

“EVERYTHING WE NEED IS HERE”:

RESTORING ENVIRONMENTAL BONDS THROUGH ACTIVISM IN *SOLAR STORMS* BY

LINDA HOGAN, *POTIKI* BY PATRICIA GRACE, AND *PRODIGAL SUMMER* BY

BARBARA KINGSOLVER

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The following study explores the role of environmental activism in *Solar Storms* (1995) by Linda Hogan, *Potiki* (1986) by Patricia Grace, and *Prodigal Summer* (2000) by Barbara Kingsolver. In each novel, characters participate in activism for their respective environments through both direct and indirect actions against forces desiring to dominate the natural world. As indigenous authors, Hogan and Grace connect the domination of nature to the colonization of indigenous peoples as well. Kingsolver, on the other hand, examines the role of the EuroAmericans in her text as conquerors and demonstrates ecologically sound ways her characters and readers can restore broken bonds with the natural world. In all three novels, characters, communities, and the reader begin to experience a healing of deep wounds inflicted by attitudes that position humans as superior to the rest of the world and interactions with the environment based on economics and domination rather than balance. Through this cross-cultural comparison, an understanding of multiple ways in which humans can participate in a restoration of the broken bonds with the natural world emerges.



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## INTRODUCTION

### SHIFTING OUR PERSPECTIVES: *SOLAR STORMS*, *POTIKI*, AND

### *PRODIGAL SUMMER* AS ACTS OF RESISTANCE

Novels are often valued for the way in which they change our perspectives on the human condition or the universal truths about life they convey. Yet, these truths are often human-centered and focus only on what humans have experienced over time. Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995), Patricia Grace's *Potiki* (1986), and Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000) go beyond providing universal truths about humanity; they broaden their readers' perspectives to include all of the natural world—humans, plants, animals, land, and water—in a bond necessary for all life's survival. Although recent trends have people “going green,” and the destruction of the environment is the subject of popular films and political debate, a hierarchy continues to exist that positions humans as superior; in some cases this superiority comes in the form of benign stewardship, commodification of the natural world as a mere resource, or blatant misuse of plants, animals, land, and water. In all of these cases, the connection between humans and the natural world is nonexistent or at best, hierarchical in nature.

After I read Hogan's *Solar Storms*, I was struck by her main character Angel's statement: “perhaps there's still another day of creation” (349). While reading the novel, I had been forced to confront my own anthropocentrism and my lack of connection to the natural world. I had been living as a separate observer, appreciative of nature in a somewhat condescending way. Angel's statement left me with a sense of hope that I might have another chance to reconnect with the world on a deeper level. Grace's text also left me with a feeling of hope and reconnection despite the devastation her fictional community (much like that of indigenous communities around the world) faced. I began to feel that these characters are models for anyone wishing to go beyond

“going green.” I also knew immediately that I wanted to continue my study of both *Solar Storms* and *Potiki*. I found healing through reading the novels and through shifting the way I interact with the world around me, whether it’s changing the way I teach my high school students, altering what I consume, or adjusting how I interact with a spider crawling across my kitchen floor!

When it was time to decide on a third novel, I eventually chose Barbara Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer*. Both Hogan and Grace are indigenous authors while Kingsolver is not. However, the way in which Kingsolver’s main characters interact with their environment bears striking similarities to, yet is intriguingly different from the other two novels. Although my original intent was to study three indigenous texts, I realized the value in comparing indigenous perspectives with a EuroAmerican text that also grapples with environmental issues and presents models for activism. By comparing the three texts, I have realized that for indigenous writers, the colonization of nature coincides with the colonization of indigenous cultures, land, and ways of life. Protest for the land becomes protest for the people as well; the well-being of both is dependent on each other.

In *Prodigal Summer*, Kingsolver shows how nature is colonized and that the colonizers are also impacted in negative ways by their dominance of the natural world. She demonstrates how it is imperative for the colonizing group to recognize that the survival of plants, animals, and the land itself will have a direct impact on human survival. In all three novels, the colonizers must change their interactions with the natural world, and they are also encouraged to look to the natural world as a model for interactions that are sustainable and healthy for all parts of the environment. Readers of these texts are urged to examine their local environments and consider



if their roles are those of colonizer or colonized. Looking at the three texts together, we can find models for how to respond.

Despite the global ramifications of adopting the environmental perspectives of the novels, their narratives remain local in scope. Changing a community, therefore, is the first step to changing the world, Hogan, Grace, or Kingsolver might argue. Throughout *Potiki*, Patricia Grace's character Hemi encourages his family to look to themselves and their ancestral land for intellectual and physical sustenance, telling them numerous times, "everything we need is here" (37, 41, 159). In Grace's novel, activism for native lands recreates a fragmented Maori community as members of the extended family work together to protect communal land, spaces, and way of life. Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* also employs activism to restore community among various Native American and First Nation tribes in the Boundary Waters between the United States and Canada. Connecting the healing of nature with the healing of people, Hogan explores the interconnectedness of humans and natural world, of which she stresses humans are an essential but not hierarchically more important part. Both *Solar Storms* and *Potiki* are written from indigenous points of view, Native American and First Nations and Maori respectively, and the protests in the novels are at once against big businesses threatening native lands as well as the entire Eurocentric vision of people as owners of nature. In order to protest, fractured communities must come together to face ongoing historical trauma and reconnect with each other and the environment.

Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*, on the other hand, presents characters in a rural Appalachian community whose land is threatened more so by the community's own poor choices due to economic pressures. While big business factors into the struggles these small farming families face, insecticides, irrational fear of predators such as coyotes, and reliance on cash crops

like tobacco have broken the connection between people and nature. Separated from the rest of the natural world, many human members of the community in Kingsolver's novel mourn the loss of an agrarian way of life, but rather than look to plants, animals, and the land itself as partners in this way of living, they further destroy what they need to survive because they cannot let go of the hierarchy that positions humans as superior. In contrast to the destructive community mindset Kingsolver shows in her fictional county, she presents three main characters who work to restore a symbiotic relationship among people, land, plants, and animals. These characters create their own forms of activism as they work tirelessly to raise awareness among their neighbors about the interconnectedness of all life and the fact that life is not defined as humanity. They model ways of living that respect plants, animals, and land as equally important and provide a pattern for other adults and a younger generation to hopefully mimic. Ultimately, Kingsolver's main characters seek to change not only the way their community thinks about the natural world, but more importantly, how they interact within it.

Hogan's and Grace's characters, however, take this reconciliation a step further to recognize all parts of nature as equally important *and* sacred in a more overtly spiritual sense. Yet, by employing various types of activism, characters and communities in all three novels rediscover, reconnect, and recreate themselves. This recreation not only involves how the characters think about nature; it extends out to their physical interactions with the world around them. They participate in activism through the way they see, hear, and feel their relationship with the world, and this translates into protesting, educating their communities, and physically standing in the way of environmental destruction. Through these examples of changing both the mind's and the body's relationship with the world, each text also urges the reader to take part in

the healing process and redefine his or her inherent connection to the natural world. The novels encourage the reader to continue the activism found in the texts.

The term “activism” often connotes a political stance or a protest with a social goal in mind. In these three novels, however, activism becomes more than just action taken for a specific cause. Activism, to Hogan, Grace, and Kingsolver, is about changing mindsets, relationship patterns, and the way people act within the natural world. Patrick Murphy’s article “The Procession of Identity and Ecology in Contemporary Culture” demonstrates how contemporary novels with an ecological focus often “question human perception, preconception, and misconceptions about the nature of nature and of human beings as discrete individuals” (77-78). Hogan, Grace, and Kingsolver do this by what Cheryl Glotfelty calls an essential component of ecocriticism, enlarging “the notion of ‘the world’ to include the entire ecosphere” (Glotfelty xix). Through this expansion of relationships among people and the natural world, Hogan, Grace, and Kingsolver show that environmental activism requires a complete shift away from thought patterns developed by humans to set themselves apart and above the rest of the natural world.

Ultimately, nature has been colonized by this paradigm that positions humans at the top of an environmental hierarchy. This way of thinking assumes all aspects of the natural world exist to benefit people and for humans to use as they wish. As indigenous authors, Hogan and Grace seem acutely perceptive of this form of colonization. For their indigenous communities, as Chadwick Allen puts it, “the basic relationship between colonizer and colonized persists” (35). While this colonizer and colonized relationship often refers to the human groups on both sides, Hogan and Grace incorporate all animals, plants, land, and water into their activism against the destructive hierarchy. Andy Smith’s essay, “Ecofeminism through an Anticolonial Framework,” stresses how “all oppressions are related and reinforce each other” (21). She shows clearly how

power asserted over the environment in colonial situations reinforces domination of the indigenous peoples: “Because Native people suffer the brunt of environmental destruction, it is incumbent upon ecofeminist theorists to analyze colonization as a fundamental aspect of the domination of nature” (24). Ecofeminism stresses the connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; both women and nature have been historically treated as inferior to men and relegated to a position in which they supposedly need male stewards to make the best use of their resources. Smith takes this a step further and articulates the paternalistic relationship Native Americans and First Nations peoples have been forced to have with a male-dominated EuroAmerican society. Ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and postcolonial theories, therefore, are crucial to any discussion of the three texts.

Just as nature, women, and indigenous peoples are often viewed as inferior within the framework of EuroAmerican male-dominated ideals, indigenous texts have also been relegated to inferior status in the EuroAmerican canon. However, Carter Revard offers a justification for reading indigenous texts and EuroAmerican texts together. Through extended comparisons of American or European writers and Native American writers, Revard’s essay “Herbs of Healing” argues for the integration of American Indian Literature into school curriculums. He finds Native American writers to better express an accurate experience with landscape and history. Revard’s essay abandons the idea that the “Big Guns,” those who have traditionally established the literary canon and who often marginalize indigenous writers, alone determine what literature is deemed worthy of study. He posits, “regions which the Big Guns want us to think are deserts, but which I see as *lands of plenty, filled with herbs of healing*” are integral to a truly “*All-American curriculum*” (162). By comparing poems such as “Speaking” by Simon Ortiz and “Anecdote of the Jar” by Wallace Stevens, Revard also compares Native American and Euroamerican values.

Revard argues, “it is FAMILY VALUES which dominate the Ortiz poem, *and the family in question is more than human*. ‘Anecdote of the Jar’ narrates conquest, enslavement, culture-wars, class alienation, war between the Civil and the Natural” (165). While Kingsolver’s text does not spring from a colonial perspective such as Stevens’s, Revard’s cross-cultural comparison of texts offers a model to balance literary studies and explore how different indigenous and EuroAmerican attitudes toward nature can be.

This difference, according to Revard and my study, also demonstrates how cross-cultural comparisons enrich our understanding of the world, and in this case, human interaction with the environment, history, and each other. Through his analysis of Stevens’s poem, Revard examines how EuroAmerican visions of the natural world are relatively young and immature. The natural world, in this case, remains a mere landscape on which to act out human history. Kingsolver shows a much more mature version of human interaction with the environment. Her characters have progressed far beyond Stevens’s speaker. However, plants, animals, and the land itself have not quite attained sacred status in her text. Perhaps then, Hogan’s and Grace’s indigenous perspectives represent what people can eventually achieve (again) in their relationship with the world.

Even though Kingsolver’s text is undoubtedly a means to raise environmental consciousness among her readers, a comparison of *Solar Storms*, *Potiki*, and *Prodigal Summer* reveals the divergent means by which each text depicts the world and models activism. For example, as Hogan’s text progresses, the barrier between human and nonhuman quickly disintegrates for the main character Angel. For many in the community Angel enters, the barrier has never existed. Grace’s *Potiki* reveals a community collectively returning to both ancestral land as well as a traditional way of life, one that had been forced to share European values.

Kingsolver's text, on the other hand, takes a more scientific approach to land conservation. From respecting predator species to limiting the use of pesticides, Kingsolver demonstrates practical ways non-indigenous people who are not necessarily protesting for immediate survival can reduce their destructive mark on the entire ecological community. Hogan and Grace, however, take this idea a step further. Not only are humans required to respect the natural world, they should also feel it in their core beings. *Solar Storms* and *Potiki* do not deem humans as protectors (a term that often implies a hierarchy) but instead see humans as part of nature, as only one component of the balancing forces at play in the world.

The following chapters show the ways in which all three authors model how humans can participate in a restoration of relationships and bonds with the environment. Hogan and Grace demonstrate how, for many indigenous communities, these bonds are integral to worldviews, forming the core of spiritual and physical existence. In many ways, Hogan's text most overtly enables us, through her characters' experiences, to feel a connection, both spiritual and ecological, with the natural world. Because of this constant call in the text, Hogan's novel is discussed in Chapter One. *Solar Storms* has been heavily studied by critics of ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and postcolonial studies. Although much attention has been paid to protest for the environment in Hogan's text, the scholarship leaves room for considering how *Solar Storms* fits in with other texts presenting a similar quest for environmental justice and healing through communion with the natural world. Her characters take physical and emotional journeys to heal themselves and protest for ancestral land along with all the life within it. Perhaps it is this journeying that allows readers to immerse themselves so deeply in both the character development as well as the intense activism of the novel. Lisa Udel claims, "Hogan's texts all

end with the promise of human redemption and connection with the natural world. . . . Reading her texts, we too can be redeemed” (79).

The characters in *Potiki* do not physically journey as they do in Hogan’s text, but in this novel, we see a drawing inward to strengthen community bonds and connection to the land as developers threaten a Maori community’s ancestral homeland. Current scholarship about Grace recognizes her voice as representative of Maori beliefs and conceptions of time and space. This scholarship is expanded in Chapter Two as it shows how Grace portrays activism, healing, and environmental connection in her fictional community. Grace’s use of such images as the spiral and the carvings of the community’s ancestral home reinforce the community’s ability to remain spiritually and ecologically connected to their environment and ancestors despite threats from outside their community. While Grace’s call to her readers may not be as overt as Hogan’s, the text remains grounded in a form of activism that changes both her characters’ and her readers’ relationships with the world. Grace’s community halts construction of a resort on their ancestral property by both peaceably refusing to sell their remaining land and also by physically destroying the machinery used by the developers to tear apart the adjacent hillside. Some critics argue that Grace’s text leaves non-Maori readers out of the activism because they are not part of the community or directly involved in the activism, but Mark Williams makes an important point about the activism in *Potiki*: “*Potiki* is concerned with stories as a means of retelling history, of giving voice to other experiences and other truths about the world than the official one named ‘history.’” *Potiki*, therefore, perhaps in a way less obvious than *Solar Storms*, but equally powerful, seeks to change the way in which readers think about the natural world and understand their place within it.

Chapter Three focuses on Kingsolver's more recent *Prodigal Summer*, comparing her characters' approaches to activism to those in *Solar Storms* and *Potiki*. In *Prodigal Summer*, the Appalachian community grapples with individual survival on family farms as well as expectations for cash crops and productivity. Some see predatory animals such as the coyote as a menace while the protagonists see humans as the greatest threat to ecological stability and work to protect the wildlife and educate the people. Little critical scholarship exists about this novel so far, but what has been written takes a decidedly ecocritical stance, analyzing Kingsolver's tribute to Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic" and her attention to alternative and sustainable solutions for struggling family farms. Instead of focusing on a spiritual connection with land, plants, and animals, Kingsolver's characters offer practical and scientifically grounded advice for how to improve humans' relationship with the natural world.

Finally, the conclusion draws upon Revard's method of cross-cultural comparison to explore how Hogan and Grace's novels connect the characters and readers with the natural world through a spiritual bond whereas Kingsolver educates her reader through characters who understand relationships on an ecological level. This chapter emphasizes how reading these texts together provides multiple options for the reader to engage in activism for the environment. The novels, therefore, go beyond being just texts; they become acts of resistance that prompt the reader to change his or her perspective. Each text redefines community, participates in activism, and explores some form of healing, making it difficult for the reader not to leave the text changed by the reading experience.



## CHAPTER ONE

### RECREATING COMMUNITY THROUGH PROTEST FOR THE NATURAL

#### WORLD IN LINDA HOGAN'S *SOLAR STORMS*

*You know, Angel, here a person is only strong when they feel the land. Until then a person is not a human being.*

(Tulik in *Solar Storms* 235)

Linda Hogan's 1995 novel *Solar Storms* tells the story of Angel, a teenage girl who is returning to the home of her mother and grandmothers after years of living in one foster home after another. When Angel returns to her family's home in Adam's Rib, a small town on the Boundary Waters of Minnesota and Canada, she begins to realize not only her connection to her ancestors but also her inherent connectedness to the natural world, particularly water. As a Chickasaw poet, novelist, and nonfiction writer, Hogan incorporates her Native American heritage as well as her environmental consciousness into her writing, and *Solar Storms* proves to be a novel that, as Amy McNally states, "relates the connected interests of Native American continuity and environmental sensitivity" (McNally).

