UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
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"IF A GARDEN WASN'T LOVED IT COULD NOT PROPERLY GROW!": SAND LIZARD GARDENING, COSMOPOLITICS AND THE EROTIC IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *GARDENS IN THE DUNES*

PORTO ALEGRE
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I write to be one person who helps to put the world, the lives of humans and non-humans back together, to make them whole again. I do this for the future. I do this for life's sake.

(Linda Hogan)

ABSTRACT

This undergraduate dissertation investigates three themes in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*—gardening, travelling, and sexuality—and argues that, by incorporating into the narration the perspectives of both native and non-native characters, the novel shows how each characters' cultural legacies affect their relationship to these themes. This work opens with a discussion of how genocidal settler colonialism attacks indigenous gardens, a domination strategy Gilio-Whitaker calls environmental deprivation, which disrupts a web of interdependent relations among diverse beings. Vine Deloria, Jr. describes this interdependency through his concept of a moral universe. Accordingly, in the novel, indigenous gardening is understood as a practice that involves sustenance and interdependence, distinct from the hobby it represents to non-indigenous characters. On the other hand, gardens cultivated by white characters are analyzed in relation to how the gardeners organize them according to different cultural traditions. While the American gardens are backed by nineteenth-century imperialist and patriarchal ideas about land, other-than-human beings, and gardening practices, the gardens in Europe are intimately related to pre-Christian European traditions, such as stone and grove worshipping in Bath, or snake worshipping in Lucca. In addition to that, on the topic of travelling, this work proposes a contrast between Indigo's journey and Edward's expeditions. While in the former Indigo finds seeds to bring back home and creates bonds with the European gardeners, in the latter Edward smuggles exotic plant species to be sold to private investors. Indigo's attitude to meeting new places and beings is described here as related to Isabelle Stengers' cosmopolitics, because of her recognition of other-than-human beings as political agents. Besides, her means of making acquaintance to these beings is understood through David Abram's conception of the sensuous, a way of perceiving the world that is attuned to other life forms' ways of communicating. Sexuality is another aspect of the narrative that is analyzed following critic Deborah A. Miranda and Silko's discussion of Yellow Woman's stories. Edward's and Hattie's relationships to their own gender roles and to the erotic are analyzed in comparison to the Sand Lizards' sexual practices and gynostemic gender balance. Finally, this work proposes that Silko's subversive use of free indirect speech makes this novel a mediational text, according to James Ruppert's concept of mediation. Therefore, by inviting readers to rethink their cultural biases, the stories in *Gardens in the Dunes* allow indigenous worldviews to reseed and outlast colonial violence.

Keywords: Leslie Marmon Silko. Indigenous gardening. *Gardens in the Dunes*.

RESUMO

O presente trabalho de conclusão de curso tem como objetivo investigar três temas no romance *Gardens in the Dunes*, de Leslie Marmon Silko: jardinagem, viagem, e sexualidade. Ao incorporar as perspectivas de personagens indígenas e não-indígenas à narração, o romance mostra como as diferentes heranças culturais de cada personagem afetam a relação deles com esses temas. Este trabalho inicia com uma discussão sobre o uso que o colonialismo de povoamento faz de uma estratégia de dominação genocida que Gilio-Whitaker denomina privação ambiental, que destrói jardins indígenas e rompe teias de relações de interdependência entre diversos seres. Vine Deloria, Jr. descreve essa interdependência através do conceito de universo moral. Assim, no romance, a jardinagem indígena é entendida como uma prática que envolve sustento e interdependência, diferentemente da visão da jardinagem como *hobby* para personagens não-indígenas. Em contraste, os jardins cultivados por personagens brancos são analisados em relação à forma como os jardineiros os organizam de acordo com diferentes tradições culturais. Enquanto que os jardins americanos são sustentados por ideias imperialistas e patriarcais características do século XIX relativas à terra, aos seres além-de-humanos e às práticas de jardinagem, os jardins na Europa estão intimamente ligados a tradições europeias pré-cristãs, como a adoração de pedras e bosques em Bath ou a adoração de cobras em Lucca. Além disso, em relação à viagem, há um contraste entre a jornada de Indigo, durante a qual a menina Sand Lizard coleta sementes para levar de volta para casa e cria laços afetivos com as anfitriãs europeias, e as expedições de Edward, seu tutor americano, que servem para contrabandear plantas exóticas que serão vendidas para investidores privados. A atitude de Indigo ao encontrar novos lugares e seres é descrita como cosmopolítica, de acordo com o conceito de Isabelle Stengers, por seu reconhecimento de seres além-de-humanos como agentes políticos. Além disso, o modo com que ela cria laços com novos seres é entendida através do conceito do sensível, proposto por David Abram, uma forma de perceber o mundo que é atenta a como outras formas de vida se comunicam. Outra dimensão da narrativa, a sexualidade, é analisada aqui a partir das contribuições de Deborah A. Miranda e da discussão que Silko faz das histórias da Mulher Amarela. As relações de Edward e Hattie com seus papeis de gênero e com o erótico são comparadas com as práticas sexuais e o equilíbrio ginostêmico de gênero dos sand lizard. Por fim, este trabalho propõe que o uso subversivo do discurso indireto livre faz com que *Gardens in the Dunes* seja um texto mediacional, de acordo com o conceito de James Ruppert de mediação. Desta forma, ao instigarem os leitores e leitoras a repensar suas influências culturais, as histórias que o romance conta permitem que cosmovisões indígenas se resemeiem e sobrevivam à violência colonial.

Palavras-chave: Leslie Marmon Silko. Jardinagem indígena. *Gardens in the Dunes*.

