word "exile" include James Mooney's well-known 1900 report, *Historical Sketch of the Cherokee*, and an account by one of the soldiers who participated in Cherokee removal, John G Burnett, titled *The Cherokee Removal through the Eyes of a Private Soldier* (1890). Burnett would close his essay by articulating a core problem of representation, particularly by scholars, and how tragic narratives obscure injustice: "Murder is murder, and somebody must answer. Somebody must explain the streams of blood that flowed in the Indian country in the summer of 1838. Somebody must explain the 4,000 silent graves that mark the trail of the Cherokees to their exile. I wish I could forget it all, but the picture of 645 wagons lumbering over the frozen ground with their Cargo of suffering humanity still lingers in my memory. Let the Historian of a future day tell the sad story with its sighs, its tears and dying groans. Let the great Judge of all the earth weigh our actions and reward us according to our work" (p. 55).

Additionally, Kent MacKenzie's 1961 film, *The Exiles*, though a film about later urban relocation thanks to the Indian Relocation Act (1956), further solidified this association between the word and Native American experience.

^{iv} This association was born thanks to a recognition in the United States of their limited adoption of Eurowestern norms, including a return to subsistence agriculture (which had contracted after colonial contact triggered the fur trade in Southern Appalachia), some practice of Christian religion, literacy at a rate that surpassed their neighbors in Georgia and North Carolina, and institutionalized slavery. Because the elites of these tribes "realized that claims to whiteness and racial superiority depended on antipathy and discrimination toward African American" (Foster, 2008, p. 281).

^v Cherokee ethnologists Jack and Anna Kilpatrick argue this is a "similarity too obvious to disregard between the two words" (1964, p. 99).

^{vi} See John Guthrie's "Shadow of the Owl" and "Morning Tears" at www.cherokee-indian-art.com