Hogan was born to a father of Chickasaw heritage and a mother who was Pennsylvania Dutch. Although she was raised in Colorado, Oklahoma, and Germany, Hogan always felt that Oklahoma and the land on which her Chickasaw family lived was her home ("In Depth: Linda Hogan"). Therefore, Hogan's concerns center on indigenous people and the environmental issues that often determine their survival. In an interview, Hogan explains, "I write about what our [Native American] difficulties are. I write about political situations that are going awry like the James Bay Hydro-Québec project. . . I usually select a political topic" ("In Depth: Linda Hogan"). Part of the reason Hogan's work is purposefully political is her belief in the connections between people and the environment: "We're connected to everything, so we have

to be careful about everything we do and the effects on the future. What happens to the land—what we do to the land—affects us” (“In Depth: Linda Hogan”).

When looking at the critical work surrounding *Solar Storms*, it becomes clear the connections among people, land, water, plants, and animals are central to understanding the novel. Hogan seeks to restore violently shattered bonds through a process of activism for the land, water, and natives of the Boundary Waters. Many critics recognize how Hogan incorporates the reader into this activism by reframing relationships between humans and the natural world. Critics reveal how through a process of rejecting the maps of colonization and recreating the stories of the world, Hogan crafts an alternate vision, one that rejects the materialism and environmental racism prominent in the postmodern era. Hogan, in turn, roots her story in the truths of land and water. Ultimately, this reconnection to the landscape is a source of healing for both scarred characters such as Angel and readers who are tempted to view nature as a commodity rather than an extension of themselves.

Hogan’s characters, therefore, acutely understand this interconnectivity and the serious consequences that result when humans consider themselves superior and separate entities. Angel, after spending time with her grandmothers in Adam’s Rib and reconnecting with the natural world, journeys to the land of the Fat Eaters, a fictional tribe whose land and way of life are threatened by an impending dam project. Although *Solar Storms* details the struggles of the fictional Fat Eaters against a fictional corporation, BEEVCO, Hogan’s story derives from the real James Bay Hydro-Québec project that threatened the Boundary Waters and destroyed animals, waterways, and land, as well as the ability for tribes of the First Nations of Canada to sustainably live on their homeland. In both Hogan’s story and in the real struggle against Hydro-Québec, Native Americans and First Nations not only fight against the destruction of their

ancestral lands but also representations of themselves as “vanquished and ultimately as vanished” (Allen 161). Fighting for the land becomes inseparable from the struggle to survive as a people.

In their article about *Solar Storms*, Theresa S. Smith and Jill M. Fiore explore how contemporary Native American authors draw upon myths that evoke a strong connection with the land:

The stories that contemporary Native Americans often need to hear are ones that acknowledge dislocation and isolation while enacting healing for both the individual and a community that includes the natural environment. By definition, these stories must grow out of the landscape—indeed, must participate in the landscape—in order to be efficacious. (60)

Hogan’s *Solar Storms* allows both her characters and her readers to participate in what her character Husk calls “cell-deep memory” (*Solar Storms* 137). This memory, Hogan demonstrates, has been ignored by EuroAmericans who treat the land as a mere commodity as well as Native Americans who have forgotten or not been taught about their connection to the natural world, a connection that runs among humans, water, land, plants, and animals.

At the beginning of *Solar Storms*, the narrator, Angel, recognizes the bond between her, the women who will soon be back in her life, and the natural world: “Between us there had once been a bond, something like the ancient pact land had made with water, or the agreement humans once made with animals. But like those other bonds, this bond, too, lay broken” (22). When Angel returns to her family in Adam’s Rib, she is mentally and physically shattered by the abuse her mother inflicted upon her as a child, years of being bounced around foster homes, and a series of unhealthy relationships with men. She carries “two plastic bags of [her] things” and

years of feeling unwanted and unloved (*Solar Storms* 25). However, seeing Bush, Angel's surrogate grandmother, in her canoe from the ferry and meeting Agnes, her biological great-grandmother, at the dock stir in Angel a visceral sense of family and connection. About Agnes, Angel states, "I knew who she was by the way my heart felt in my chest. It recognized its own blood" (23).

Immediately, Angel becomes a member of Agnes's household and also develops a strong relationship with her great-great-grandmother, Dora-Rouge. Through this bond, Angel begins to understand her connection to the natural world as Dora-Rouge teaches Angel the healing power of plants and the connection humans have with their animal kin. Angel starts to feel this connection at an instinctive level, describing her physical closeness to Dora-Rouge in terms of wolves: "We would breathe together the way wolves do with their kith and kin, the way they nurture relations by breathing" (*Solar Storms* 45). Hogan also employs water imagery to emphasize Angel's new-found connection to her true "mothers." Angel muses, "I was water falling into a lake and these women were that lake" (55). The women of Adam's Rib as well as several male figures become role models for Angel as she begins to understand her past, one that includes a bond with native lands, plants, animals, and water. Husk, Agnes's companion, tells Angel how he once trapped for profit and has since regretted his breaking of the "covenant between animals and men" (35). He explains to Angel that the covenant promised "[t]hey would care for one another. It was an agreement much like the one between land and water. This pact, too, had been broken, forced by hunger and need" (35). Through her relationships with the people of Adam's Rib, and, later in the novel, with the Fat Eaters, also known as the Beautiful People, Angel learns that the key to healing for herself, her people, and the land is reinstating the broken pact.

Like Agnes, Dora-Rouge, and Husk, the elderly people on the Hundred-Year-Old Road as well as Tulik, a friend and fellow activist Angel meets later in the novel, teach her that human existence on earth relies on a fair and respectful relationship with the natural world. Geoffrey Stacks notes how Tulik's understanding of his relationship to the earth surpasses the knowledge displayed in cartography. Stacks posits, "Even though Tulik's globe shows the post-Pangaea distinction between landmasses, Tulik sees it as a balanced whole in which the continents exist in a symbiotic relationship. What happens on one side affects the other" (164). Tulik passes this awareness on to Angel. Angel also witnesses an instinctual understanding of the natural world and resultant hope in the people who live on the Hundred-Year-Old Road. Angel describes them as having "the peaceful look of those who still had hope, those who still believed that their people and the buffalo would return" (*Solar Storms* 29). Because of these defiantly hopeful and ecological role models, Angel starts to see the world around her differently, and she begins to connect to the environment as part of her kinship circle.

Angel's surrogate grandmother, Bush, however, has the most influence on Angel's blossoming awareness of her place in a larger spectrum of life. People of Adam's Rib simultaneously revere and keep their distance from Bush, a woman who sometimes looks more like her animal neighbors than human: "She'd gone to the old ways, the way we used to live. From the map inside ourselves" (*Solar Storms* 17). Angel goes to live with Bush on Fur Island, and when she first sees Bush in her natural surroundings, Angel "thought she was a deer, thin and brown, smelling the direction of the wind" (67). Angel learns that Bush acutely recognizes the "savagery of civilization" and works diligently to protect her home, Fur Island as well as the neighboring Spider Island from development (65). Bush believes the two islands are "kindred spirits, one male and one female. Bush thought it would be too lonely for those pieces of land to

drift far from one another” (66). Bush’s tethering of Spider Island to Fur Island is one of her many attempts to right the wrongs inflicted on the land by European exploration and exploitation. Her tethering also emphasizes her belief that the land feels.

Bush lives a quiet life, and Angel must be patient as Bush shares Angel’s childhood history as well as lessons on how to interact with the natural world. Jim Tarter explains Angel’s new awareness as part of learning a different language, a language she sometimes begrudgingly but eventually willingly learns from Bush: “Angel slowly learns this nonhuman language and she does it basically by slowing down and listening to the voices of all living things, including herself. Angel then reconstructs a contract, not unlike the pact with the animals that was broken when Euroamericans came, with the land and all its living things—with the culture of the place” (134). Before Angel can hear the story of her mother, Hannah, and her grandmother, Loretta, stories of deep historical trauma, Angel must first listen to her surroundings. With few distractions on Fur Island, Angel begins to see and feel her place in a larger sphere. In a cathartic moment, Angel bonds with water, realizing “there was no separation between” her and the water: “The sound of water lashing down filled me with such a longing, an ache in my chest I could not yet fathom, but now know as the animal heart yearning its way into being, pulled out of a song” (*Solar Storms* 78). It is in this moment Angel realizes she is “part of the same equation as birds and rain” (79).

Tarter finds environmental concerns at the heart of Hogan’s text, and he offers an approach that combines cultural studies and ecocriticism. With this approach, Tarter claims Hogan participates in a “blurring of the border between nature and culture” (131). As Angel reclaims her indigenous identity, with that comes a reclaiming of relationship with the land and all its parts since “[a]ll are considered to be equally part of the culture and to have a spirit, to be

alive” (Tarter 132). Christa Grewe-Volpp adds to this discussion in her article about how Hogan complicates the dichotomy of “Ecological Indian” versus “Spiritually Corrupt White Man.” She explains, “On such a prelinguistic, sensuous, empathetic level, the boundary between species as well as between living and nonliving entities becomes blurred, making communication possible between human beings and the land” (279). Just as the “people at Adam’s Rib believed everything was alive,” Angel comes to view plants, animals, earth, and water especially, as living entities (*Solar Storms* 81).

Bush aids Angel in her self-discovery and renewed connections as Angel hears how her origins are tied with the traumas her mother faced as a child, historical traumas passed from one generation to the next but also connected with the wounded natural world; her “beginning was Hannah’s beginning, one of broken lives, gone animals, trees felled and kindled. Our beginnings were intricately bound up in the history of the land” (*Solar Storms* 96). Silvia Schultermandl, who focuses on an ecofeminist reading of *Solar Storms*, demonstrates how Hogan’s characters are “painfully aware of the interconnectedness between the domination of their Native American tribal culture and the exploitation of the nonhuman biosphere” (67). While Angel learns to have her own personal relationship with the natural world, she also “learns that in order to restore peace within her self, within her family, and within the biosphere, she must restore the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman nature” (Schultermandl 70). After living with Bush, Angel becomes more reflective about her relationship with indigenous lands and values; she realizes she can “see inside water” unlike her grandmothers (*Solar Storms* 85), and she begins to understand that she is an integral part of a much larger system. Through her dreams, Angel interprets this connection: “Maybe dreams are earth’s visions, I thought, earth’s expressions that pass through us” (119). Angel, therefore, participates in Husk’s “cell-deep

memory” as she reclaims her indigenous past and her innate ties to all that surrounds her, both nonhuman and human (137).

Because Angel comes to recognize, as Stacks articulates, the land “as possessing a will, as wild,” as fully alive and with agency, she cannot concede to EuroAmerican ideas of land ownership and destruction for human consumption (168). Angel’s community sees just how devastating viewing the environment in strictly economic terms can be. Ellen Arnold explains how Hogan “makes it clear that humans help maintain the alienation between themselves and the world by refusing to acknowledge our dependence on the sacrifice of other living beings, an acknowledgement that allows us to shift perspectives and to experience our own embeddedness in the processes of the natural world” (54). Since Angel and her grandmothers acutely see and feel this “embeddedness,” they feel they have no choice but to act when nearby ancestral land, indigenous animals and plants, as well as native peoples are threatened by big business in the form of hydroelectric power and huge dams. Threats to the animals and land are threats to Angel and her grandmothers’ kin, and this threat extends to an entire way of life for their people. Angel and her grandmothers, therefore, recognize their survival is dependent upon the very plants, animals, land, and waterways that would be lost should the water’s power be exploited to satisfy corporate and governmental economic interests.

Even though Angel has only recently arrived in Adam’s Rib, she already senses the urgency of the problems facing her ancestral tribe, the Fat Eaters, in nearby waters. Two young men come bearing news of the proposed hydroelectric project and what it will mean to the indigenous people of the area:

These men’s people, my own people, too, had lived there forever, for more than ten thousand years, and had been sustained by these lands that were now



being called empty and useless. If the dam project continued, the lives of the people who lived there would cease to be, a way of life would end in yet another act of displacement and betrayal.

These were my people. I listened carefully. (*Solar Storms* 58)

Tarter insists the “historical context is crucial to any basic understanding of *Solar Storms*,” and he emphasizes that this “violent encounter with environmental racism and industrial capitalism epitomizes a conflict repeated not only across Canada but all over the world” (139, 141). While Hogan renames the company BEEVCO, Tarter posits Hogan’s connections to the real James Bay project cannot be ignored, and importantly, “the massive hydroelectric project represents a full-scale invasion and direct attack on their entire culture and way of life,” a statement which is applicable to the Fat Eaters in the novel as well as the Cree and Inuit in real life (142).

A November 1993 issue of *National Geographic* features an article about the James Bay hydroelectric project, a massive project that began in the 1970s and as of the mid-nineties had plans to expand even further into indigenous lands and waters. Hydro-Québec, the company responsible for the rerouting of rivers and the placement of dams, with the backing of the Canadian government, saw the project as an opportunity to create “jobs for the jobless, industrial growth, political stability. And it all flows out of a place so remote and sparsely settled that it hardly seemed necessary for Hydro-Québec to consult the indigenous population, the Cree and the Inuit, much less expect that many of these people would view the project not as a triumph of engineering but as a threat to their way of life” (Mitchell 68). Andy Smith speaks to this type of corporate arrogance, explaining that “Native lands are the site of the most environmental destruction that takes place in this country” (23). Part of this is because, as Smith goes on to

explain, “mainstream society portrays Indians as people who had a romantic past, but people who have no place in modern society” (31).

The Cree and Inuit were unable to halt the progress of the first phase of the Hydro-Québec project because the legal system moved much slower than the dam building process. However, when Hydro-Québec announced a second phase of dam construction, the Cree went to great lengths to publically protest the dams: “The Cree’s direct action campaign began in 1989, when the Council decided to move away from legal means and focus on nonviolent direct action tactics” (“The Cree Campaign”). By making the public aware of the environmental impacts of the dams and the devastating effects the project would have on indigenous ways of life, along with public protests on college campuses and at popular Earth Day events, the Cree were able to convince states on the U.S. side of the border to not purchase energy from Hydro-Québec. Through peaceful activism that focused on changing the way mainstream society thinks about the environment and indigenous communities, the Cree were able to stop phase two of the project (“The Cree Campaign”).

Despite the success of the Cree’s protests in the early 1990s, the Cree of the James Bay area and the characters in Hogan’s novel are undoubtedly aware that mainstream ideas about interaction with the environment often privilege human needs and desires for consumption over sustainability and relationship with the natural world. Those who believe Native Americans have “no place in modern society” may also belittle impacts projects such as the one at James Bay have on the entire biosphere, on humans and nonhumans (Smith 31). In her essay, “Searching for Common Ground,” N. Katherine Hayles explores the dangers of objectivism and instead urges her readers to experience and interact with nature on a reciprocal level. Hayles’s ideas directly correlate to the type of environmental activism in which Hogan’s characters take part:

By separating subject from object, objectivism helped to constitute the belief that one could act upon the world without oneself being acted upon. The Baconian vision of human domination of the planet through science could thus be put forward as an enterprise that would not necessarily affect those who dominated. Extrapolated to the environment, this attitude implies that rainforests can be cut without affecting those doing the cutting; rivers polluted without poisoning those doing the polluting; flourohydrocarbons released without affecting those doing the releasing. By contrast, a science understood to flow from historically specific interactions implies we know the world because we are involved with it and because it impacts upon us. While such an understanding of the scientific enterprise does not guarantee respect for the environment, it provides a conceptual framework that fosters perceptions of interactivity rather than alienation. (56)

Angel, who was originally alienated from her natural surroundings, through the care of the grandmothers and particularly the teachings of Dora-Rouge and Bush, now experiences the type of “interactivity” Hayles discusses. Therefore, when she hears about the adversity her tribe faces in the north, she is compelled to act along with Bush, Agnes, and Dora-Rouge.

Angel agrees to journey with her grandmothers to the land of the Fat Eaters because of her bond both with the women and the land: “Only a month earlier I knew none of these women, or even that they existed, and now our lives were bound together (in truth as they had been already) by blood and history, love and hate” (*Solar Storms* 93). The same type of bond also exists between Angel and the natural world. When she hears “[a]nimals in the path of it [the hydroelectric project] were killed, people’s lives displaced, plants and lives gone forever to make way,” she must act (103). Angel recognizes that indigenous resistance receives little press,

comparing the resistance to the dams with the American Indian Movement: “If the American Indian Movement got little attention on television, the dams and diversions of rivers to the north were even more absent” (156). Yet, Angel still aligns herself with a history of indigenous protest in the Boundary Waters and in North America as she travels closer to the destruction.