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INTRODUCTION: "THE MOST POLITICAL THING OF ALL"

Leslie Marmon Silko is a Laguna Pueblo writer born in 1948 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her third novel *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999) is primarily set in the region surrounding the Mojave Desert in the American Southwest at the turn of the twentieth century; it also features a trip across the United States and to England and Italy. In an interview with Ellen Arnold, Silko joked that after her previous novel *Almanac of the Dead* received criticism for being too political due to its raw and harsh account of settler violence and indigenous genocide, she decided to write an innocent novel "about gardens and flowers" to give the white male readership what it wanted from her (SILKO, 2000, p. 163). But soon after she started researching and writing, she realized that she "had actually stumbled into the most political thing of all—how you grow your food, whether you eat, the fact that the plant collectors followed the Conquistadores. [...] I realized that this was going to be a really political novel too" (Ibid., p. 164).

Revealing the politics behind gardens and flowers is one of the many achievements of *Gardens in the Dunes*, a novel which, much like her previous works, attests to Silko's ability and mastery of literary forms and, in the words of critic Gregory Wright, has enabled her to be "welcomed into the community of great American novelists" (WRIGHT, 1999, n.p). The fact that this novel skillfully appropriates from typically Western forms of narration has most certainly played a role in Wright's praise of it as a "fully-realized, robust novel in the finest tradition of the form" (Ibid., n.p). Although her use of techniques such as free indirect speech puts her side by side with Jane Austen, Henry James and Gustave Flaubert in terms of narrative technique, she also subverts their narrative tradition and, consequently, the European bourgeois ideology upon which these authors stand. Silko herself never attempts to leave behind the markers that identify the place from where she writes: she is an acclaimed Laguna Pueblo writer, whose work has always been profoundly committed to advancing indigenous ideas and agency and fostering honest examinations of US history, environmental justice, gender- and race-related issues and more—always from a native, Laguna Pueblo point of view. Since her debut book, *Laguna Woman: Poems* (1974), she has published eleven books ranging between novel, short story, autobiography, poetry, essay forms, and traditional stories.

In *The Invention of Native American Literature*, an investigation of a Native American literary history, Robert Dale Parker places Silko's work as a refreshing force among indigenous writers in the United States, since before her and other women contemporaries, including Paula

Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan, Louise Erdrich, and others, most successful Native American writers were men. He identifies a tradition among native men writers, spanning from John Joseph Matthews's *Sundown* (1934), through D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936) to N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), of writing about indigenous young men who become disconnected from their traditional cultures and undergo a process of reconciliation with their indigeneity, often finding in their people's culture the long sought answers about themselves and their relationship to the world, the land, and other people. Silko's 1977 debut novel *Ceremony* tells the story of Tayo, a character very similar to those found in the works of previous writers, but her perspective as a woman writer sheds new light on the topics handled before by men authors. Twenty-two years later, *Gardens in the Dunes* is her first novel that assumes a more admittedly feminist approach; for instance, most main characters that consistently display caring and considerate attitudes are women, whereas most male characters prove to be untrustworthy and receive some sort of penalty for their greed. In other respects, this novel explores many of the themes that were already present in her previous work and in Native American literature in general, such as the relationship to land and other-than-human beings[1], the native ways of life, indigenous worldviews, settler colonialism, resistance to violence and acculturation, among others.

The novel tells the story of two sisters, the last members of the fictional Sand Lizard people (apart from their mother that has gone missing), who are kidnapped from their home deep in the dunes of the Mojave Desert and separated from each other. From then on, the narrative switches back and forth between the two sisters. The oldest Sister Salt is taken to the Parker reservation, from where she escapes together with two friends, the Chemehuevi twins Maytha and Vedna. Her love interest, the black cook Big Candy, allows them to open a laundry business beside his beer and gambling business, which is located near the construction site to a dam that will redirect the course of the Colorado River towards Los Angeles. Sister Salt witnesses how the dam project brings devastating effects to animal and plant life in the area, let alone to the indigenous peoples who depend on the river water. She works at the dam construction site washing workers' clothes by day and having sex with those who pay her for it by night. When she gets pregnant, she suspects that the baby may be either from Big Candy or from Charlie, one of the workers. Despite caring for her during pregnancy, day by day Big Candy gets greedier with

[1] In this work, the term "other-than-human" refers to beings that enjoy existences other than human, avoiding the binary language of the term "non-human". In turn, the use of "more-than-human" is indebted to David Abram's *Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, in which he refers to a world where all beings participate; at times, this term also refers to a group of human and other-than-human beings.

the money from his business, and she gradually becomes weary of the dam site. Then, she starts planning to buy land with the Chemehuevi twins and move away to find her sister Indigo and raise her Sand Lizard baby in the old gardens. Meanwhile, Delena, a Yaqui Gypsy woman, steals Big Candy's money to buy weapons that will aid her people who are revolting in Mexico.

Indigo, whose journey comprises most of the novel, is taken to an Indian boarding school from which she manages to escape. She hides in a place that turns out to be a garden belonging to a well-to-do white couple. Their Amazonian monkey Linnaeus is the one who finds and first befriends her, followed by Hattie, who, assuming she is an orphan, insists with her husband, Edward, to let her keep the child during the summer before she is returned to the boarding school. At this point, we learn about Hattie's past as an early church history scholar who has been accused of heresy by her thesis committee and, around that same period, was sexually harassed by a university classmate. Later she married Edward, a botany enthusiast who works travelling to faraway locations and collecting rare plant species for private investors. In an orchid-collecting expedition to the Pará River in Brazil, his colleagues betrayed him and left him to die in a forest fire, and the incident caused him a painful leg injury. The failed enterprise left Edward in unstable financial conditions, so he decides to join a fuzzy citron scheme that requires him to travel to Corsica. He invites Hattie to join him and she insists on taking Indigo along. The trio then sets off on a trip during which they will visit different houses and gardens. The first stop happens at Oyster Bay, Long Island, where Hattie's parents and Edward's sister Susan live as neighbors. Despite Susan's hostility, Indigo makes good friends with her parrot; Susan decides to give it to Indigo as a bribe for her silence after she caught Susan in extramarital affairs with the gardener. From there, they board a ship to Bath, England, to visit Hattie's aunt Bronwyn, who welcomes them to her home in an old Norman cloister. Aunt Bronwyn makes good friends with Indigo and gives her seeds to plant at the Sand Lizard gardens. While onboard to Italy Hattie falls ill and is assaulted by an Australian doctor, with whom Edward had made friends, but to her dismay he discredits the assault as some confusion caused by the strong medicine she had taken. In Italy they make a short visit to Laura, the *professoressa*, Aunt Bronwyn's scholar friend who shows them her gardens in honor of pre-Christian European fertility goddesses, which impact Hattie greatly.