On this journey, the women grow even closer to the land, water, plants, and animals they want to protect. Their journey is neither back nor forward in time, but instead circular. Angel and her grandmothers become one entity as well as united with their surroundings. Angel states, “[t]he four of us became like one animal. We heard inside each other in a tribal way” (*Solar Storms* 177). Although the women become one, they also experience their own unique relationships with the landscape in which they travel. Angel tells us, “[T]he plants and I joined each other. They entangled me in their stems and vines and it was a beautiful entanglement” (171). Even though the journey toward the Fat Eaters cannot last forever, Angel senses a type of timelessness as the women move with the rivers and lakes their ancestors also traveled: “It was this gap in time we entered, and it was a place between worlds. I was under the spell of wilderness, close to what no one had ever been able to call by name. Everything merged and united” (177).

Even Agnes’s death, while tragic and upsetting for the other women, does not disrupt the unity. Agnes dies from an unknown illness while on the journey, and instead of being buried, her body is consumed by animals: “It was what Agnes had wanted, to be eaten by wolves and birds, to have her hair woven into bird’s nests in spring, along with twigs, fishline, downy breast feathers, and moltings. After that, on the chance that she had been eaten by wolves, I called every wolf I saw Grandmother” (*Solar Storms* 216). Agnes’ natural death acts as a stark contrast to the decimation the women find at their journey’s physical destination.

The land, animals, plants, and people of the Fat Eaters' land are suffering in unimaginable ways. Angel learns that the government "had recently used this native land as a bombing range," and faced with the impending destruction due to the hydroelectric project, the people are stuck in a cycle of self-hatred and self-destruction (*Solar Storms* 226). Here, Hogan again connects the state of the environment and the state of the people as inseparable:

The devastation and ruin that had fallen over the land fell over the people, too. Most were too broken to fight the building of the dams, the moving of waters, and that perhaps had been the intention all long. But I could see Dora-Rouge thinking, wondering: how do conquered people get back their lives? She and others knew the protest against the dams and river diversions was their only hope. Those who protested were the ones who could still believe they might survive as a people.

(226)

Part of the desperation felt by the Fat Eaters comes from the sense of impending and unavoidable doom, impressed by years of being physically and mentally colonized by EuroAmericans. The domination of the rivers and lakes is reflected in the domination of the people's psyches. T.V. Reed poses an important question: "How does the nature of colonialism reinforce the colonization of nature?" (155). Both Hogan and John Mitchell, in his article for *National Geographic*, bring up the French explorer Pierre Esprit Radisson and his statement, "We were caesars . . . with no one to answer to" while he traveled in the Canadian wilderness (*Solar Storms* 285; Mitchell 72). Hogan articulates the sorrow of the Fat Eaters, as Angel states, "We were the no one" (285). Consequently, from a EuroAmerican viewpoint, the land and people are there to be commodified, consumed, or ignored.

Therefore, Angel, her grandmothers, and the Fat Eaters must protest not only the dams but also the invisibility imposed upon them by EuroAmerican society. They recognize that the “world there was large, had always been large, and the people were small and reverent, but with machines, earth could be reduced to the smallest of elements” (*Solar Storms* 274). Because Angel has spent time communing with nature and listening to its language, she decides “to fight back, for the water, the people, the animals,” all of which she sees on equal terms (275). Angel quickly learns, as T. Christine Jespersen puts it, “survival is resistance” (291). Lisa Udel also suggests that the activism in which Angel and her grandmothers participate gives voice to native peoples, in particular women, and land that has been silenced by Eurocentric ideas of land use and ownership: “Grassroots activists employ an ecoculturalist methodology that identifies women’s health and prosperity with a feminized, maternal earth in order to combat the destruction of natural habitat (ecocide) and a land-based culture (ethnocide), which they view as inextricably bound” (64). By speaking against the dam, presenting petitions, and physically blocking the progress of the workers, Angel and her expanded family among the Fat Eaters protest a system they perceive to be cannibalistic in nature.

Hogan employs the windigo character of Native American folklore to emphasize how destroying the natural world is destroying a part of ourselves. The windigo story is alluded to in Agnes’s “Prologue” as she tells “about the frozen heart of evil that was hunger, envy, and greed, how it tricked people into death or illness or made them go insane” (*Solar Storms* 12-13). Agnes connects the legend of the windigo who possesses a person’s soul, usually someone outside alone in the middle of winter, and then turns that person against her family or even herself to Angel’s history. Bush explains to Angel that her mother was overtaken by “a force as real as wind, as strong as ice, as common as winter,” a force she equates with evil (115). Hannah’s

abuse of Angel includes burning and biting, mimicking the way in which a windigo might consume a person. Not only does Hannah embody the windigo figure, but Hogan also emphasizes how EuroAmericans' destruction of indigenous communities and consumption of the land is windigo-like in nature.

Therefore, Angel rewrites the story of the “dam-building, water-changing men,” describing it as a “story of people eating, as toothy and sharp and hungry as the cannibal clan was said to be—eating land, eating people, eating tomorrow” (*Solar Storms* 279, 302). Consequently, EuroAmericans become the ones without future because they are destroying their connection the world. Jespersen adds to Hogan's statement about the fictional hydroelectric company, BEEVCO: “BEEVCO, a perversion of beavers who, the novel affirms, created the world, is a cannibalistic and taxidermic entity. It is a hollowed out, dead thing that masquerades as the living as it feeds on and transforms the living into replications and perpetrators of its deadlines” (291). But, instead of hopelessness in what seems to be an impossible struggle, Hogan's characters fight with love, first and foremost, against all types of windigos.

Jespersen calls this type of activism, “sustainable resistance” (294). When disagreements among protestors threaten the movement, many of the indigenous people who have joined the struggle respond with love and empathy rather than violence. Even Orensen, the white shop owner who is originally wary of the protests, “took up [the Fat Eaters'] cause because the injustice was so blatant that not even one of their own could abide it” (*Solar Storms* 301). Out of fear, BEEVCO workers treat the activists as threats or “terrorists,” yet Angel and her fellow protestors “sat there on quiet nights, warm with hope, and no bitterness among us” (283, 302). Even when BEEVCO workers damage and eventually destroy Tulik's home, the epicenter of the resistance, Angel turns to the story of Wolverine and uses her tricks as a model for her

retaliation. Instead of resorting to physical violence, Angel destroys the workers' food supplies and merges with the trickster figure from oral traditions (323).

Despite conflicts that do arise among the activists, many, like Angel, find a community they had not previously experienced or had thought lost entirely. As they fight against those who “wanted to control water, the rise and fall of it, the direction of its ancient life. . . its power,” Angel and her new family realize their way of looking at the world is invaluable and the only means of survival (*Solar Storms* 268). Hogan uses the following metaphor to demonstrate the reconnection of people to each other and to the earth: “In those days, we were still a tribe. Each of us had one part of the work of living. . . . All of us together formed something like a single organism” (262). Despite the breakdown of the natural world around them, coming together for the land possesses healing properties and allows the tribe to function as a living, breathing being. The creation of a community amidst the chaos of environmental and cultural destruction also becomes another form of activism.

In fact, reimagining communities in the novel makes the protest in which Angel and her grandmothers take part possible. First, Angel realizes she is part of the “Abandoned Ones,” the women left behind by fur-traders, “as if they too were used-up animals” (*Solar Storms* 28). Yet, these abandoned women are ultimately “mighty women,” women who can travel far and take a stand against big business (29). Through their journey and activism together, Angel finds mothers all around her and even becomes a surrogate mother to her half-sister Aurora in the process. Angel says, “it was an old world in which I began to bloom,” and it is in this “gynocratic society,” according to Schulterman, that Angel learns “the importance of inter-female relationships for the preservation of ancestral culture,” a culture she now understands includes the natural world (*Solar Storms* 48; Schulterman 76). Both Schulterman and Tarter



argue that the community of women in the novel is the strongest advocate for the environment, yet Hogan gives several male characters important roles in the protest and in helping Angel develop her new sense of community.

Husk, Tulik, and Tommy also become crucial to Angel's community and aid her immensely in the healing process. All of these male characters demonstrate empathy for the natural world and help Angel develop a real sense of compassion and love. Husk freely shows remorse for playing a part in the destruction of animal kin, and he encourages Angel to blend science and intuition: "Husk said some things were so obvious the scientists couldn't even see them" (*Solar Storms* 139). These male characters do not fit EuroAmerican stereotypes of masculinity, allowing them to be part of the female-led community but not domineering figures. When the BEEVCO representatives see Tulik holding baby Aurora, "this lost him points in the white men's book. Tenderness was not a quality of strength to them" (281). What the white men do not understand is "that Tulik knew every plant and its use, knew the tracks of every animal, and was a specialist in justice and peace" (280). Tulik and Husk, as they protest EuroAmerican ways of seeing people and nature, give Angel an alternate version of both masculinity and family interactions.

Tommy represents another form of partnership Angel has not previously experienced. In Angel's scarred past, men were a way to escape her lonely reality and find a fleeting sense of being wanted. Tommy, however, shows Angel a deeper type of connection, one that comes with shared ancestry and communion with the natural world. Angel describes sleeping with Tommy as "a natural thing. . . . Here, sleeping with a man wasn't an offense. True sin had nothing to do with love; it consisted of crimes against nature and life" (*Solar Storms* 160). Angel's budding relationship, therefore, is the exact opposite of the control and violence she had experienced in

the past and that the natural world is up against. In the end, Angel and Tommy are a microcosm of what Hogan envisions as a healed community: “I believed Tommy and I were our ancestors reunited in their search for each other and we loved deeply, in the way they had loved” (350). Hogan’s text works to reunite humans with one another and also with the world around them, providing Angel and Tommy as models for others to follow.

Hogan’s recreated community also transcends relationships defined by blood and tribal affiliation. As Tarter suggests, Hogan’s novel shows “mixed groups and multicultural alliances” rallying for a common cause (144). Bush’s “shrine of sorts” represents this openness to anyone or anything willing to be a patron saint, of sorts, to the cause: “Bush, neither Catholic nor Protestant, was a person of the land, but she kept statues of saints and crosses alongside eagle feathers, tobacco, and photographs of loved ones. Just in case” (*Solar Storms* 71). Hogan also includes characters from many tribes and presents some EuroAmericans sympathetic to the cause because reinforcing dichotomies would negate her message of hope for both humans and nature. Tarter reiterates how Hogan carefully avoids categorizing and because of this, she opens the concept of community to include a wider world: “By leaving categories such as race and ethnicity undefined, [Hogan draws] attention toward other ways of seeing people. . . . [A]ttention is drawn toward other factors that people have in common, especially the language of other living things and the land or biotic community of their place” (130). This open sense of community, then, is yet another way Hogan’s characters protest against forces of colonization that insist on hierarchies of people based on ethnicity and ideas of nature based on skewed perceptions of humanity’s superiority.

Hogan’s antagonists, then, are the forces that work to disrupt and destroy communities. Importantly, her definition of community also includes the natural world, and without this

connection, all other connections cease to exist. The image of Pangaea and its split recurs in Hogan's text. Tulik's home, which becomes a center for the Fat Eaters' resistance, is described in terms of this ancient land mass: "It was a house where, in summers, outside light came in through cracks in the walls, and in winter, the light from inside fell out across snow and ice, looking like fracture lines in the earth where inner light and fire were opening, breaking out. Like Pangaea" (*Solar Storms* 232-233). By referencing Pangaea twice in her description of Angel's time with Tulik, Hogan emphasizes how the newly formed community in the threatened land of the Fat Eaters signifies a healing of divides among humans and between humans and nature. Angel's recreated community fits together in a way similar to the continents; they have drifted apart but retain the pieces that once connected them. Activism against the dams, in the form of peaceful protests and refusal to move out of the way of the workers' destructive path, therefore, becomes the bond that pieces the indigenous community and the natural world back together.

In her text, *Dwellings*, Hogan tells her readers,

We have been split from what we could nurture, what could fill us. And we have been wounded by a dominating culture that has feared and hated the natural world, has not listened to the voice of the land, has not believed in the inner worlds of human dreaming and intuition, all things that have guided indigenous people since time stood up in the east and walked this world into existence, split from the connection between self and land. (82)

Although the community has recently come together to protest the dam, a new division occurs over how to continue the protests. Some of the protesters feel violence may be the only option to stop the dam project, while others, such as Bush, want to continue peaceful protesting. Especially when some of the men take work on the dams to feed their families, the community divides over

whether or not the men are traitors. LaRue, a man from Adam's Rib who arrives to take part in the protest, leads another group "who pushed toward a monetary settlement" (*Solar Storms* 317). Immediate needs conflict with the tribe's desire to preserve the natural world and a way of life.

Then, a split physically occurs to the land, reinforcing the dam's devastating effects: "[A]s if to mirror our division, a piece of land split off from the rest and moved through the rain down toward the new river" (*Solar Storms* 326). LaRue, "leaped on it, as if to pull it back or save it" (326). Early in the novel, Hogan establishes LaRue as a character conflicted by his own self-loathing: "What men were capable of, he hated, and his hatred included himself" (29). He has broken the bond with animals by participating in taxidermy, and Hogan implies LaRue also tries to hide trauma he experienced in Vietnam (28-29). As Tarter observes, only by recognizing a "common animality, a common plant nature, a common earthliness" can LaRue begin to heal (145). Angel acts out her sense of community when she witnesses LaRue's tears near the end of the novel: "He cried for the animal, for us, our lives, and for the war he'd endured and never told about" (*Solar Storms* 339). In many ways, LaRue's tears indicate a restoration of connection to the land, plants, and animals he had denied as family for much of his life. LaRue's attempt to save the piece of land, then, is his way of rejoining a community who sees "the land and all its creatures" as "equal to humans and have voices and intentions of their own" (Tarter 132).

Grewe-Volpp explains, "When relationships to other human beings as well as the natural environment are understood in terms of kinship, they ideally result in attitudes of solidarity and caring" (280). The health of Hogan's community, then, depends upon their interaction with the natural world on an equal playing field. A significant number of critics argue that Hogan includes readers in this community and in a healthy relationship with the world; for example, Udel states, "Hogan also draws the reader into the world she depicts and speaks directly to us,

informing and advising us of our possible participation in producing change” (65). The change Hogan asks of the reader is “to fundamentally alter their ways of thinking by engaging openly with indigenous belief systems and ways of life,” and according to Jespersen, Angel directly “inspires us to join the fight” (Jespersen 276, 289). By including readers in her definition of community, Hogan’s brand of activism extends far beyond the pages of her text.

Laura Castor posits that empathy creates the sense of community in the novel, and this empathy inspires healing among all members of Hogan’s community:

I would like to suggest that the narrative power of *Solar Storms* lies in its ability to create a sense of empathy among characters, between the narrator and the landscape, and between the narrator and the reader. The role of empathy in Hogan’s novel is not only to persuade her reader to enter her imaginative world, but, more importantly, it is a politicized strategy of influencing her reader’s attitudes and understanding of the ways in which indigenous people’s rights are connected to the survival of the planet. (159)

Healing, too, is tied together with this sense of empathy. Angel’s healing is the center of the novel, but Hogan also creates characters such as Bush, LaRue, and Dora-Rouge who experience “the healing power that comes from a reconnection of humans to their environmental landscapes” (Schultermandl 69). Even her readers are expected to take part in the healing process by experiencing the characters’ journeys and methods of activism.

While on their journey, Angel and her grandmothers realize there is no return to life as they knew it: “Everything had changed. We’d gone too far to turn back. Not too far in distance alone, but too far inside ourselves” (*Solar Storms* 193). Survival becomes a spiritual undertaking, and during the journey, “[w]hat mattered, simply and powerfully, was knowing the current of

water and living in the body where land spoke what a woman must do to survive” (*Solar Storms* 204). Instead of broken, Angel “felt almost immortal” (*Solar Storms* 206). Grewe-Volpp notices that Angel’s transformation is an acceptance of a new self: “Angel’s story, a continuation of her ancestors’ tales, encourages Indian feelings of self-worth and helps her create a new, self-defined identity instead of accepting her degradation as the ‘no-one,’ as the one without history” (281).

When her mother dies, Angel accepts Hannah’s past and even her own abuse as part of a history of survival, and Angel turns this history into a healing process. Hogan writes, “Hannah had been my poison, my life, my sweetness and pain, my beauty and homeliness. And when she died, I knew that I had survived in the best of ways for I was filled with grief and compassion” (*Solar Storms* 251). Angel can feel “grief and compassion” toward her mother, a person considered a “miracle in reverse,” because Angel has found her place within a human and biotic community (100). Her activism against the dams and for all the life that would be lost should BEEVCO’s plans go through gives Angel the strength to fight not only corporate control of nature but also her own feelings of hate toward her mother and herself.

Angel’s healing, therefore, is a shift in her spiritual nature. Hogan defines indigenous spirituality in the following statement: “Respect the rights of nature” (“In Depth: Linda Hogan”). As Angel adopts this spiritual stance, the rest of her life falls into place. When readers first meet Angel, she is trying to hide her physical scars. The women of Adam’s Rib, the water surrounding Fur Island, and the animals Angel learns to respect all teach Angel to see her scars in a new way. Arnold speaks to the importance of scars to the healing process in *Solar Storms*: “Healing cannot be a smoothing over of scars, a wiping away of divisions and wounds; healing must include the conscious understanding of the wound’s function, of the necessity of resistance for survival, of the interdependence of life and death, creation and destruction” (56). Angel’s fight for survival

and for the survival of her people and native lands instills a sense of hope in the future that Angel had not previously felt. She attributes this feeling to the spirit of her ancestors:

Sometimes my heart skipped a beat, with a kind of Indian hope. Sometimes when I dried dishes with one of Tulik's threadbare rags, a feeling came over me, as if a shining old person inside my body was happy that once again the people were coming together, insisting on justice, happy that anybody could still sing and dance. That old person had seen our lives in tatters before, and saw it again now in the light of hope. (*Solar Storms* 271-272)

Not only does the hope live within Angel and her people, but it also resides in nature as Angel hopes for healing of the land, waters, and animals. Implied in this healing is a sense of forgiveness, as Angel states, "I hoped the earth would one day forgive this breach of faith, the broken agreement humans had with it" (330). Like Angel's scars, the land's wounds inspire a change in the way Angel thinks and acts as well as a new sense of purpose in Angel's life.

Not all characters feel healed by the novel's end. Tulik tells Angel, "I don't have inner peace. I can't find it again" (*Solar Storms* 342). He does not see the dam project cease before his death. After a year of battling BEEVCO in court, the dam building is stopped. However, Angel states,

It was too late for the Child River, for the caribou, the fish, even for our own children, but we had to believe, true or not, that our belated victory was the end of something. That one fracture was healed, one crack mended, one piece back in place. Yes, the pieces were infinite and worn as broken pots, and our human pain was deep, but we'd thrown an anchor into the future and followed the rope to the

end of it, to where we would dream new dreams, new medicines, and one day, once again, remember the sacredness of every living thing. (344)

Perhaps Angel finds the peace Tulik cannot. Like the Cree at James Bay, the legal system fails to recognize indigenous rights. Angel explains how the native people are treated as invisible: “To others, we were such insignificant people. In their minds we were only a remnant of the past” (343). Hogan, however, presents a strong sense of the future in her protagonist. Angel fights against stereotypes of Native Americans and First Nations people as an extinct community by envisioning a stronger future.

Angel’s version of the future requires all people to participate in a renewal of the covenant between humans and nature. In this way, the reader is expected to participate in the healing and take action: “[Hogan’s] demands on the reader are reformative; [her work] model[s] a superior Native reality, with the hope of producing an educated reader/activist who, upon finishing the text, will work to improve the lives of contemporary Native Americans” and the natural world (Udel 63). Hogan reiterates this in *Dwellings*, stating, “Indian people must not be the only ones who remember the agreement with the land, the sacred pact to honor and care for the life that, in turn, provides for us” (94-95). Using the word “sacred” in both texts, Hogan highlights the spirituality inherent in the remade pact between humans and nature.

Ultimately, *Solar Storms* participates in what Arnold calls a rewriting of “dominant discourses that separate science from history and spirituality, humans from nature, and mind from body” (50). This reframing of the way in which people think and act becomes the primary means of activism in Hogan’s text. By reconnecting humans with the natural world, Angel’s community as well as Hogan’s readers can combat the continued colonization of indigenous lands and culture. Tulik says people are not human unless they embrace their natural



surroundings and make these elements part of their core beings (*Solar Storms* 235). In this way, community is redefined to include all elements that create the world, and by recognizing the interconnectivity of plants, animals, people, land, and water, Hogan's readers can experience the world in a new way and participate in the activism her characters model.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REJUVENATING COMMUNITY THROUGH ACTIVISM FOR ANCESTRAL LANDS IN PATRICIA GRACE'S *POTIKI*

*He'd always known that one day he would return to the land, and  
that the land would support them all again.*

*(Potiki 60)*

First published in 1986 in New Zealand, Patricia Grace's second novel *Potiki* tells a particularly Maori story, a tale that resounds with both the past and present for natives of Aotearoa, the Maori name for the country. With a variety of narrative voices, Grace depicts the struggle of a Maori community to keep wealthy developers off their land and to reclaim traditional livelihoods for future generations. Characters such as the married couple Roimata and Hemi, their youngest son Toko, as well as the carvings of the wharenui (the meeting house) illustrate the complexity of community life and the ancestors who are at its heart. Writing at a time when Maori voices were strengthening among local and international audiences, Grace presents a strong indigenous perspective on behalf of her community and her land, one that is of political, historical, and literary importance.

Grace was born in 1937 on Te Upoko o Te Ika, also known as Wellington, New Zealand, to a father of Maori and "a mixture of other" and a Pakeha (white) mother ("Influences" 65). Growing up in a working-class and predominantly white neighborhood, Grace was aware of her Maori heritage and spent weekends and school breaks with paternal grandparents on "a remnant of tribal land that was not confiscated, deviously purchased, or legally stolen" ("Influences" 65). As an adult, Grace has lived on the ancestral land she so often visited, and her experience in this tight knit Maori community undoubtedly shines through in *Potiki*. Like many other Maori

communities as well as the fictional one depicted in *Potiki*, Grace's ancestral, coastal community is constantly threatened by businesses wanting to develop and commercialize the land.

Not only is Grace studied for her ability to weave political, social, and economic struggles of Maori people into beautiful prose, but critics have also emphasized her ability to shift narrative voices within a text. Grace's use of narrative voice is striking in its divergence from Western literary conventions and its close ties to Maori oral traditions. Miriam Fuchs explains that "Grace's text supersedes its linear dimensions and literally performs Maori ideas of life and death and the passing of time" (178). Grace herself explains how her writing attempts to "reflect the way that talk moves in a circular fashion inside the meeting house" ("Influences" 72). The spiral nature of voice and plot in *Potiki* reflects the place of ultimate narration, "this place of now, behind, and in, and beyond the tree" where Toko, the Potiki, tells of his own death and where he has "eversight" and can "watch the people" (*Potiki* 183). To Grace, time and objects are unconstrained; stories spiral through time, and trees, carvings, the wharenuī, and the urupa (burial grounds) all have a part in the community's narration. Mark Williams writes that the "ancestors are part of the fabric of the book and the dead have a voice within it." The novel speaks not only to the Maori people of present day, those struggling to maintain land and life amidst immense pressures, but she also breathes life into the ancestors and emphasizes the way in which past, present, and future exist concurrently in "this time of now" (*Potiki* 184). Grace's text, therefore, through its form and content, emphasizes how a hierarchy does not exist among the land, plants, humans, and ancestors in the story. All of the elements that create and sustain life exist together and depend on one another.

*Potiki* follows the family of Roimata and Hemi, which includes their oldest son James, their daughter Tangimoana, their younger son Manu, and the youngest and adopted son Toko.

The circumstances surrounding the birth of Toko to Hemi's mentally disabled sister, Mary, take on a mythical quality, and Toko exhibits a "special knowing," and understanding of future events and an intuition beyond his years (*Potiki* 46). After years of working away from the land in factories and other Pakeha-dominated industries, Hemi and others decide to instead live off the land and return to a traditional Maori way of life. Yet, as the community grows to depend on the land, planting a communal garden and forgoing modern conveniences, developers threaten to destroy this reclaimed way of life. The community's meeting house, the *whareniui*, is destroyed suspiciously by a fire, but the community remains steadfast and reconstructs their ancestors' house. The wood that creates this house is shown to be more than an inanimate object; the carvings are "their children, their slaves, their enemies, their friends" (8). These ancestors, in turn, have a voice in the telling of the community's story, a voice that transcends linear notions of time and Western conceptions of who and what can tell a story.

Eva Knudsen explains how in Maori traditions, the "storyteller deals with communal identity rather than with individual identity" ("Beginnings" 28). Although Grace's novel seems to be narrated primarily from the point of view of Roimata and Toko, she includes chapters in which the narrator is not necessarily one of the human characters. Knudsen connects this shifting narration to the importance of the meeting house to the community: "In the surface text it is recognized that the *whareniui* is an important cultural site for storytelling but, as we shall see, it is also arguable that the entire narrative of *Potiki* is told from and by the walls of the *whareniui*. . . . the voice of the house is the voice of the people; any narrative originating in such a 'text' will have the community as its protagonist" ("The Community as Protagonist" 187). Even though Hemi and Roimata's family appear to be leaders in the rejuvenation of their traditional community, the story is not theirs alone. The return of extended family members, the regrowth in

the communal gardens, and the protests against development of their land becomes a community story, one that Knudsen argues is told, not by individual narrators, but by the community narrative situated in the ancestral meeting house.

In many ways, the whareniui becomes the center of Grace's story. Knudsen explains that "a Maori person who enters a meeting-house enters into the myths of the ancestors or into the body of the people" ("Beginnings" 23). The whareniui is described as family as well as the community's main source of knowledge: "But our main book was the whareniui which is itself a story, a history, a gallery, a study, a design structure and a taonga [prized possession]. And we are part of that book along with family past and family yet to come" (*Potiki* 104). The whareniui, therefore, teaches and comforts, records and listens to the community. The meeting house is also composed of natural elements, and throughout the novel, Grace emphasizes the community's connection to the wood and trees that make up the whareniui.

Grace begins her novel with the carver and the carving that he adds to the whareniui. He is unnamed but described as a "carver who spent a lifetime with wood, seeking out and exposing the figures that were hidden there" (*Potiki* 7). Rather than believing he gives life to a dead or inanimate thing, the tree, the carver believes that with his art, he creates a different type of life through which he and the community can honor the tree and their ancestors: "The tree, after a lifetime of fruiting, has, after its first death, a further fruiting at the hands of a master" (7). The significant "first death" implies that the tree has another type of life as a carved ancestor, that "what was already waiting in the womb that is a tree" lives on through the carver's work (7). However, Grace goes on to write that the carver "is master only of the skills that bring forward what was already waiting in the womb of the tree" (7). She is careful to explain that the carver

does not own the tree or the carving; he is only one part of an intricate design that insures “the ancestors are known and remembered” (8).

In his article “Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace: The Maori Renaissance,” Williams states, “In traditional Maori belief the dead are present in the form of the representations of the ancestors worked into the carvings and the architecture of the meeting house.” By the end of the “Prologue,” Grace establishes that the wood and the carvings are very much alive, particularly when the carver breaks his own rules in his final living act: “He put his face close to the nostrils of the wood face, and blew. . . . The next morning the people lifted the poupou from off him” (*Potiki* 12). The carver essentially blows life into his own rendering, passing his life into the tree, and demonstrating that the wooden ancestors exist in a space between life and death. The novel, therefore, begins with an example of connection among the natural world, the humans who reside with it, and a spiritual realm. The tree, a once living being, transforms into an ancestor and becomes an entity able to transcend Western notions of living and nonliving. It also becomes something possessing qualities of plant, human, and spirit. Toko sees, or as Knudsen might argue the entire community sees, time and nature as “a before, and a now, and an after knowing, and not like the knowing that other people have. It is a now knowing as if everything is now” (52). Therefore, while *Potiki* has some semblance of a linear narration, Grace’s text also asks readers to see beyond Western notions of time and perspective. The land, the ancestral house, and the stories themselves tell this narrative about community, land, and healing.

In a similar manner to Hogan’s text, *Potiki* demonstrates very clearly how attachment to the land, water, and the life within them, can bring indigenous communities together. The threat from big business instigates the need for protest, and activism for the land as well as the common good for all beings coexisting with it inspires a type of healing even as tangible wounds in both

the people and the earth are created. Although Grace's characters do not journey in the physical way in which Hogan's characters do, her community still transforms as pressures from Pakeha society force the Maori community to draw inward and strengthen bonds among people and with ancestral lands. Grace's spiral motif, like Hogan's use of the circle, emphasizes the continuity and the connectedness of Maori communities to the past, present, and future. By remaining connected throughout their struggles with developers and continuing colonial pressure, the community creates their own form of activism, one that incorporates both direct action and quiet resistance.

As in *Solar Storms*, humans in *Potiki* are only one piece of an intricate and relational system of organisms, land, and water. In the first chapter of Part I, Roimata introduces the land just as she introduces herself and her family:

My name is Roimata Kararaina and I'm married to Hemi Tamihana. We have four children, James, Tangimoana, Manu and Tokowaru-i-te-Marama. We live by the sea, which hems and stitches the scalloped edges of the land. This piece of land is the family land of the Tamihanas. Our houses stand close together on this, the papakainga, and they window the neatened curve of sea. Towards this curve we pitch our eyes constantly, tides of eyes rolling in reverse action to the sea. (*Potiki* 15)

This passage demonstrates the community's physical connection to the land as well as the ancestors' presence among them. The homes flow with the land, and the people find peace in the surroundings of land and sea. Roimata defines this space as "a nothing," but this seemingly negative description instead grants her land an openness because it is a between space. She says, "Yet because of being a nothing, a neutral place—not land, not sea—there is freedom on the

shore, and rest” (18). Perhaps the “rest” comes from looking at a natural space versus a developed and confined landscape. Regardless, Roimata presents a calmness felt when surrounded by the ancestral lands, and the “nothing” space does not necessarily need to be filled.

The book’s “Prologue” states that the “spinning, dancing eyes are the final gift from the carver, but the eyes are also a gift from the sea” when describing the carving process (*Potiki* 8). Like Roimata’s introduction, this passage also references the importance of the ancestors’ watchfulness. The eyes used by the carver come from the sea in the form of shells or stones. Purposefully, Grace reminds readers that the ancestors are present not only in carved form in the wharenuī but also flowing with the tides of the sea, keeping watch over the community just as the community keeps watch over the ancestors. The relationship, like that with the land, is one of mutuality. No part is of more importance than another. In fact, in an interview with Paola Della Valle, Grace explains how the “word ‘worship’ doesn’t apply to the Maori world. I would say everything is tied up with ‘respect,’ which means respect for the people, the environment, the ancestors, the *atua*. The term *atua* is roughly translated as ‘Gods’” (137). Respect, to Grace, lacks hierarchical implications, and *Potiki* relies on this concept as the fictional community becomes closer in their relationships with one another and with the land as the novel progresses.

Models of respect are demonstrated in the Maori community through stories. For years, the Maori community has sought to preserve their land and culture while negotiating influences from the Pakeha-dominated society. The Maori language faced annihilation because it was not taught in Pakeha schools, schools which separated Maori beliefs and ways of coexisting with the land from “civilization.” In Hemi’s first chapter, he remembers how “their ancestors had been rubbished in schools, and in books, and everywhere. So were their customs, so was their language. Still were rubbished too, as far as he could see. Rubbished or ignored” (*Potiki* 65).



Growing up, Hemi notes, “Funny how you came to see yourself in the mould that others put you in, and how you began not to believe in yourself” (65). However, Hemi sees a change in his children’s generation: “Kids were different these days. They wanted knowledge of their own things, their own things first. They were proud and didn’t hide their culture, and no one could bullshit them either” (65). When Hemi loses his job, he embraces the younger generation’s pride and willingness to put Maori stories first. Roimata weaves Hemi’s change into the family’s building stories:

Gradually the stories were built upon, or they changed. None changed more than Hemi’s which told more and more about people who were not working anymore because there was not work for them, and of people who were beginning to be cold and poor. More and more he was telling about the land and how the land and sea could care for us. It could care for those who had gone away too, but who would return now that work was hard to find. “There are things I can tell you in stories,” he said, “But I can show you too, and then you’ll really know everything we need is here.” (41)

Hemi’s new stories, then, require active participation with the land; he teaches from what Roimata calls “this school earth” and hopes to bring the community together through involvement with the land (39).

As the community draws inward in a time of economic crisis, Grace emphasizes the inclusion of community members who have left and want to return. As Angel, Bush, and Dora-Rouge are welcomed among the Fat Eaters in *Solar Storms*, the Maori community in *Potiki* welcomes those who have strayed far from home. In Grace’s interview with Valle, she explains how “*Turangawaewae* literally means ‘a place where one puts one’s feet—a place to stand.’ The

right is inalienable and *turangawaewae* is a place where one has a right to live, a right to return to, a right to speak and a place one may go back to for burial at death. In most cases the cords are not completely severed, but in some cases they are” (132). Hemi sees hope in the return of people to their *turangawaewae*, even though they come because they have no other option. Hemi’s ardent belief in “that first furrow, that first turn of the soil” in the communal garden his *whanau* (extended family) has recreated mirrors his hope in the younger generations coming home to a sustainable place (*Potiki* 64). As the younger people learn to survive on and appreciate the land, Hemi also sees a renewal in “their songs and their stories. There was their language. There would be more opportunity now to make sure they, the older ones, handed on what they knew” (65). Ultimately this passing on of knowledge is “important for their [the next generation’s] survival” and becomes part of the activism against encroachment on their land and culture (64).