When in Corsica, neither Hattie nor Indigo know about Edward's intentions to steal the *Citrus medica* cuttings. They only learn about the real intent of the trip and their part in it as a pretense of innocence when the Italian authorities catch him smuggling and arrest him. Hattie realizes her husband was keeping from her the criminal reason for the trip, so she asks for a

divorce as soon as possible upon their return to the United States. Once there, she goes to Needles to help Indigo find her lost family. Meanwhile, Edward meets the Australian doctor again to start a new iron meteorite mining business, but he contracts pneumonia after spending a cold night at the iron mine. He dies as a consequence of the false treatment with morphine that his partner prescribes for him, but not before he trusts all Hattie's assets in the ore business controlled by the doctor. With Hattie's help, Indigo finds Sister Salt with the Chemehuevi twins not far from the old gardens. Before finding out that she is bankrupt, Hattie is raped and badly injured as she is on her way to visit Indigo. Out of her mind and full of anger, she sets half the town of Needles on fire. Finally, Indigo is back at the gardens with Sister Salt, her son Little Grandfather, Linnaeus and her parrot Rainbow, where they receive a visit from the Chemehuevi twins. Hattie sends them letters and money from Bath, where she is now living with Aunt Bronwyn, and the two are planning a visit to Laura's home in Italy.

The novel's narrative is told by a third-person omniscient narrator that often meshes its voice with that of the characters, providing us many moments where free indirect speech is widely deployed and we can dive into the characters' perceptions, memories, feelings and desires. Indigo, Hattie and Edward are the characters whose point of view readers get most access to, but even minor characters, such as Maytha, Vedna, Delena and Susan are given space for their thoughts to surface. The narrator's flexibility to move back and forth between a wide range of characters' points of view is combined with Silko's all-encompassing storytelling that closely resembles the Laguna Pueblo stories she describes in her 1981 essay "Language and literature from a Pueblo Indian perspective". The stories contain in themselves recipes, maps, information about harvest seasons, life advice, ritual instructions; stories that tie together all aspects of life to help the listener navigate their reality better. The many points of view and the comprehensive range of themes evocative of Pueblo storytelling provide literary critics looking into *Gardens in the Dunes* with a variety of topics, perspectives and cultural legacies to investigate, including but not limited to the Ghost Dance, religious syncretism, damming and treatment of water, gardening practices, sexuality and fertility, indigenous feminism, and others. In addition, taking Indigo on a journey through the European bourgeois world provides a constant contrast between Indigo's way of doing things and that of her white companions. A good dose of irony and humor can be felt in the passages where, upon arriving at a new garden or facing some sort of conflict, Indigo's point of view is presented right before or after Edward's or Hattie's, and we can realize how lost, anxious or arrogant they often sound.

This dissertation examines the contrast Silko creates between the characters' gardening practices and argues that these are intertwined with the way a gardener character relates to the world

and to the erotic. “The erotic” here should not be understood as restricted to sexual acts, but as related to the ability of creating and maintaining positive connections that are mutually beneficial while maintaining both sides’ autonomy to decide for themselves. It is no coincidence that Indigo’s way of bringing new plants into her garden is through the seeds and corms—the result of sexual reproduction in plants—given by friends as gifts, while Edward, who is incapable of building sexual intimacy with his wife, uses cuttings—a plant multiplication technique that does not involve sexual interaction and seeding. This is the type of contrast that is laid out throughout the novel and that, upon close examination, may reveal one of the many insights Silko offers her readership through her writing.

In short, my hypothesis is that the Sand Lizard way of gardening as practiced by Indigo, for its cosmopolitical and erotic attitude that mirrors Sand Lizard seed gathering and sexual alliance-building practices, counters settler violence grounded on imperialist views of nature and culture, and therefore constitutes a source of resistant survival strategies to the Sand Lizard sisters. The cosmopolitical and erotic attitude I am referring to is based on two markedly Sand Lizard moral teachings, both passed on to the girls by Grandma Fleet before she died. The first is that collecting different seeds and growing plants that are not endemic to Sand Lizard land out of curiosity is worth it, because often Sand Lizard people have been surprised by what the plants ended up bringing them; rarely ever will these different plants not have any use to the people. The second is that sex with strangers—and sex in general—is highly valued, because it favors positive relationships and cooperation with non-Sand Lizards. Not only that, but babies whose mom is Sand Lizard are always considered to be part of the people, since the “Sand Lizard mother’s body changed everything to Sand Lizard inside her” (SILKO, 1999, p. 202), as Sister Salt explains to the Chemehuevi girls.