While Hemi sees the world in a more concrete sense, focusing on the gardens and the physical labor to care for the land, Toko articulates the more abstract side to the community’s stories, embodied in the spiral. In many ways, *Roimata* represents a mix of both the concrete and abstract. She teaches her youngest sons at home rather than sending them to public school, and she sees how this, in conjunction with a return of the people to the land, rewrites the community’s stories so they are centered on the ancestral land: “And this train of stories defined our lives, curving out from points on the spiral in ever-widening circles from which neither beginnings nor endings could be defined” (*Potiki* 41). Toko tells one of these new stories after he catches his “big fish,” a story he finds to be intertwined with his own miraculous birth and his namesake, the great-granduncle who was born in a time of sickness for the people:

My mother Roimata had taken a passionfruit cutting from Granny Tamihana's vine. At the time when I caught my big fish the cutting was dry and without life, that's what I've been told. But after we buried the fish head and fish guts there the plant began to grow and grow. The branches began to swim everywhere like a multiplication of eels. It was as if the big eel head with its little seed eyes was birthing out trail after trail of its young. All the little eels swarmed the shed walls and the trees, whipping their tails and latching them to the walls and branches, still growing and multiplying all the time. And the eel-vines had a thousand hidden eyes, a thousand tails and a thousand hidden hearts. (57)

Although Toko's story seems larger-than-life, he carefully merges the life that comes from the sea with the life that grows on land. With this, he incorporates the concept of the watchful ancestors' eyes and their caring hearts. The "whipping" and "growing and multiplying" returns to the spiral motif Grace carefully weaves throughout her novel.

Jean-Pierre Durix posits that both the carvings and the way in which Grace crafts her story "suggest the image of a spiral. Another geometrical figure, that of concentric circles, is used to refer to the close relationship between different moments in time" (283). Taking this idea a step further, the spiral also refers to the relationship between human and nonhuman entities. They are not separate beings, according to Grace's text, but instead exist through reliance on one another and a never-ending process of nurturing and consuming. Realizing "people were looking to their land again" and learning to tell old stories mixed with new elements becomes part of the new reality Roimata witnesses in her community: "So the 'now' is a giving and a receiving between the inner and the outer reaches, but the enormous difficulty is to achieve refinement in

reciprocity, because the wheel, the spiral, is balanced so exquisitely. These are the things I came to realise as we told and retold our own-centre stories” (*Potiki* 61, 39).

The “exquisite balance” Roimata finds necessary to survival is threatened in the midst of the community’s revitalization. In “Influences on Writing,” Grace explains, “One’s own background and experience is central to one’s work” (67). At the time surrounding *Potiki*’s conception, during the 1970s, Maori protests against the New Zealand government’s appropriation of native lands were at their height. The Ngati Whatua people occupied Bastion Point, their ancestral lands, and were forced to end the protests by police force. Similarly, another Maori group led by Eva Rickard protested at the Raglan Golf Course, land that had been taken from them for an airport during World War II and never used for such or returned (“Influences” 68-69). Eventually, both groups reclaimed at least part of the lands that were rightfully theirs all along. At the same time, the Maori Renaissance was occurring, and as Williams explains, this growing body of native writers dealt with two main issues: land and language. While Maori people struggled to reclaim and maintain ancestral land, “[t]he language was dying and with it many Maori people felt the culture itself was in danger of dying” (Williams). Grace grapples with both these issues in *Potiki*, using Maori words and phrases in a primarily English text as she renders the daily struggles of her fictional community at odds with land developers.

While community members return to Tamihana land to seek refuge from poverty and to live off the land, developers see quite a different type of potential in the coastal area. Representative of big business set on commodifying Maori land and culture, Mr. Dolman, or “Dollarman” as the community begins to call him, finds potential for condos, boardwalks, and other tourist attractions in the land now occupied by Maori people and their ancestors. In their

article, “Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism,” Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel explain that threats to land and identity like Grace presents in her novel are typical among indigenous populations: “All of these people confront the daily realities of having their lands, cultures and governmental authorities simultaneously attacked, denied and reconstructed by colonial societies” (599). What Mr. Dolman sees as an improvement to the land would destroy the way in which the community lives, works, and shows respect to their ancestors and the earth. He cannot fathom and purposefully avoids trying to understand living with the land and sea versus exploiting it for monetary gain. Instead, the “money man was coming, to ask again for the land, and to ask also that the meeting-house and the urupa [burial grounds] be moved to another place” (*Potiki* 88).

Grace dedicates a chapter to the discussion between the community and Mr. Dolman. Even though the chapter is titled “Dollarman,” the narration remains from a collective Maori voice, perhaps of the entire community or the wharenui itself. The chapter begins with “a wood quiet” in the meeting house, described also as “a watching quiet because the new-limbed trees have been given eyes with which to see. It is a waiting quiet, the ever-patient waiting that wood has, a patience that has not changed since the other tree life” (*Potiki* 87). Despite the anxiety the community feels about this meeting, the ancestral house is sacred space and demands peace within it. Likewise, Grace also shows how the ancestors are present for this conversation, and when the people speak, the chapter implies the ancestors guide and speak with them. The people in the house feel the love of their ancestors as they begin the fight to keep their land:

It was the warmth of embrace, because the house is a parent, and there was warmth in under the parental backbone, enclosure amongst the patterned ribs. There was warmth and noise in the house as the people waited for Mr Dolman to

speaking, Dolman whom they had named 'Dollarman' under the breath. Because although he had been officially welcomed he was not in the heart welcome, or at least what he had to say was not. (88)

Ultimately, Mr. Dolman presents his company's version of "progress," which means, in the Maori community's eyes, "to make zoos and circuses in the sea, or to put noise and pollution there, or to line the shore with palaces and castles, and souvenir shops, or to have restaurants rotating above the sea, lit up at night like star crafts landing their invaders on the shore" (*Potiki* 98). Roimata and Hemi's community, however, see the returning people, rejuvenated communal gardens, well cared for meeting house, and the tended urupa as growth for their people. They explain to Mr. Dolman, "But what we're doing is important. To us. To us that's progress" (90). Mr. Dolman calls these concerns over traditions, ancestors, and ties to the land "superstition" and "hoo-ha" (94). What he miserably fails to understand is that for the Maori community, "the past is the future," and the land is not a commodity to be traded or sold (94). The community tells Mr. Dolman, "We give it to you and we fall through. We're slaves again, when we've only just begun to be free" (95).

Because the developers own the surrounding hills, land purchased from the community in the past under dire circumstances, the Maori community can only control the portion of the land they legally own. However, they remain "anxious about the land and sea. The hills and the sea did not belong to [them] but [they] wished to see them kept clean and free" (*Potiki* 98). Even after the community tells Mr. Dolman "there's no one, not one of us here, that would give an okay" to selling the land, the developers still put pressure on the community to take part in the commercialization of the coastline (90): "And when a letter came telling us how we could be involved, and how we could dress up and dance and sing twice a day and cook food in the

ground, we wrote angrily in reply. Our singing and dancing was not for sale, we said, nor was our food cooked on stones” (97). Their response to the letter becomes a protest against the commodification of Maori culture. Alfred and Corntassell explain how by objecting to the colonizer’s demands, indigenous groups work against colonial hegemony: “Indigenoussness is reconstructed, reshaped and actively lived as resurgence against the dispossessing and demeaning processes of annihilation that are inherent to colonialism” (612). Retaining the community’s cultural authenticity and protecting their land from exploitation becomes a form of activism that also reshapes their communal identity.

The Tamihana family and community find a model for “resurgence” in the fictional Te Ope people. Just as Hogan bases BEEVCO and their plans on the real Hydro-Quèbec James Bay project, Grace bases the Te Ope protests on the community demonstrating against the Raglan Golf Course. In the novel, the Te Ope were dispossessed of their land when the government wanted to use it for an air base during wartime. The Te Ope people “were to return to the land when it was no longer needed for purposes of war. They went quietly because they were poor” (*Potiki* 72). Obviously, the government felt indigenous land was free for the taking, and instead of honoring their agreement, made the land into a park. The Te Ope people lived away from their land for many years, but two generations removed from the original seizure of land, Rueben of Te Ope leads a protest to reclaim land that was never sold or handed over permanently to the government. Toko narrates an entire chapter dedicated to Te Ope, explaining how Reuben began camping on the land and others followed: “And he told the mayor that they were not land protestors, but that they were just people living their lives on land that belonged to them” (81).

Eventually, the courts concede that the Te Ope people do own the land, but the government considers tearing down the old homes and meeting house, flattening the hills, and

removing the trees, improvements for which the Te Ope people should pay (*Potiki* 83-84). Some of the land is given up to pay for so-called improvements, “[b]ut at last they were able to begin building their house on their own land, to make their gardens, plant their trees where Rupena’s [Rueben’s grandfather] parents had planted theirs such a long time before. At last they had a place to put their feet, and it was their own place, their own ancestral place, after all the years and all the trouble” (84). Williams emphasizes that Grace’s text is “rooted in current economic and political conditions,” demonstrating that although fictionalized, the Te Ope people and the Tamihana community represent real struggles faced by Maori groups. Grace also explains that her real community has “always had to be watchful and resistant regarding our land and our privacy, and land issues are very much part of our everyday lives in the place where we live, as they are in the lives of many Maori people throughout Aotearoa” (“Influences” 69).

With Te Ope as a model for activism, and knowing “the land and sea was our whole life,” the community restructures itself to protest the encroaching destruction of land and sea (*Potiki* 98). Their protest, however, is not necessarily about being on the offensive. People such as Hemi and Roimata draw inward to the community for strength and focus on the land they have left: “We worked for our own survival and we tried not to look towards the hill, tried not to hear the sounds that came from there” (107). Some of the younger generations want to protest the bulldozing of the hills, but Hemi advises against it; they do not own that land. Yet, when the company requests to use the community’s road, they collectively deny access. Roimata and Hemi’s daughter, Tangimoana, is sent to study law at the university as one more measure to protect the whanau. Despite the community’s efforts to focus inward and maintain what it has, the environmental destruction begins to mount around them.



Grace juxtaposes this ability to focus on the community's daily needs with the hills behind them being exposed, altered, and pushed into the sea. She finishes one paragraph with the following sentence: "The hills were being sliced away, and rock and rubble was being pushed into the sea." Her next paragraph begins, "It was spring then, and the gardens, the big gardens, were soft and tender and green" (*Potiki* 109). Devastation is paired with new growth and sustenance from the earth, and the Tamihanas try to focus on the gardens instead of "the changing shoreline, and tried not to talk about the yellow mud colour of the sea" (110). The Tamihanas' outlook should not be considered a head-in-the-sand way of avoiding the inevitable; instead, it comes from deep-rooted beliefs about relationship with land: "At the same time we could not help but remember that land does not belong to people, but that people belong to the land. We could not forget that it was land who, in the beginning, held the secret, who contained our very beginnings within herself" (110). Here, land is an ancestor and a creator.

Like the windigo, the cannibal figure in *Solar Storms*, the developers in *Potiki* are consuming a part of themselves, and the Tamihanas realize this. Roimata's tone is often one of pity rather than hatred as she describes both the Maori and non-Maori workers tearing apart the land. Part of the struggle she and her community faces is comprehending how anyone can willingly destroy the land that sustains life and should be a part of all people rather than a vehicle for monetary gain. However, like in *Solar Storms*, some of the workers are also indigenous and participate in the destruction as a means of survival for their families. Roimata and Hemi, like Bush in Hogan's text, extend empathy to the desperate workers while Tangimoana reacts in anger. Not participating in the construction, therefore, becomes another act of resistance. Even though the whanau struggles to survive on the land and lacks the extras a paying job might buy,

Roimata emphasizes, “We were not pohara [poor]. We were whole and life was good” (*Potiki* 105). Remaining hopeful keeps the community’s activism alive.

The whanau is joined by other New Zealanders in their protest of the development. As Grace points out, the community has always had a positive relationship with visitors using the land for respectful recreation. In this way, Grace creates a cross-cultural coalition against the destruction of the land. These supportive outsiders agree when the community refuses to grant access for the road to the developers:

In this we were supported by other people who, over the years, had become friends. They were fishermen and family people who had always used our road and the beach in a family way. They were people who did not want to see development in the area, and did not want the destruction of trees and the flattening of hills, and did not want to have the road used by big trucks and land-working machines. (*Potiki* 106)

Toko also emphasizes that “there were fishermen and weekend boat people, and environmentalists” sympathetic to the Maori community and the environmental balance at risk (97-98). The struggle becomes, then, not one of the “Ecological Indian” against “Spiritually Corrupt White Man” to borrow Grewe-Volpp’s terms in her discussion of *Solar Storms*. Instead, the conflict exists between two different ways of thinking. Roimata explains to Toko that the developers “think differently in their heads and have different importances” (99). Environmental concerns and the impact on indigenous life-ways hold very little importance to the developers Grace portrays.

The difference is also a matter of perception. Toko understands “that the man [Mr. Dolman] had not, had never, understood anything we had ever said, and never would” (*Potiki*

100). Mr. Dolman or “Dollarman” stands in for all those people who “have different importances,” who see the land only in economic terms. This clouds Mr. Dolman’s sight when it comes to the Maori community: “What he saw was brokenness, a broken race. He saw in my Granny, my Mary and me, a whole people, decrepit, deranged, deformed” (102). In *Solar Storms*, Angel’s community also has to confront the developers in the form of a town meeting with BEEVCO. Like Toko, Angel sees how the white men view her people: “To the white men who were new here, we were people who had no history, who lived surrounded by what they saw as nothingness. Their history had been emptied of us, and along with us of truth” (*Solar Storms* 280). The BEEVCO developers call the indigenous people “remnants of the past” and treat them as impediments to a type of progress that ignores the cost to people, animals, land, and water. (*Solar Storms* 280). Like Mr. Dolman’s encapsulation of Maori culture as a bunch of “hoo-ha,” the BEEVCO representatives have no concept of the depth and diversity of the lives they want to destroy.

The developers in *Potiki*, like BEEVCO, veer off their “legal” path of destruction to wreak havoc outside the zone they are supposed to be developing. Since the Maori community refuses to cooperate by allowing use of their road or selling their remaining land, the developers use underhanded methods to force the community to concede. After heavy rains, Roimata and Hemi wake to flooding throughout the property. The gardens are submerged in water, and the urupa is sliding down the hill: “The following morning we woke to water, surrounding our houses and entering some of them, and water spread like a lake where the gardens had been. We discovered later in the morning that one side of the urupa had begun to slide away. The rain had stopped by then and there was no sound at all” (*Potiki* 114). At first, the community believes a combination of the stripping of the hills and an extraordinary amount of rain have caused the

flooding, but they realize “the creek was going in ways it had never gone before” (116). The creek is purposefully blocked, and Hemi says, “It took a man and a machine” to destroy the gardens, houses, and burying place (128).

Despite the signs pointing to foul play from the developers and their workers, the community has a hard time understanding why someone would seek to destroy the land, especially the sacred burial space. Toko explains that “rage and hatred are not easily understood. It is not easy for those who do not have power, to understand the force of power” (*Potiki* 118). Instead of rage, the community responds first with silence and then with song. Roimata explains, “We stood in silence about the dinghy, our feet being pulled further into the mud of our own turangawaewae, our own standing place. It was a world of silence, an unfamiliar world, a world of other, a world of almost drowning” (129). Roimata literally feels the pull of the mud, and even though they feel a sense of strangeness amidst the flooding, this passage also points out how adversity is drawing the community into further closeness with the land. Granny Tamihana expresses this link through a song of mourning: “then Granny began to chant a waiata, one that was known only to her. It spiraled thinly upwards, linking the earth that we are, to the sky that we are, joining the past that we are to the now and beyond that we are” (130). The song becomes the spiral, and the people remain part of a much larger entity that includes earth, sky, and water.

In their struggle to remain an intact community despite the pressures from developers, the community faces yet another tremendous loss. Toko wakes one night after the flooding to unfamiliar sounds and light, realizing that the whareni is on fire when he hears the people moving about outside. His chapter describes the burning building like the loss of a family member as each familiar piece turns to ash:

The walls had fallen too, taking and changing the tipuna of the people—the loving, warring, singing, talking, shouting guardians of the night and day. Taking also the patterns belonging to the lives and deaths of people, the stories and histories of people, and the work of hands and minds. Taking the people’s place of resting, their place of learning, of discussing, singing, dancing, sorrow, joy, renewal, and whanaungatanga. Taking the world inside which all else may be left behind, as dust is left on shoes beyond the door. (*Potiki* 136)

Toko goes on to point out that the “ruin that had been the house of genealogies” stems from a natural element all too often misused by humans: “Fire causes to change what it touches, and yet it was, in the beginning, gift-given” (137). While the developers hope the fire will force the community to give in, it strengthens them even more to resist and remain on their land.