Both principles, regarding seed collecting and sexuality, make up a distinctly Sand Lizard philosophical system. I am insisting on calling these “Sand Lizard” attitudes, and not “indigenous”, because throughout the novel stories are told of how other peoples’ (Mojave, Yuma, Apache, and others) opinions on the Sand Lizard are often that they are a little strange and unusual—they live in the dunes far away from the river, they cultivate plants they are not certain whether they can be eaten, they do not take prisoners in warfare. Their identity, and the moral principles just cited, are differentiated from other peoples’ in multiple instances in the novel, and so to name these cosmopolitical and erotic teachings indigenous would be a generalization in this case. This is not to say that cosmopolitics or alliance-building sexual pleasure are only found among the fictional Sand Lizard people—even in Silko’s other writings she describes similar principles in Laguna Pueblo stories, just like other authors do by mentioning their own peoples

or using the broader category of indigenous practices and epistemologies—but the specific operations of Sand Lizard cosmopolitics and erotics are the only indigenous worldviews that the readers have access to in the novel. However, often Sand Lizard ways are paralleled or contrasted to non-Sand Lizard approaches to gardening and to sexuality, since these are common themes in the lives of Edward, Hattie, Laura, Aunt Bronwyn, Susan, and others. Exploring these comparisons may contribute to enhancing our understanding of the novel.

In its disposition to both experiment with different plants and to foster mutually beneficial relationships motivated by pleasure and affinity, Sand Lizard gardening is epitomized in *Gardens in the Dunes* through Indigo's stewardship of gladiolus corms. Described by Edward as "quite vulgar" (SILKO, 1999, p. 295) and by Hattie as "garish and artificial" (Ibid., p. 245), the gladiolus is the plant that most calls Indigo's attention when she first sees them in Aunt Bronwyn's garden. She falls in love with the gladiolus flowers' bright colors and high stems (Figure 1). Later on, in Lucca, she learns about hybridization from Laura, who manipulates her gladiolus flowers to be colored black, the color that represents the earth and fertility to pre-Christian European cultures. She takes home gladiolus corms which Laura has given her, and when she finally gets back to the old gardens together with Sister Salt, Rainbow and Linnaeus, her aesthetic-driven desire to cultivate her own gladioli proves highly advantageous: they find out that the corms can be boiled to eat, and their delicious taste is approved by Sister Salt's friends, the Chemehuevi twins, who come to visit and bring information about the world outside the dunes.

Figure 1 - Gladiolus flowers

Source: Plant Instructions (2018, n.p)

Underlying Indigo's transformation of the gladiolus' meaning from frivolous to nutritious is a worldview that is integrative, creative, responsible and ecological. This work

describes this worldview, looking at how it surfaces in the novel and relates to other worldviews throughout the narrative, be it through commonality or conflict. The gladiolus storyline is one of the many instances, perhaps the most symbolic, through which Sand Lizard gardening demonstrates its potential to strengthen indigenous communities and to counter settler violence inventively, using the many tools native knowledge has at hand. Silko's novel is also a story that gives us tools to navigate reality, the most important of which is perhaps an awareness of our responsibility in reimagining and reconfiguring our relationships to the more-than-human world. For that, we must recognize the history of violence against indigenous peoples and listen to their voices—for both their insightful ecological knowledge and their demands for rights that guarantee the continuity of sustainable ways of life. This work proposes one possible way to listen to the indigenous perspectives through *Gardens in the Dunes*.

The following chapter focuses on investigating the many historical gardening legacies at play in the novel. Beginning with the centrality of gardening to indigenous peoples, given that plants are a way to obtain sustenance, this chapter analyzes Indigo's Sand Lizard gardening practices. Besides, it discusses settlers' use of environmental deprivation, a domination strategy that involves dismantling the interspecies balance in indigenous gardens in order to weaken native peoples' resistance. Finally, it examines the legacies behind the other gardens in the novel, namely those in California, Long Island, Bath and Lucca. The second chapter moves on to discuss and contrast Indigo's and Edward's travels, especially in their ways of meeting new places and beings. Indigo's travelling is described as deeply connected to the more-than-human life forms that she meets in new places, through which she establishes a web of relationships that help support her away from home. That attitude is contrasted to Edward's emotional distance from the world he meets. In the third chapter, Hattie's character development is explored through the prism of sexuality and gender. This chapter identifies in *Gardens in the Dunes* an indigenous erotics, which is connected to caring, creating and sustaining, as opposed to a mainstream Western erotics, which is tied to hedonistic and individualistic pleasure. Based on that, Hattie's story is understood as a movement from a Western patriarchal gender system that values masculine over feminine traits towards a more balanced and integrative view of gender promoted by indigenous cosmovisions.

Finally, this work considers that, by letting Indigo's point of view, along with that of characters from other cultures, surface into the third-person narration, Silko provides the reader with a back and forth movement between epistemologies. Such a movement may foster a recognition of cultural biases in readers, especially those who hold worldviews similar to

Edward's, Susan's or Hattie's. Thus, Silko puts a typically Euro-American literary form to a subversive use, providing readers with a native outlook on Western culture that is responsible for the deeply political character of this novel. Hence, Silko's story helps plant the seeds of a continuity to indigenous modes of thinking which regard land and the erotic in a more balanced and long-lasting way.

1 “THE PLANTS LISTEN”: INDIGENOUS GARDENING AND STORYTELLING

1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL DEPRIVATION AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

There is a fundamental difference between the Sand Lizard gardens and all the other gardens in *Gardens in the Dunes*: the Sand Lizard gardens are not real estate—they have not been commodified, the Sand Lizards have not bought them. Instead, the Sand Lizard people belong to and care for a land whose boundaries are not rigid, much less previously drawn on a map, and the Sand Lizards are profoundly aware of how the successful growth of their plants is affected by beings living far from the piece of land they use to plant. This is reflected in how far Sand Lizard gardening reaches: the girls learn how to nurture the plants under their care in the dunes, but also how to collect fruit in the palm grove nearby while leaving some behind to other animals; they learn that the rattlesnake that lives at the spring nearby needs to be respected in order for them to have available water; they know that wherever they go they must collect seeds to bring back home. These teachings signal that, in a way, gardening is not an activity performed within an enclosed, delimited territory with clear boundaries, but a way of relating to the surrounding world that the Sand Lizard people carry wherever they go, because events that happen anywhere in their ecosystem can enhance or hinder the growth of their plants. In addition to that, gardening is not only related to seeding, watering and pruning plants, but it also ensures the survival of a wide range of species that help in the task of maintaining the garden. In this sense, gardening for native cultures requires a delicate web of relationships between human and other-than-human beings to be maintained in balance, since it is only with this balance that water can be guaranteed, that insects can fulfill their pollinizer/decomposer roles, that bigger animals can eat the plants and take seeds elsewhere, and so on.

What happens in many instances in the novel is that this delicate interspecies web sustaining indigenous communities is threatened or directly disrupted in some way by the white settlers, who fail to perceive life in indigenous land as interdependent. For instance, during their stay in Long Island some farmers find Indigo taking a walk through their farms and eating some of their corn. Assuming she is a Matinnecock Indian, they take her to the Matinnecocks. She stays with them for a few hours before Hattie comes to pick her up and learns that they have become dependent almost exclusively on seafood because “the land where their gardens used to grow was

taken" (SILKO, 1999, p. 169). Because of the shortage of food, some kinds of food could not be harvested directly from their land anymore. In order to feed themselves, the Matinnecock started producing shell buttons that could be sold for money enough to buy the lard, flour and salt they now needed, which inevitably inserted them into the settlers' economy and diet. Not coincidentally, upon their arrival in Long Island, Edward learns that most of the houses are owned by rich families who use them as summer houses and later is surprised by the sheer number of new construction sites, which means that the Matinnecock were probably dispossessed of land and food resources in favor of people who will not even inhabit the region for most of the year. This is one example in the novel of how settler colonialism harms the sustainability of indigenous communities, setting in motion a series of consequences that are often invisible to the mainstream eye.

Drawing from the example of the Matinnecock, but also of other Southwestern tribes depicted in the novel as being forced into reservation life, we must consider that, in the history of American colonization, one of the major tactics used by colonizers to disarticulate and weaken native communities was to attack precisely the internal cohesiveness and balance of the delicate relationships playing out in native gardens. In *As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight For Environmental Justice from Colonization to Standing Rock*, Colville scholar Dina Gilio-Whitaker proposes the term "environmental deprivation" to name a form of environmental injustice that targets tribal relationships to the land and those living in it, thus relating this concept to "historical processes of land and resource dispossession calculated to bring about the destruction of Indigenous lives and cultures" (GILIO-WHITAKER, 2019, p. 39). Removal from ancestral lands and suppression of sources of food, energy, water, clothing and ritual materials are examples of environmental deprivation. She contextualizes her analysis of environment-harming colonial strategies as part of settlers' deployment of a wide range of tactics of domination, including slavery, indentured servitude, acculturation and assimilation, persecution, scorched earth policies, and others. These were not isolated acts of violence, neither were they homogeneous across the territory, but rather strategically combined and aimed differently at certain regions and peoples. Each native nation has their own experience and memory of how and which of these colonial tactics were directed against them and of their own history of resistance. By calling attention to the deliberate destruction perpetrated by colonizers, Gilio-Whitaker joins a common struggle among indigenous scholars to debunk the myth that the radical decrease of native population numbers in the Americas was caused mainly by an unintentional, accidental spread of European diseases which indigenous people had no immunity to.

Gilio-Whitaker's focus on environmental deprivation is also a response to contemporary environmental justice movements often failing to account for indigenous peoples' relationship to the land and for how historical processes of dispossession were carried out. This incapacity often results in the misguided use of historically inappropriate law terms and in unfair court decisions that disfavor indigenous peoples in land disputes, among other shortcomings. In the task to correct these injustices, identifying how environmental deprivation has inflicted and continues to inflict harm on indigenous communities is paramount. For instance, issues such as malnutrition and starvation can be traced back to the depletion of diverse traditional food sources; poverty can be traced back to the dismantlement of vital trade routes (including ones that reached as far as South America); and the material and psychological consequences of deprivation and relocation are strongly tied to "pervasive social problems such as substance abuse, mental illness, violence against women, and high suicide rates in Indigenous communities" (GILIO-WHITAKER, 2019, p. 49). These environmental issues do not belong to an immutable bygone past, but to the present-day life of these communities as a long-lasting consequence of ongoing settler colonialism.

Then, Gilio-Whitaker closely examines some of the most systematically harmful environmental deprivation cases and their role in American history. The enterprise of railroad construction, for instance, greatly accelerated westward colonial expansion (railroad tracks amounted to 115,000 miles in 1880, compared to 3,000 miles in 1840) and, not coincidentally, accompanied the beginning of the confinement of many native populations in reservations. Resistance to this process sparked multiple revolts across the country in a period known as the Indian Wars. Seen through the perspective of the settler government, the railroads were the technological advancement necessary to consolidate a superior nation, but from the native perspective it represented "the death knell to an independent Indigenous existence" (Ibid., p. 58) and the impediment for "entire cultures to survive in their environments and maintain responsibilities to their nonhuman relations" (Ibid., p. 57). This is largely portrayed in *Gardens in the Dunes*, from the main characters' train ride that crosses the nation from West Coast to East Coast, to the concerns of Grandma Fleet about avoiding being taken to a reservation at whatever cost.