Fire factors into *Solar Storms* as well, and the wharenui and carvings in *Potiki* are destroyed in the same way Tulik’s home is lost in the struggle with BEEVCO. Arsonists set Tulik’s home on fire, and even though the home itself may lack monetary value, it housed important cultural documents as well as the protest movement. After the fire, Tulik, Angel, and the others mourn most for the loss of Tulik’s dog, Mika, and “Ek’s book” with irreplaceable drawings of healing plants. Angel also notes how she misses the feeling of his home: “I had loved Tulik’s house, the way thin lines of light came inside it like long fingers of gods and spirits, touching the floor in slants and angles of warmth” (*Solar Storms* 321). Like the wharenui, Tulik’s home is a spiritual haven, but despite their loss, Angel’s community moves on.

Toko’s community buries the remnants of the wharenui as they would a family member, “so that the new could spring from the old which is the natural way of things” (*Potiki* 141). However, Chadwick Allen, in his book, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American*

*Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts*, explains, “Immediately, before any decision is made to rebuild, the community literally becomes the house, physically standing in place of its walls” (148). The whanau resists the destruction by their presence and persistence. Later, with the help of people from Te Ope, who bring their tents as their own symbols of protest, the community begins the rebuilding process (*Potiki* 142). The new house becomes a site of healing for the community as they join past, present, and future. New and old patterns merge in the wharenuī: “They were etched on the memory and were patterns of the stars and the sea, of the fish and birds and plants, and also of learning and relationships, conflict, sorrow, and joy. But there were new patterns too, of flooding and fire, roads and machines, oneness and strength, and work and growth” (143-144). Allen connects the rebuilding of the meeting house for Maori people with the importance of the land on which the wharenuī sits, and he explains how this act becomes an expression of the “community’s self—it’s significant present and possible future” as well as the community’s ancestors (147). This rebuilding of house and spirit relates to what Jespersen calls “sustainable resistance” in *Solar Storms* (294). While some of the younger generation want to lash out in anger against the workers, the whanau knows rebuilding and caring for each other and the land ultimately is what holds them together. The new meeting house symbolizes their communal sense of activism and the continuity of their stories.

Yet, it does take direct action, inspired by Roimata and Hemi’s daughter Tangimoana, for the destruction to eventually cease. During the development of the hills, the flooding of the land, and the destruction of the wharenuī, Tangimoana and some of her peers push for a more forceful response from the people. She is the counterweight to Hemi’s intense focus on the gardens rather than the noise of construction as the hills are pushed into the sea. Roimata explains, “She did not agree with our acceptance of a situation, which was not a deep-down acceptance, but only a

waiting one. She saw the strength of a bending branch to be not in its resilience, but in its ability to spring back and strike” (*Potiki* 152). Grace uses a metaphor with implications not only about Tangimoana’s strong spirit but also the power of wood to both sustain under pressure and demonstrate strength in tangible ways.

Tangimoana must act after the murder of her youngest brother Toko. One night after the fire and reconstruction of the wharenuī, as Toko enters the meeting house through a door specially constructed for his wheelchair, he is killed by what Roimata describes as a “soft explosion” (*Potiki* 163). While the details of his death are vague, the community understands it to be caused by one more of the developer’s violent measures to force them to give up the land. Roimata explains, “His death had been with us for a long time, but it is the manner of his death that is so hard to bear” (163). In response to Toko’s death, Tangimoana goes to the hills and confronts the workers; she places the blame of Toko’s death on them as long as they remain working for a company that employs violence against people and the land. At first the men are defensive, but the weight of Toko’s death forces them to stop their work: “The machines were not heard that day on the hills, and have not been heard since, except once. Many of the men who walked down off the hills that morning were of our own race but some were not” (161). The men essentially join the growing Māori community, one that has expanded from the extended family to include Te Ope and others who have taken up their cause.

Near the end of the novel, Grace includes a dramatic act of protest against the environmental, cultural, and human destruction by the developers. Roimata and Hemi do not play a direct role in what the young people do to finally stop the machines, but one might argue their teachings about the land and sea instigate the group of younger people to destroy the pseudo-progress on the hill. When the community wakes the morning after Toko’s funeral,

“There was no sound, so we rose from our beds and looked out. The new road had been destroyed, the new structures had been flattened. The big machines were submerged in the sea. We saw all this from our windows but we did not, at first, go out” (*Potiki* 166). When officials inquire about the vandalism, the community protects the young people, arguing that the officers did not find the community believable when the creek was blocked and the meeting house set on fire (169).

Despite the loss the community has faced, Grace’s novel does not lack hope. Hope for the whanau comes in the form of spirals. Roimata describes the land after the machines were taken from the ocean and did not return: “The hills will be scarred for some time, and the beach front spoiled. But the scars will heal as growth returns, because the forest is there always, coiled in the body of the land” (*Potiki* 169). Just as the land heals, the stories are given new life as Roimata and Hemi’s oldest son, James, takes over the role as the carver. He renders Toko as a wooden ancestor, creating “a spiral heart that had no breaking—no breaking and no end” (172). Toko retains his voice through the walls, just as the wood retains its life through the wharenuī. The community, like the ancestors, continues by writing a new story: “[T]here was one more story to be told, a story not of a beginning or an end, but marking only a position of the spiral” (180).

Through her novel, Grace presents a community at odds with big business, an extended family struggling to survive and hold onto ancestral land. While Hogan ultimately asks her readers to share in her characters’ activism for the environment, Grace’s relationship with her audience is a bit more complicated. Durix explains this well:

Patricia Grace seems to write with several types of readers in mind: the insiders to Maoritanga will take for granted veiled allusions to their own culture. But failure to do so will not block the general understanding of the plot. Simply, more areas



of shadow or mystery will subsist in the mind of the external reader. Perhaps this will encourage outsiders to probe deeper into Maori culture, this leading to their discovery of a different worldview. Perhaps too this obstacle put up in the face of non-Maori readers suggests there is some measure of *tapu*, of sacredness in any society, which cannot—or perhaps must not—be perceived by outsiders. (287)

Fuchs takes this argument a bit farther when she states, “Grace has worked to situate non-Maori readers at the edge of her Polynesian narrative, where they can sense its innermost components but are unable to engage fully or even penetrate beyond the borders” (182). By making the novel inaccessible at times to English-only speaking readers, the text itself enacts a type of protest against Pakeha encroachment on land, language, and culture.

When asked why she chose not include a glossary with *Potiki*, Grace responded, “I didn’t feel it should be necessary. I just felt that Maori people have never had glossaries given to them when things have been written in other languages that they’ve been led to read” (Tausky 101-102). While this authorial decision may alienate some readers, it protests the notion that texts must be monolingual. It takes a community to tell Grace’s story, and it takes both languages to convey that story. The development Grace’s community must fight stems from a colonial mindset that claims native lands and indigenous people should concede to the majority culture. However, Grace does not vilify all Pakeha elements in her story. Her community appreciates the support of Pakeha visitors who respect the environment as it is, and the Tamihanas send Tangimoana to a university to study Pakeha laws. Therefore, the mix of English and Maori languages in the text reflects the way in which Grace’s community accepts elements of Pakeha culture without letting them dominate the community’s way of life.

Yet, the community realizes that it must embrace its language and land first and foremost in order to survive in a postcolonial setting that retains colonial ways of thinking. And instead of seeing the language and narration of *Potiki* as exclusive, perhaps readers should see it as more inclusive than the average text. Grace teaches readers to see the earth, sky, water, and all living beings in layers rather than in one dimension. Her concept of the spiral goes even beyond the realization that everything on the planet is connected; she takes this a step further to include ancestors and the stories we tell as part of the environment each person should work to protect. Just as she includes the non-Maori construction workers who join the community's protest, Grace opens up the activism of her community to her readers. By recognizing the relatedness of humans to the natural world, we too can participate in a restoration and rejuvenation of the relationships among humans, plants, animals, land, and sea for the present, past, and future.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REDEFINING COMMUNITY TO CREATE SUSTAINABLE

#### RELATIONSHIPS IN BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S *PRODIGAL SUMMER*

*So much detail goes unnoticed in the world.  
(Prodigal Summer 170)*

N. Katherine Hayles posits that discussions of science, nature, and stories are often in separate and competing discourses: “‘Values’ are too often treated in scientific discourse as if they were written not in the book of nature but in an appendix to it, added on afterward rather than intrinsic to the stories through which we constitute nature for ourselves and others” (55). In her novel *Prodigal Summer*, Barbara Kingsolver, like Hogan and Grace, merges discussions of human identity and community with issues integral to conservation, environmental degradation, and activism. However, for Hogan and Grace, personal identities, spirituality, and indigenous cultures are threatened by the very forces that also threaten nature. Kingsolver’s text, on the other hand, presents characters who are at various stages of recognizing their roles as conquerors over the natural world. Three of her female characters present ways in which humans can mend broken relationships with land, plants, and animals. Their activism is about changing patterns of interacting within the natural world which means, to her protagonists, trying to alter the way in which Kingsolver’s fictional community hunts, farms, and ultimately perceives the natural world.

In Kingsolver’s fictional farming community, nature exists on the outskirts of most people’s lives. Even though the people rely on the land for their livelihoods, the natural world is meant to be tamed and used to benefit humans first and foremost. Yet, this practice of placing economics over ecological stability threatens the entire balance of the world. By forgoing a relationship of mutuality for one of domination, Kingsolver’s rural community experiences a

breakdown in all types of relationships. The connections lost among humans in the novel mirror their lack of relationship with the natural world. Kingsolver makes it clear that the community's failure to recognize the natural world as having an equal role in their endeavors to survive has devastating physical and emotional consequences on all life in the region.

The activism, then, in Kingsolver's novel grows out of her female protagonists' desires to change this debilitating mindset. While the women do not necessarily consider themselves activists in the traditional sense, they model ways of interaction that demonstrate interdependence within the natural world and challenge the dominating attitudes of their region. Ultimately, they realize humans are not in control, and when humans become conquerors, all aspects of the world suffer as a result. Human relationships with the rest of the natural world as well as human interactions with each other are injured when the balance of nature is precarious. Kingsolver carefully explains the balance necessary for all life to exist in a healthy manner; every species relies on another, and Kingsolver educates her reader about the necessity of preserving a system dependent upon the smallest beetle to the largest predator. Activism, to Kingsolver, requires recognizing how humans have created holes in the ecosystem and learning how humans can help restore connections with the natural world by interfering with the balance of ecosystems as little as possible. Finally, she demonstrates how restoring relationships with nature that maintain an ecosystem's sustainability may also help heal human communities. Recognizing interdependence, therefore, is crucial to the activism and healing Kingsolver presents in her novel.

Barbara Kingsolver grew up in rural Kentucky but has lived in Tucson, in several locations in Europe, and most recently in rural Virginia. She experienced a mixture of respect and frustration toward her small farming community where she lived as a child and adolescent;

however, she ultimately studied Biology in college as a result of loving all forms of life found on her family's land (Mackenzie). Even though she has become a bestselling fiction writer, Kingsolver claims she "still look[s] at the world through the eyes of a scientist" ("About *Prodigal Summer*"). Part of her goal in writing fiction is "to bridge that gulf somehow" between science and the humanities ("About *Prodigal Summer*"). Suzie Mackenzie, in her article for *The Guardian*, explores how Kingsolver is in "an unusual position" for a fiction writer; she is "both inside and outside culture," Mackenzie claims. She goes on to say, "And it's a tension she plays in all her books: a reverence for nature that never gives way to disdain for humans" (Mackenzie). However, Mackenzie seems to treat the idea that nature is "outside" of culture as a given. Hogan and Grace demonstrate that for their fictional indigenous communities, nature, culture, and community are inseparable. Although Kingsolver may take a more scientific rather than overtly spiritual stance in her reverence for nature, in *Prodigal Summer*, nature is not a separate entity, something apart from the characters' "culture." If culture is defined by the way in which a group lives and acts as well as by what the group values, a community's attitude toward the natural world or recognition of interdependence with nature should be considered integral to understanding the community's value system. For Kingsolver, environmental issues define the ways of life for both characters who participate in environmental activism and those who disdain it.

About her writing, Kingsolver states, "I examine support systems, not the lone hero. I am interested in how everything works together" (qtd. in Mackenzie). This makes sense when considering the multiple and overlapping narration Kingsolver employs in *Prodigal Summer*. The novel is divided into three intertwined sections titled "Predators," "Moth Love," and "Old Chestnuts." "Predators" follows Deanna Wolfe, a biologist living what many would consider a

solitary life in Zebulon National Forest. After completing a thesis about coyotes, Deanna proposed a position of her own in a heavily hunted area of southern Appalachia, “wrangling a rare agreement between the Park Service, the Forest Service, and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, so that there were almost more words on her paycheck than dollars” (*Prodigal Summer* 59). Although Deanna is involved in the protection of all life on the mountain, her most immediate and constant concern is for the life of predator species, especially the coyotes finally filling a niche left by the nearly extinct red wolves. Kingsolver writes about Deanna’s positive impact on her environment: “Two years after her arrival, one of the most heavily poached ranges of southern Appalachia was becoming an intact ecosystem again” (59).

Like Deanna, Lusa Landowski, the character followed in the chapters “Moth Love,” develops a sense of “mountains breathing,” even though her background is not in rural Appalachia, but instead that of an urban dweller from Lexington with parents of Polish and Arab descent (*Prodigal Summer* 31). Lusa married a native of Zebulon County and left her position as an entomologist, a scientist specializing in insects, to take on the role of farmer’s wife. After her husband dies in a trucking accident, Lusa finds herself a landowner in a small town full of other struggling family farms. As a scientist and insect lover, Lusa stands out against the residents who frequently employ pesticides in an effort to protect crops and kill predators in a misplaced zeal to avoid livestock loss. Despite her role as a nonnative in the community, Lusa forms a relationship with the land even when her interactions with her relatively new in-laws, the Widener family, remain strained.

The third section of the novel, “Old Chestnuts,” presents the point of view of Garnett Walker, a retired extension agent and widower who has made it his mission to create a “blight-resistant chestnut tree” (*Prodigal Summer* 204). The American chestnut went extinct due to a

combination of disease and human desire to consume what was left of the dying population. Although Garnett has good intentions, he relies heavily on pesticides and believes man to be supreme master over nature. Kingsolver uses him as a foil for Nannie Rawley, Garnett's neighbor and the clear protagonist of his section. Nannie is an organic farmer who prefers weeds to the use of herbicides, and throughout the novel, Nannie tries to educate Garnett on the benefits of working with nature versus controlling it. Despite Garnett's designation of Nannie as "a deluded old harpy in pigtails," Kingsolver obviously creates Nannie as a complement to both Deanna and Lusa's characters and as a vehicle to change Garnett's relationship with the earth and his legacy of chestnut saplings (87).

Although *Prodigal Summer* lends itself to ecocritical analysis, relatively few critics have tackled the text. In his 2003 article, "Leopold's Novel: The Land Ethic in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*," Peter Wenz shows how Aldo Leopold's principles expressed in his 1949 essay, "The Land Ethic," come to life in Kingsolver's characters and her setting. Wenz argues that Kingsolver's female protagonists are "role models" acting out Leopold's Ethic, working against anthropocentrism, yet still participating in "individual self-development" (122, 123). Suzanne Whitmore Jones adds to this discussion in her 2006 essay, "The Southern Family Farm as Endangered Species: Possibilities for Survival in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*." Jones not only explores the ecological activism inherent in the novel but also posits that Kingsolver suggests survival requires a combination of experience and science as well as insiders and outsiders working together. Not only does Kingsolver, according to Jones, break down barriers between people and the natural world, but she also redefines the meaning of community for small rural areas. Using Lusa and the coyotes as two examples, Jones shows how Kingsolver's text allows for new additions to the community to help repair the broken

ecosystem. Jones, therefore, argues that survival in Kingsolver's text depends upon "understanding the complex interconnections between humans and nonhuman worlds, between natives and newcomers, between the local and the global" (95). Ecocriticism remains at the heart of both essays, and understanding Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic" is crucial to understanding the community Kingsolver creates in her novel.

The Aldo Leopold Foundation website says Leopold "defined a *new* relationship between people and nature and set the stage for the modern conservation movement" ("The Land Ethic" my emphasis). However, Hogan and Grace demonstrate how respect for nature is inherent to indigenous understandings. Although Leopold's ideas were revolutionary for a EuroAmerican audience, his idea that land "is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals" should not necessarily be considered new (181). Leopold, nonetheless, adds to an existing conversation indigenous peoples have been having for centuries about the colonization of land and the debilitating mindset where the "land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations" (168).