Gilio-Whitaker also relates the process of dam building, which started some decades later around the turn of the twentieth century and further removed many tribes from their ancestral lands, including the Ahwahneechee Miwok for the O'Shaughnessy Dam in California (1923); Nez Perce, Umatilla, Yakama, and Warm Springs families for the dam projects along the Columbia River (1930); the Seneca for the Kinzua Dam in New York (1965); and others. This

stripped them from access to clean water, harming their ability to cultivate traditional crops and to maintain fishing practices. Among the many impacts of damming, Gilio-Whitaker lists “the extinction of indigenous species of fish; disappearance of birds; loss of forests, wetlands, and farmlands; erosion of coastal deltas; and many other issues” (GILIO-WHITAKER, 2019, p. 60). For the Maricopa Pima, the impairment of their ability to grow food caused by the Coolidge Dam resulted in starvation and, much later, a diabetes epidemic. We see this impact in *Gardens in the Dunes* through the many native communities that were forced into reservations in order to build the Colorado River dam. Later on, the mining of coal, iron, uranium and other metals inside or nearby reservations in the second half of the twentieth century called under- or unemployed indigenous people to work on toxic mines without appropriate protection. Mining also contaminates whole communities through the leaking of radioactive material into the air or water, rendering usual water sources poisonous and, as with the Diné (Navajo), resulting in rising cancer rates for generations to come (Ibid., p. 65). This also appears in the novel when, after their return from Europe, Edward joins an ore business with prospective mines located in the American Southwest. Other examples of environmental deprivation include the mass killing of buffalo populations in the Northern and Southern Plains, where they had “for centuries been an abundant resource that provided food and nearly everything else” for Plains Indians (Ibid., p. 58). The killing of the buffalo increased seriously after the US army met militant resistance to the policies of confinement in reservations and decided to reduce buffalo population numbers (from tens of million to fewer than one thousand) as an environmental deprivation strategy to weaken indigenous resistance and force them into reservation life.

Therefore, the violence aimed at indigenous communities throughout the last five centuries, using multiple tactics of domination, suppression, assimilation and disruption, has caused harm to a degree that it becomes suitable to consider it genocidal. And, as Gilio-Whitaker points out, although the US government still does not acknowledge this historical violence as genocide, but as “mistreatment” (Ibid., p. 49), these destructive acts—including those that are related to environmental deprivation—fit into the definition of genocide as stated in the United Nations’ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide:

> any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; *deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part*; imposing measures intended to

> prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (UNITED NATIONS, 1948, n.p, added emphasis)

Moreover, in a document published by the UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG), listed under "Genocidal Acts", is the following: "Less obvious methods of destruction, such as the *deliberate deprivation of resources needed for the group's physical survival* and which are available to the rest of the population, such as clean water, food and medical services" (OSAPG apud GILIO-WHITAKER, 2019, p. 51, added emphasis)[2]. As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz points out in *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, the settler government's goal was to "terminate their [indigenous peoples'] existence as peoples—not as random individuals" (DUNBAR-ORTIZ, 2014, p. 6). And for that purpose, the disruption of interspecies relationships in the indigenous gardens played an important role. Within this historical framework, it becomes apparent that the contrast between different gardens as narrated in *Gardens in the Dunes*, especially when it comes to Susan's garden and the Sand Lizard garden, is not an attempt to present equally valid albeit different perspectives for seeing and acting in the world, but an exploration of what is at the root of settler violence and destruction, what causes and what are the everyday destructive consequences of settlers' disconnection from the land. As Dunbar-Ortiz emphasizes, what is at stake here are not different worldviews that coexist and exchange elements somewhat peacefully, which would be a naive, multicultural rendering of history, acting as an "insidious smoke screen meant to obscure the fact that the very existence of the country is a result of the looting of an entire continent and its resources" (Ibid., p. 5). Instead of adopting such a multicultural approach, which promises inclusion but in fact only superficially accommodates the demands from marginalized peoples in order not to destabilize the structures of dominance, Silko reveals through her story the subjective workings of different worldviews. In this way, she brings to the surface how the settler's attitude of dominance attempts to annihilate the other and would succeed, were it not for the resistance and relentless resilience of native peoples.

Gilio-Whitaker's analysis of environmental deprivation and the recognition of American settler colonialism as genocidal provide a more honest look at US history and the destruction that lies at the root of the nation's constitution and expansion. Dunbar-Ortiz asserts that the purpose of the genocidal enterprise in the US was—and still is, because this process has not ended—to

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[2] OFFICE OF THE UN SPECIAL ADVISER ON THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE. **Analysis Framework**, [s.d.]. Disponível em: https://www.un.org/ar/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg_analysis_framework.pdf. Acesso em: 20 abr. 2021

make land available for white settlers and their projects, serving not only the US government's interests but also settlers' private and personal interests. "Everything in US history is about the land", she writes, "who oversaw and cultivated it, fished its waters, maintained its wildlife; who invaded and stole it; how it became a commodity ('real estate') broken into pieces to be bought and sold on the market" (DUNBAR-ORTIZ, 2014, p. 1). This unveils the central role that theft of land has played in US history and helps undo the American origin myth that paints genocide as a mere side-effect of what was only the natural expansion process of a more civilized culture. Furthermore, in the same way that Dunbar-Ortiz urges white US historians to revise their own people's history and stop their complacent denial and disregard of genocide and colonialism, readers must remain aware that seeing through this colonial framework of US history is fundamental for us to read *Gardens in the Dunes* honestly and critically.

Such an honest and critical reading of *Gardens in the Dunes* may help raise questions regarding how imperialist worldviews have justified violence and enabled characters like Edward and Susan to remain oblivious to the harmful consequences of their actions, which include the commodification of other-than-human lives and the destruction of ecosystems. Likewise, it may foreground how the novel's indigenous knowledge, spirituality, and stewardship stand in opposition to Euro-American settlers' worldviews, and what insights the novel itself offers to its readership. In a recent interview to the Brazilian television program "Roda Viva", when asked about the reasons why the general public is usually ignorant of indigenous struggles and environmental issues, Ailton Krenak, a Krenak philosopher and leader, argued that the difference between indigenous cosmovisions and the white people's worldview is "in the heart". According to him, there is a cognitive gap that prevents whites from taking responsibility for the world's environmental problems and supporting the indigenous fight for land rights (KRENAK, 2021). The next section presents the indigenous ecological principles that guide Sand Lizard gardening and will later allow Indigo to navigate through a world with "incomplete hearts"[3].

1.2 GARDENS AS WEBS OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

While Western science promotes minimal commitment of knowledge to a specific place, valuing instead a detachment from circumstance and place to validate findings as truth, indigenous knowledge is built in relationship to the land. In "How (!) is an Indian?", Creek critic

[3] The expression is used here in reference to Roberta J. Hill's talk entitled "A Heart Complete: Earth Knowledge, Native American Literature and Social Justice", in which she argues that industrial society capitalizes on "keep[ing] young people locked into a stifling immaturity" (HILL, 2001, 39).

Jana Sequoya Magdaleno states that in rough terms Western logic is one of *space*, while indigenous logic is tied to *place*. She adds that "those raised in (or more influenced by) American Indian traditions are thus more likely to point to familiar geographical features—the hill or river, for instance, and say, 'That is our culture'" (MAGDALENO, 2000, p. 288), thereby demonstrating how close the relationship between indigenous peoples and their land is. And as I have argued before, the land upon which they co-create and participate in a community of shared responsibility and interconnected life is precisely the garden in the native sense, meaning that the whole biosphere within the Sand Lizard's relational reach is conceptualized by them as "the old gardens" and is therefore under their care. In exchange for their gardening work, the other species take care of each other and of the Sand Lizard people, too. That notion differs greatly from the garden in the Western sense, which means the space that is contained within one's land property apart from the house or whatever enclosed building. The garden in the indigenous sense has no established, drawn-on-paper limits.

Silko's work is full of Native American characters who exist in close co-responsibility with other-than-human beings around them, including so-called "inanimate" beings such as the sun or the rain clouds. Tayo, the main character of her 1977 debut novel *Ceremony*, is throughout the story intertwined with his natural surroundings, and the health of other-than-human beings is closely related to his own trauma healing process. In the beginning of the story, while he is still in a traumatized state after coming back from the war, the rain clouds have not appeared in a long time and the sun is too hot. The land is dry and so the plants die from thirst and suffocation from the hot air, which also leaves his cattle thirsty and hungry. As his healing journey reaches its conclusion and he cultivates a growing understanding of the connections between the war he fought in, the nuclear bombs, the opened toxic mines in his people's reservation, the life around him, and himself, the rain clouds come back and "to the east, south, and west, as far as he could see, the land was green again" (SILKO, 1977, p. 234).

In *Gardens in the Dunes,* the rain clouds also mean at once material and spiritual nourishment for the Sand Lizards, because they represent both the ancestors that came back in the form of rain clouds and the source of water that will allow the Sand Lizard gardens to grow for another season. Sand Lizards demonstrate their responsibility toward the land by adequately caring for the plants according to the instructions of their ancestral mother, the Sand Lizard herself, and by never being greedy about their food. When the Sand Lizard gardens received too many hungry refugees escaping from being forced into reservation life, everyone was so hungry that they ended up eating too much, even the seeds that were put aside to plant the following year.

This had a tragic ending: the gardens were unable to reseed and the people, starving, had to leave the dunes and move to nearby towns or reservations. This is told by Grandma Fleet to the two young sisters so that they learn not to make the mistake of greed again. Their culture is thus sustained by stories that reinforce centuries-long balanced relations tying one being to another—the rain clouds to the gardens and the people, the plants to the animals, the animals to the people, the people to the rain clouds and the water spring near the dunes, the water spring to the rattlesnake who lives in it; and so it goes endlessly.

Complementing the cautionary tale of greediness, the Sand Lizard origin story offers positive gardening lessons that aim at sustainability and longevity. In the beginning of the novel, before the girls first leave the gardens, Grandma Fleet tells them about the old teachings of their people's mother, the Sand Lizard herself:

> Grandma Fleet told them the old gardens had always been there. The old-time people found the gardens already growing, planted by the Sand Lizard, a relative of Grandfather Snake, who invited his niece to settle there and cultivate her seeds. Sand Lizard warned her children to share: Don't be greedy. The first ripe fruit of each harvest belongs to the spirits of our beloved ancestors, who come to us as rain; the second ripe fruit should go to the birds and wild animals, in gratitude for their restraint in sparing the seeds and sprouts earlier in the season. Give the third ripe fruit to the bees, ants, mantises, and others who cared for the plants. A few choice pumpkins, squash, and bean plants were simply left on the sand beneath the mother plants to shrivel dry and return to the earth. Next season, after the arrival of the rain, beans, squash, and pumpkins sprouted up between the dry stalks and leaves of the previous year. Old Sand Lizard insisted her gardens be reseeded that way because human beings are undependable; they might forget to plant at the right time or they might not be alive next year. (SILKO, 1999, p. 14-15)

This story has multiple layers of meaning and instruction. It encodes a moral understanding of the Sand Lizards' duty as gardeners, establishing a covenant between the Sand Lizard herself and her children to provide means for the gardens to reseed themselves in case the people are not capable of fulfilling gardening duties next season. The gardens are planned and managed so as to allow plants to outlast humans, because in case other humans come to the gardens or other animals need the plants for nourishment, they will be there, as prosperous as ever. Aside from that, it also instructs Sand Lizard gardeners to offer part of the harvest to other fundamental participants in the gardens' growth: the many animals and insects and the ancestors in the form of rain clouds. In encouraging sharing and reseeding independent from humans, the story sets the people as merely one among the many beings responsible for the gardens and, likewise, merely one among many that depend on them to live. This differs radically from a view

of gardening as a hobby or a fashion trend, the latter of which is markedly present in Susan's practices discussed later in the next section.