Throughout *Prodigal Summer*, Deanna, Lusa, and Nannie fight against those who take on "the conqueror role" with nature, a role Leopold defines as "eventually self-defeating" (171). Kingsolver's fictional community relies on the land for income, but many of the people have come to view the land *only* in terms of the money it will produce. Instead, Leopold, and Kingsolver as well, insists the relationship between people and land must include the ability to truly "see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in" the natural surroundings and all that lives within in them (Leopold 179). The attachment Kingsolver's lead characters have with the land is formed through an understanding of science as well as an instinctual awareness of the life all around them, emphasizing what Leopold's "Land Ethic" calls "an intellectual as well as



emotional process” (190). By informing others and acting out the ethics Leopold articulates, Deanna, Lusa, and Nannie create their own brands of activism and attempt to change their community’s relationship within their environment.

The relationship Kingsolver presents between the fictional community of Egg Fork and the land on which it resides is one of mastery, domination, and colonization on the part of humans. If the native plants and animals are considered indigenous to the area, then the people have certainly exerted a type of unnatural and colonial control using harsh pesticides, killing keystone predators, and introducing foreign and invasive plants that make life difficult and sometimes impossible for the native species to survive. Often, Deanna finds the men of the community participating in “willful extermination” of species in an attempt to protect their farms and success at the cost of other forms of life (*Prodigal Summer* 29). Kingsolver, however, does not present the average resident of Zebulon County as unabashedly evil. Instead, through Deanna, Lusa, and Nannie, she shows how misguided certain practices are among the local residents and how they hurt the truly native flora and fauna. Because all three women try to teach others how to respect the land and still survive with it, they create a scientific brand of activism still grounded in their own experiences.

The first of three sections focuses on Deanna Wolfe, the biologist and park ranger, who ardently protects the mountains of Zebulon County from poaching and misuse. Her first chapter begins with a strong statement about the connections among different species: “Every quiet step is thunder to beetle life underfoot; every choice is a world made new for the chosen. All secrets are witnessed” (*Prodigal Summer* 1). Right away, Kingsolver introduces the idea that what humans do to the earth has far reaching implications; our choices do not just impact us. Deanna, who seems most keenly aware of the losses her local ecosystem has faced, explains how the

disappearance of each native species leaves a gaping hole on the ecological level where each part is necessary for the survival of others:

There were hundreds of reasons for each death—pesticide runoff, silt from tilling, cattle in the creek—but for Deanna each one was also a piece in the puzzle she'd spent years working out. The main predator of the endangered shellfish was the muskrat, which had overpopulated to pestilence along the riverbanks over the last fifty years. What had kept muskrats in check, historically, was the mink (now mostly coats), the river otter (also nearly gone), and, surely, the red wolf. (63)

When Deanna realizes coyotes are making their home on her mountain, she sees them as a restoration of the predator species lost with the near extinction of the red wolf. However, she also realizes the community of Egg Fork is not ready for the reintroduction of a predator species. For the farmers, coyotes, like the red wolves before them, are seen as a threat to their livestock, regardless of the fact that they rarely go after such large prey, and they will undoubtedly be exterminated if seen by other humans.

Kingsolver weaves the origins of this human and wolf feud throughout her novel. At the same time Deanna finds the coyote family, she also meets Eddie Bondo, a rancher and hunter from out west who has made it his mission to kill as many coyotes as possible. Despite their competing beliefs, Deanna and Eddie form a physical bond amidst the fecundity of springtime around them. Their relationship is often described in animalistic terms, and their connection related more to pheromones than compatible personalities and interests. Yet, Deanna cannot forget or forgive the fact that Eddie represents those who wish to tame nature, keeping only those parts humans deem worthy and forgetting that all parts work together. Kingsolver explains Deanna's greatest fears about Eddie through her concerns for the coyotes:

She knew the hatred of western ranchers toward coyotes; it was famous, maybe the fiercest human-animal vendetta there was. It was bad enough even here on the tamer side of the Mississippi. The farmers she'd grown up among would sooner kill a coyote than learn to pronounce its name. It was a dread built into humans via centuries of fairy tales: give man the run of the place, and he will clear it of wolves and bears. (*Prodigal Summer* 28)

Despite their connection on a physical level, Deanna struggles to convince Eddie to give up his hatred of wolves. She asks him to read her thesis and explains that wolf or predator hatred has been wrongfully ingrained into EuroAmerican values through the perpetuation of stereotypes even in children's stories. Deanna tells Eddie, "Every fairy story, every Disney movie, every plot with animals in it, the bad guy is always the top carnivore. Wolf, grizzly, anaconda, *Tyrannosaurus rex*" (317). Even Deanna's last name, Wolfe, emphasizes her allegiance to the misunderstood and over hunted population of wolves and coyotes.

Not only does Eddie have an ingrained animosity toward the coyotes, but so do the farmers of Deanna's area:

Last spring a dairy farmer had found a coyote den over there in the woods above his pasture. A mother, a father, and six nursing pups, according to local gossip all dead now, thanks to the farmer's marksmanship. She didn't believe it. She knew how Zebulon men liked to talk, and she knew a coyote family to be a nearly immortal creation. 'Mother and father' was a farmer's appraisal of something beyond his ken; a coyote family was mostly females, sisters led by an alpha female, all bent on one member's reproduction. (*Prodigal Summer* 18)

Unlike Eddie and the farmers around her, Deanna has studied the coyote and sees them with both scientific and compassionate eyes. She realizes the coyote family she has stumbled across is the “same family starting over” or “some other refugees of human damage” (18, 57). Deanna sees the coyotes as victims of human misunderstanding and encroachment: “[T]his family had its own history. It’d been shoved to the wall” (58). And even though Deanna believes she sees the coyotes first, she realizes they have been spying on her; the coyotes show themselves to outsmart even a seasoned scientist (62).

The possibility that the coyotes have made the mountain their home and may restore a lost balance becomes to Deanna a scientific miracle in the making:

The ghost of a creature long extinct was coming in on silent footprints, returning to the place it had once held in the complex anatomy of this forest like a beating heart returned to its body. This was what she believed she would see, if she watched, at this magical juncture: a restoration. If she was not too lazy or careless. And if she did not lead a killer to their lair. (*Prodigal Summer* 63-64)

Deanna lives what Leopold terms “the extension of the social conscience from people to land” (174). She also embodies the philosophy Hayles promotes: “To sacrifice animals or exterminate species in this model directly reduces the sum total of knowledge about the world, for it removes from the chorus of experience some of the voices articulating its richness and variety” (58). Deanna’s relationship with the coyotes, therefore, extends beyond scientific study and data collection; she begins to relate to the coyotes on an instinctual level. Deanna wishes she knew someone else with whom she could discuss “this tightly knotted pack of survival and nurture,” someone she could tell “how much they felt like family” (*Prodigal Summer* 203).

Lusa Landowski, whose first name resembles the Luna moths she studied as an entomologist and whose last name means “of the land,” wonders nearly the same thing as she works to save her late husband’s family farm: “If she could find just one other person in this county who didn’t feel the need to shoot a coyote on sight, that would be something. Then she’d have a friend” (*Prodigal Summer* 409). After her husband’s death, Lusa inherits his family’s farm and the surrounding land, land adjacent to Deanna’s mountain. Though technically neighbors, the two women never meet in the novel but share similar philosophies about land use. Lusa refuses to plant tobacco because of its harmful effects, deciding instead to raise goats to be slaughtered for Muslim holiday feasts on days such as Id-al-Fitr and Id-al-Adha (155). The goats are donated to Lusa by Egg Fork residents who raised them as part of a 4-H project organized by Garnett Walker years before. Lusa finds purpose and economic viability in the goats Egg Fork residents had deemed useless. Although Lusa is treated as an outsider, especially because of her Jewish and Muslim background, she uses her multicultural heritage to save the Widener farm, a place she comes to call home. Lusa sells the goats to a cousin in New York, raising the necessary money to keep the farm running but not compromising her environmental consciousness.

Jones explains how Kingsolver’s “larger point is as much ecological as it is agricultural. She uses principles of ecology to question and to illuminate human behavior, and not just the Widener family’s actions but Lusa’s own. To survive and prosper, this rural farming community, which has become an endangered species, needs more information about the interconnectedness of their world” (88). In a conversation with her sister-in-law Jewel, Lusa discusses why she refuses to cut down the forest on the Widener property, even if it means the farm goes under because of her decision. Lusa’s decisions are economically minded, but her “ecological conscience” ultimately guides her (Wenz 122). She tells Jewel, “I will not cut down those trees. I

don't care if there's a hundred thousand dollars' worth of lumber on the back of this farm, I'm not selling it. It's what I love best about this place." Jewel, with disbelief, asks her if she means the trees. Lusa responds, "The trees, the moths. The foxes, all the wild things that live up there" (*Prodigal Summer* 123). Lusa, therefore, understands the land on a more ecological and instinctual level than even those who have lived there all their lives; instead of seeing the land in strictly economic terms, Lusa finds value in all the forms of life that go into making the land functioning as both a farm and an intact ecosystem.

Jones compares Lusa to the coyotes, both foreigners who are filling a void in a fragile system. She states, "Indeed her arrival, like that of the coyotes in the nearby national forest, begins to right an imbalance in the ecosystem" (90). Lusa does this by first recognizing and revering the life all around her, down to the smallest insect. She refuses to take part in the coyote hatred, a prominent mindset among the residents of Zebulon County, explaining to her nephew Rickie, "I can't see killing a thing that beautiful just on suspicion. I'll go with innocent until proven guilty" (*Prodigal Summer* 413). When she reflects on her position as landowner, Lusa realizes she is "[n]ot just a mortgage holder, not just burdened, but also blessed with a piece of the world's trust" (413). In the end, Lusa recognizes that the land now in her name is not truly hers; it belongs to a community that includes bobwhites, coyotes, and Luna moths: "This was still the Widener farm, but the woods were no longer the Widener woods, Lusa explained. They were nobody's" (439).

Garnett Walker, through his interaction with Nannie Rawley, is forced to have an epiphany about land ownership similar to Lusa's. However, his takes much longer to realize as he fights against an ingrained belief that "[s]uccess without chemicals was impossible" and the idea that man's role should be that of conqueror (*Prodigal Summer* 87). Garnett must battle his

own contradictory nature; he is convinced his efforts to restore the chestnut are being hampered by Nannie's organic farming, yet his overuse of pesticides kills not only the insects that threaten his chestnuts but also those that would keep the pest population under control. Nannie explains this as she articulates the "Volterra principle," the idea that killing both pests and predator insects only increases the pests since they reproduce much faster than the predators (275). However, Garnett wants "a forest that obeyed the laws of man and geometry" rather than one that has its own rules (270).

Garnett is so concerned with how his property looks and controlling what is allowed to prosper that he misses the joy of life happening all around him. This attitude is shown especially when Garnett expresses disgust over Nannie's "NO SPRAY ZONE" sign in front of her property, stopping the county from spraying pesticides that could harm her organic apples: "It took only one good dose of Two-Four-D herbicide every month to shrivel these leafy weeds to a nice, withered stand of rusty-brown stalks, easily raked down afterward to show the world a tidy frontage. But instead he had this, now—this tangle of briars harboring vermin of every kind known to man, breeding in here and getting set to invade his F1 chestnut seedling field" (*Prodigal Summer* 85). Garnett's fear of nature taking its own course, "invading" like an enemy army, contradicts his deep love of chestnuts and his mourning over their loss.

Much as Deanna feels haunted by the red wolves, Garnett lives with the loss of the chestnuts; he sees the ancient trees in the wood that built his barn: "He was haunted by the ghosts of these old chestnuts, by the great emptiness their extinction had left in the world, and so this was something Garnett did from time to time, like going to the cemetery to be with dead relatives: he admired chestnut wood" (*Prodigal Summer* 128). Despite his compassion for the

lost chestnut, Garnett continues his ardent belief in human needs superseding nature's. For example, he wonders,

Whatever happened to the bobwhite? You never heard him anymore. Garnett had read something from the Extension about fescue's being the cause, the ordinary fescue grass people planted for hay. . . . It must seem strange to the animals to have a new world entire sprouting all around them, replacing what they'd known. What a sadness, the baby quails lost in that jungle with nowhere to go. But you had to have hay. (138)

Garnett believes men to be "masters and keepers of Eden, as the Bible said," so he is annoyed by people like Nannie who let bait lizards free out of a sense of obligation even to the smallest of organisms (139). On his way home from his usual Friday errands, Garnett recalls how Nannie went to the town bait store "at least once a month, bought every 'lizard' in the tank, and set them free behind her orchard, in Egg Creek" (138). To Garnett, salamanders "were put here for man to go bass fishing with, and that was that" (139).

Nannie, therefore, acts as a foil to Garnett's anthropocentric attitude. Even though he believes his work with the chestnut saplings creates a "piece of the old, lost world returning, right before his eyes," there is a sense that he is playing God combined with a type of worship of the trees themselves (*Prodigal Summer* 204). Here, one has to wonder if Garnett is trying to recover the chestnut for its own sake or for humans to consume once again. Nannie's intentions as a farmer and landowner, on the other hand, are more obvious. She believes, "Everything alive is connected to every other by fine, invisible threads" (216). She tells Garnett, "It's glory, to be part of a bigger something. The glory of an evolving world" (277). By growing organically, trying to protect bees and lizards, and even wearing shorts (which Garnett finds to be



inappropriate for a woman her age), Nannie defies the boundaries others might set between herself and nature. She still makes a living off her apples, but for Nannie, respect takes priority over economics.

While Nannie has few boundaries, Garnett has erected many in his life. He has no relationship with his son, the father of Jewel Widener's children, or his grandchildren because he could not accept his son's mistakes. He also fails to explore the world outside his property line, and this leads him to almost miss an opportunity to find two surviving chestnuts on Nannie's property. Nannie thinks Garnett realizes she has two chestnuts on her property because, as she says, "I never really think of the woods as *belonging* to us, exactly. I walk all over your hills when I feel like it. I just assumed you did the same with mine" (*Prodigal Summer* 339). By adhering to man-made boundaries so closely, Garnett almost loses the chance to strengthen his chestnut seedlings. With this revelation from Nannie, Garnett finds a renewed sense of hope and purpose:

Garnett could picture the two old chestnuts up there, anomalous survivors of their century, gnarled with age and disease but still standing, solitary and persistent for all these years. Just a stone's throw from his property. It was almost too much to believe. He dared to hope they still had a few flowers clinging on, this late in the summer. What that infusion of fresh genetic material would do for his program! It was a miracle. In fact, now that he thought about it, if those trees had been shedding pollen all along they might already have helped him out, infusing his fields with a little bit of extra diversity. He thought he'd been working alone. You just never knew. (343)

This revelation leads to a shift in Garnett's attitude toward nature as he recognizes he cannot leave his legacy of chestnuts on his own. He begins to understand that nature cannot be separated from the process of regrowth; in fact, nature, which includes his role as human, *is* the process.

Therefore, when Garnett encounters a coyote on the road near the end of the novel, he does not react like many of his neighboring farmers might; instead, he takes a cue from Nannie and sees the coyote as a member of his community. Garnet feels "astonishment" rather than "fear" when he encounters first one coyote and then another cross the road and return to the forest which "closed like curtains in a movie house." His surprise turns into "the strangest feeling that what he'd witnessed was just that kind of magic." He believes the "creature was looking into his eyes as if it meant to speak" and goes on to observe, "They were wildness, and this was where they lived" (*Prodigal Summer* 392-393). In this case, "wildness" is not the frustrating and disgusting wildness of a weedy front yard; instead, this is wildness full of hopefulness, an untamed place where predators are returning and the extinct chestnuts survive because humans are kept from interfering.

Although Garnett remains a cantankerous old man, or a "sanctimonious old fart," as Nannie calls him, his acceptance of Nannie and the partnership he has with nature helps him find a sense of healing (*Prodigal Summer* 427). Throughout the novel, Garnett is working to restore an extinct species, but until the end, he has not embraced an attitude that would allow cooperation with the very species he is trying to restore. His lack of connection with the natural world has also hindered relationships with his neighbors and his family. As Garnett begins to restore his connection with the environment, his human relationships begin to fall into place as well. Deanna also witnesses a restoration, through the coyotes, and her attempts to protect the den and redirect Eddie's hatred continue the healing she has helped facilitate in Zebulon National

Forest. Eddie leaves, prompting a series of mixed emotions in Deanna, especially when she realizes she is pregnant, but his leaving also means the coyotes have that much longer to heal and reproduce.

As Lusa struggles to recover after the loss of her husband and embrace her new role as farmer, she finds comfort in devising new and sustainable methods to keep the farm lucrative and environmentally sound. She helps her sister-in-law Jewel as Jewel battles cancer by caring for her two children, Crys and Lowell. By the end of the novel, Lusa changes her last name to Widener, a change she did not make while her husband was alive. She states, “I’m married to a piece of land named Widener,” establishing a sacred covenant between her and the land she has agreed to protect (*Prodigal Summer* 383). She also promises to care for Jewel’s children after Jewel dies, an act that keeps the land in the Widener name but also will hopefully preserve the integrity of the land as she teaches Crys a new way to farm, one that does not require clear cutting or harmful pesticides.

Lusa also helps establish a relationship between Jewel’s children and their grandfather, Garnett, emphasizing the continuity of life through younger generations of both human and nonhuman beings. In the final chapter of “Old Chestnuts,” Garnett looks forward to seeing Crys and Lowell, hoping to teach them to care for the chestnut saplings and perhaps continue his work after he dies. Throughout the novel, Kingsolver presents her characters as separate through their distinct sections and perspectives. As the novel progresses, the reader begins to see how all the characters are connected through their relationship with the environment. In fact, the ecosystem of the region brings the three isolated stories together in the end. Kingsolver leaves the reader anticipating that all three storylines will eventually and completely intertwine; she also gives the

reader a sense that the natural world is responsible for righting imbalances for both humans and nonhumans if given a chance.

Deanna's pregnancy further demonstrates life continuing, despite the odds of conceiving in her middle age. However, Deanna also faces the harsh, and in this case unsettling, reality of life sustaining life when she realizes a blacksnake, whom she had protected from Eddie and defended for making a home in her roof, eats the baby birds nesting on her porch: "This was her familiar, the same blacksnake that had lived in the roof all summer, the snake she had defended as a predator doing its job. Living takes life. *But not the babies*, she cried in her mind. *Not these; they were mine. At the end of the summer the babies are all there will be*" (*Prodigal Summer* 329). Even though Deanna has explained to Eddie that she doesn't "love animals as *individuals*" but instead as species, she struggles with the loss of the phoebe fledglings, possibly equating them with the child growing inside her, transforming her connectedness to the birds from scientific to very personal (177). Although Deanna works to keep her relationship with the natural world on a more scientific level, throughout the novel, she struggles to delicately balance her love for all species with her scientific awareness that life and death are equally necessary.

Ultimately, Deanna decides to leave the mountain and live with Nannie as she awaits the birth of her child. If people wondered, "She would tell people in Egg Fork, because she was sure they would ask, that the father of her child was a coyote" (*Prodigal Summer* 432). Her leaving the mountain is marked by a destructive thunderstorm and a subsequent reminder of new life: "When the rain and thunder died and the wind had gone quiet, coyotes began to howl from the ridge top. With voices that rose and broke and trembled with clean, astonished joy, they raised up their long blue harmony against the dark sky. Not a single voice in the darkness, but two: a mated pair in the new world, having the last laugh" (435). Both Deanna and the coyotes are

receiving chances to start life again, whether it is through the birth of an unexpected child, returning to fill the gap left by a lost species, or surviving the thunderstorm to see life renew after the rain.

Kingsolver's final chapter in *Prodigal Summer* is untitled, and it is narrated from the perspective of a coyote, reminding readers that nature observes us as well. The chapter ends by reiterating the connectedness and cyclical nature of all life, a cycle requiring both life and death for renewal: "Solitude is a human presumption. Every quiet step is thunder to beetle life underfoot, a tug of impalpable thread on the web pulling mate to mate and predator to prey, a beginning or an end. Every choice is a world made new for the chosen" (*Prodigal Summer* 444). Kingsolver's text argues that the natural world continually recreates itself and attempts to repair the wrongs inflicted upon it by human desire to conquer and consume. As her characters' relationships grow with the natural world, their relationships with other humans change as well. In Kingsolver's novel, the natural world pulls people closer to each other and to the world with which they interact.

Activism, then, in Kingsolver's text is about experiencing the world without human-created barriers between people and the environment, modeling this way of interacting for others, and defying a value system that supports humans in the role of conqueror. The connections made once these barriers are broken, according to Jones, are essential to the text as well as the reader's experience with the novel: "Learning to observe and understand interconnections is an important ecological lesson that readers absorb through the novel's form by doing—by actively making unheralded connections—rather than by passively listening to the characters' Rachel Carson-inspired orations about keystone predators, evolution, and broad-spectrum insecticides" (94). Deanna, Lusa, and Nannie all demonstrate for other characters and

the reader through their words and actions that interdependence involves accepting the natural world as a functioning system instead of objectifying it as a thing of beauty or a resource to be used for economic gain. All three protagonists protest the way in which their community wishes to dominate nature by resisting expectations of the way humans should own land, grow crops, and interact with human and nonhuman life.

In a way similar to *Solar Storms* and *Potiki*, *Prodigal Summer* leaves the reader with hope that humans can repair their relationships with the world by changing thought patterns and ways of interacting with land, plants, animals, and each other. The indigenous communities in Hogan's and Grace's texts provide a method by which communities can sustainably benefit from nature to survive without stamping their footprints across it in irreparable ways. Likewise, Kingsolver's characters each develop their own ways to sustainably survive on the land without destroying life unnecessarily in the process. Unlike *Solar Storms* and *Potiki*, however, the activism in *Prodigal Summer* occurs most frequently at the individual level, and the characters' knowledge of the world is grounded much more so in science rather than spirituality. Yet, Kingsolver's insistence that the characters are all connected through her careful construction of the ending signals a budding community-based activism centered on ecological concerns. The future community envisioned by Kingsolver's conclusion to *Prodigal Summer* is one that, in a way similar to Grace's spiral, extends out to the reader and the entire natural world.

## CONCLUSION

### “HERBS OF HEALING”

Revard’s comparisons of American Indian and EuroAmerican texts in his essay “Herbs of Healing” as well as postcolonial theory provide another way to consider these three texts as performing similar types of activism. While all three novels demonstrate how communities find healing through communion with nature and a reframing of the relationship among all organisms, land, and water, the two from an indigenous perspective are highly influenced by colonization. Hogan’s and Grace’s texts are shaped by their characters’ recognition of the colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial state they and their ancestors have faced. Resistance is crucial to preserving ancestral lands as well as the people who live on these lands; protecting the natural world becomes inseparable from protecting the indigenous people and culture. Hogan’s and Grace’s characters potentially face immediate annihilation if they go along with the conquerors or if they protest. As Angel states in *Solar Storms*, “For my people, the problem has always been this: that the only possibility of survival has been resistance. Not to strike back has meant certain loss and death. To strike back has also meant loss and death, only with a fighting chance. To fight has meant that we can respect ourselves” (325). Therefore, the activism found in *Solar Storms* and *Potiki* places the characters and communities in precarious situations but also becomes synonymous with preserving both indigenous life ways and the natural world.

Kingsolver, conversely, recognizes but does not explicitly link the destruction of the Appalachian ecosystem to a form of colonization. While the humans in her novel may be outcast because they are “different” in their ways of living and thinking, they are not colonized by a hierarchal structure that demeans their entire way of life and relationship with the world. It is nature in her novel that is the colonized. The humans in *Prodigal Summer* are presented with a

choice to live in a way that is mutually beneficial and sustainable or one that produces immediate gain but long term consequences. They can begin to recognize their role as conquerors and change their relationship with the world or continue on a path that so far has yielded devastating consequences for both the colonized and the colonizers.

While Kingsolver does not overtly advocate her Appalachian community look to indigenous ways to improve their lives and the health of the land, she seems to draw on existing indigenous perspectives about the environment. These perspectives emerge organically for those protesting for environmental justice and advocating healing between humans and the natural world. What “indigenous” means to Kingsolver is ultimately different from how Hogan or Grace might define the word, and how each author might interpret the meanings of spirituality, science, and native also diverge. However, by looking at the novels together, multiple means of activism emerge, and the reader of all three texts, depending on his or her perspective, can find an almost tiered model for activism.

In “Herbs of Healing,” Carter Revard examines poems side by side to draw comparisons and conclusions about how Native American writing should be considered among influential and frequently read texts of the EuroAmerican literary canon, a distinction which often excludes indigenous and minority writers. By acknowledging Native American contributions to the literature of our world, Revard hopes to recognize histories and worldviews that have been ignored by the “Big Guns” of academia (162). This silencing, then, trickles down to students and readers. Instead of a one-sided education, Revard believes students deserve to hear from all the voices of the United States, and part of this enlarged perspective includes reading about alternative ways to interact with the environment. Revard shows how indigenous writers include nature in their definition of family whereas EuroAmerican authors often create an avoidable but



detrimental boundary. By looking at passages from the three novels I have discussed, one can see the various stages of this boundary being broken down and eliminated. Examining these stages further emphasizes how the texts complement one another and provide multiple models for environmental activism whether a person is able to influence his or her neighbors or directly fight against colonizing forces that threaten people, land, plants, and animals.

In each of the novels, the authors extend the kinship network beyond human families to include nonhuman entities. However, the degree to which this network extends is crucial to identifying differences among the texts. In *Solar Storms*, Angels sees the animals lost to overhunting, human fear, and EuroAmerican expansion in a similar way Deanna and Garnett see their “ghosts” of wolves and chestnuts. Angel explains, “During the long dark nights, I remembered or dreamed of the animals taken, marten, beaver, wolverine. I saw their skinless corpses. I heard their cries and felt their pain. I saw their shadows cross snow, ice, and cloud. We Indian people had always lived from them and in some way we were kin, even now” (*Solar Storms* 118). In this passage, Angel recognizes a connection that is familial in a way that redefines her relationship to the natural world. The animals created life for Angel’s people, and when the marten, beaver, and wolverine are pushed to extinction by humans, her people acutely feel the pain and suffering the animals experience in a way that goes beyond empathy or scientific understanding. And unlike Deanna’s sorrow over the phoebe babies eaten by the blacksnake, the pain Angel experiences is not only about her internal emotions but about the loss to the entire ecosystem.

Likewise, Grace shares how Maori beliefs shape her characters’ relationships with the land and life around them. Roimata explains, “Seagulls are the inheritors of the shores where they take up death and renew it” (*Potiki* 23). Even a bird many consider a scavenger and pest has

a unique and important function for the community, a purpose that goes beyond scientific reason and into a spiritual realm. Trees and carvings created by the Maori community also transcend Western science as the people and the wood share ancestry and ancient stories. The carvings are designed to pass on the community's story of activism to future generations: "It became a people story through wood, both people and wood being parented by earth and sky so that the tree and the people are one, people being whanau [family] to the tree" (*Potiki* 177). Just like the animals Angel mourns, the trees are family to the community in *Potiki*. No boundaries are erected between humans and nonhumans.

Kingsolver's characters, on the other hand, separate themselves in a more scientific manner from the natural world. They are stewards, community minded and holistically thinking stewards, but separate nonetheless. When Deanna expresses her concern for the coyotes, she does not quite transcend the human/nature binary her culture has built: "She wondered if there was anyone alive she could tell about these little dogs, this tightly knotted pack of survival and nurture. Not to dissect their history and nature; she had done that already. What she craved to explain was how much they felt like family" (*Prodigal Summer* 203). Deanna wants to move beyond dissection and scientific knowledge to a familial association with the predators; however, the coyotes are still "like family," not just "family." As Deanna craves the connection, perhaps one more like Angel's or Roimata's, with the animals of her habitat, Kingsolver's novel is ultimately close to redefining human relationship with the natural world at a more spiritual level. However, even though Kingsolver effectively combats many EuroAmerican stereotypes of predators and land use, her novel remains rooted in science and Leopold's "Land Ethic." *Solar Storms* and *Potiki*, conversely, are rooted in a spiritual association with the land where humans,

animals, plants, water, and land are on equal footing; these texts may acknowledge Western science but are not defined by it.

In all three novels, nature has been colonized for human consumption. The conquerors, no matter what form, believe plants, animals, water, and land to be less than human and therefore, sometimes consciously and other times unconsciously, treat nature as lacking agency, feeling, or importance. Hogan, Grace, and Kingsolver work against these mindsets, exploring instead the way in which all living things must work together, and they even expand on Western conceptions of what it means to be living. As Peter Wenz explains, “Stressing similarities between people and other animals tends to undermine anthropocentric claims that people alone are morally important” (112). He goes on to reiterate Leopold’s statement, saying that in *Prodigal Summer*, Kingsolver shows that “[p]eople’s domination of nature through property ownership can also be self-defeating” (Wenz 113). Garnett’s belief in pesticides and human made boundaries could have prevented his chestnut saplings from being successful. In both Grace’s and Hogan’s texts, the indigenous characters feel anger as well as pity for their adversaries, the people who cannot see the intrinsic value in land and animals, those who only view nature in economic terms. They recognize that the workers (especially those who are also indigenous) who erect the dams or tear down the hills to make way for “improvements” are even more hurt and wounded than those who recognize that the destruction of nature is wrong.

However, the indigenous communities in *Solar Storms* and *Potiki*, unlike the characters in *Prodigal Summer*, have experienced colonization of their communities as well as the land. The two have gone hand-in-hand. Perhaps herein lies the major difference between the indigenous texts and Kingsolver’s. Because the indigenous communities have had not only the land, plants, animals, and water around them destroyed, but their cultures, languages, and family structures

have also been threatened and drastically altered as well, activism requires work and cooperation on the community rather than individual level. Resistance to destructive land development is not only about preserving ecological systems but about preserving entire worldviews. For the indigenous communities, resistance is an action necessary to survival on many levels whereas the activism in *Prodigal Summer* is most visibly about individuals educating other individuals. Wenz explains, “Environmental education is key to preserving nature, according to both Leopold and Kingsolver” (121). However, the education Kingsolver promotes is both through scientific understanding and experience in the world. Suzanne Jones reiterates, “Throughout *Prodigal Summer* Kingsolver is at pains to point out that some things in life can be known from experience, without the abstract knowledge of scientific theories” (89). Yet, the “at pains” observation Jones makes points out that Kingsolver’s text comes off a bit polemic at times, whereas Hogan and Grace weave indigenous experiences with the natural world effortlessly.

While Hogan and Grace present community activism as successful, not in the sense that all of their goals are met, but successful in the sense that communities find healing and enhanced connection with nature, Kingsolver’s activism remains rooted in the individual and his or her choices. For the previously colonized communities, acting together has become the only practical means of resistance. The characters in *Prodigal Summer* share similar outcomes from their individual activism, and Kingsolver even hints that they will eventually work together. However, it is nature itself that would create this potential community. The coyotes, the chestnuts, and even the weeds are what bring her characters together or imply they will work together by the novel’s end. Hogan’s and Grace’s characters recognize throughout their stories how the natural world influences and is an integral part of their community making, but Kingsolver’s characters are only beginning to experience this.

Despite their differences, the three texts all ask readers to consider more than the story being told. In his article “The Procession of Identity and Ecology in Contemporary Culture,” Patrick D. Murphy explores connections among *Solar Storms*, *Potiki*, and Kingsolver’s earlier novel, *The Poisonwood Bible*. He states, “Cautionary tales. . . do not need to be set in the future. They can, for instance, use a microcosm-macrocosm relationship to take a seemingly discrete moment or situation historically or in the present and imply the holistic outcome for the entire planet” (79). In this way, Hogan, Grace, and Kingsolver model for readers many ways to interact with the world in a healthy and sustainable manner. Regardless of the novels’ differences, the characters are defined by their means of resistance. Hogan’s and Grace’s characters show that for indigenous peoples, activism is a means of survival, for both their communities and the entire planet. *Solar Storms* and *Potiki* become what Revard would term “herbs of healing” because the novels seek to break destructive patterns and mindsets just as the protests within the stories try to stop physical destruction of the land. Through education about ecology and interconnectivity, Kingsolver’s text alludes to the ramifications of human activities that ignore environmental consequences.

Murphy explains, “Once someone has been informed and educated about ecological realities, particularly impending crises, such as hurricanes, cyclones, global warming, acid rain, desertification, erosion, and depletion of the ozone layer, that person has no alibi for inaction, no excuse for retaining outmoded and inaccurate ways of thinking about the world on the basis that someone else will take care of it” (88). *Solar Storms*, *Potiki*, and *Prodigal Summer* all call upon the reader to change his or her perceptions and participate in a type of activism that requires altering relationships with the natural world. Should we read these texts and not rethink our “positionality,” to use Hayles’s term, we are doing a disservice to ourselves and our

environment, on a local and global scale. Whether it is on a scientific or spiritual level, the texts ask readers to rethink and reconnect with the land, water, plants, and animals all around us. The novels, therefore, like their characters' actions and the potential actions of their readers, are acts of resistance as well.

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