Furthermore, the plants cultivated in the gardens in the dunes are almost all edible: the Sand Lizard people grow corn, sunflowers (Figure 2), pumpkin, beans, amaranth and apricot trees because nutrition for themselves and for their other-than-human relatives is paramount. Back in the old times, when many Sand Lizards still lived in the gardens, both the work and the reward of gardening was shared among the whole community: "Each person had plants to care for, although the harvest was shared by everyone" (SILKO, 1999, p. 16). After most Sand Lizard people moved near the Colorado River to get easier access to water and ended up mixing with other tribes, Grandma Fleet continues to prefer the protection of the dry dunes terrain: "Farming was easy along the river but getting along with the authorities was not" (Ibid., p. 48). Terre Ryan remarks that, accepting the difficulty of cultivating deep into the desert, the Sand Lizard "traditionally occupied the dunes and farmed in concert with their region's seasonal availability of water" (RYAN, 2007, p. 119), learning to adapt their practices to the web of life surrounding them rather than stubbornly trying to circumvent their environmental constraints.

Figure 2 – Sunflowers in the Mojave Desert

Source: DesertUSA (s.d., n.p)

This resonates with another character from *Ceremony*, Uncle Josiah, who, while studying cattle raising to start a new business, is surprised by the stubbornness of the instructional books "written by white people who did not think about drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles, which the cattle had to live with" (SILKO, 1977, p. 75). He then says, "[w]e'll have to do things our own way. Maybe we'll even write our own book, *Cattle Raising on Indian Land*, or how to raise

cattle that don't eat grass or drink water" (SILKO, 1977, p. 75). His remarks on cattle seem to stem from something else he says to Tayo much earlier in the story, that "only humans resisted what they saw outside themselves. Animals did not resist. But they persisted, because they became part of the wind. 'Inside, Tayo, inside the belly of the wind'" (Ibid., p. 27). For Uncle Josiah humans have become so caught up in our own conviction that our superior intelligence will lead to better outcomes that we fail to listen and adapt to the influence of other life forms happening around us. In this respect, the Sand Lizards are proud to *persist*, making the hard choice of adapting to rough desert conditions, becoming "part of the wind".

Of course her choice to remain hidden is risky, and Grandma Fleet is well aware that "it was true their kind [Sand Lizard] was disappearing" (SILKO, 1999, p. 48), but she remains steadfast against moving near the river and having to pay the price with their autonomy to farm and gather their own food, their religious freedom, and more importantly, their physical and cultural integrity, constantly threatened by the authorities' kidnapping of Indian children and imprisonment in boarding schools. Good thing is that, in order to create and maintain a sustainable way of life in the dry desert land, Grandma Fleet has her people's ancient resources and knowledge, combining gardening skills, storytelling, and nurturing and caring for lives other than her own. This knowledge is passed on to Indigo and Sister Salt with the intention that they will be able to continue growing the gardens, but it ends up being just as fitting to orient the sisters in their separate journeys through the non-Sand Lizard world before they can go back home. The fact that their Sand Lizard cultural background helps them navigate a reality that could be seen as unbearable—after all, they were taken away from home, forced into often violent social contexts that they had never experienced before, all that without the presence of any of their family—attests to the self-reliance and resourcefulness that they have. Their keen sense of orientation and fast strategy building is arguably provided by the reciprocal principle of familiarity they feel towards all living beings around them. As critic Stephanie Li argues, "[i]n *Gardens in the Dunes*, Silko affirms the notion that to mother is to tell stories that include children in a narrative that connects them to other people and to the natural world" (LI, 2009, p. 21); mothering, in this sense, is not at all related to biology, but to the activity of raising the tribe's children and introducing them as co-creators of the lifeworld. The girls are mothered by Grandma Fleet and, through her stories and nurturing, they are included as members of a more-than-human community that may be found anywhere. In section 3, I argue that belonging and acting as a responsible member of a web of life is what makes Indigo's cosmopolitanism, or instead cosmopolitics, so much more

inventive, respectful, and prosperous than Edward's multiple failed travels, which had only destructive intentions and outcomes.

One of the most vital lessons Grandma Fleet passes on concerns the respect the girls should always have for the plants: "The plants listen, she told them. Always greet each plant respectfully. Don't argue or fight around the plants—hard feelings cause the plants to wither" (SILKO, 1999, p. 14). Thus, the Sand Lizard girls develop an acute sensibility for the feelings, desires, and needs of life forms with which they interact and which are codependent with them. Such a deep respect is also present in Aunt Bronwyn's garden in Bath and Laura's garden in Lucca, and may be linked to a way of perceiving all life forms as constituted relationally, in the way they affect other life forms.

In "Rethinking the animate, re-animating thought", anthropologist Tim Ingold articulates a critique of the concept of "animism", traditionally used in anthropology and psychology to name the attribution of characteristics of aliveness to beings that are, in fact, lifeless, like a child who has long conversations with trees. According to conventional use, "animism" is the cognitive projection of the ability to feel emotions, develop personalities and make decisions onto beings that cannot do these things. His argument is that, behind "animism", there is a completely different way of seeing life that is often overlooked. He argues, "the animacy of the lifeworld, in short, is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but is rather ontologically prior to their differentiation" (INGOLD, 2006, p. 10). The very split between spirit and substance that sustains the concept of animism is entirely non-existent in indigenous cosmovisions. Through this argument, Ingold calls attention to these cultures' ontological perspectives that ethnocentric scholars invalidate.

According to the epistemic principles of modern science, which guide Western thought, being alive is something made possible by a certain configuration of carbon atoms in structures that form cells. Cells are the quintessential producers of life: as long as they are exchanging certain elements through their membranes and transforming external fuel into internal energy, a certain organism can be said to be alive. Biological individuals capable of containing life are hierarchically distributed from most to least "complex": humans come first, followed by animals—which apparently humans are sufficiently different from—, plants, fungi, and other microorganisms. Rocks, clouds, sand, sun, moon and winds are examples of categorically inanimate beings. This perspective proposes that life is a *characteristic held by individuals*, regardless of the way they interact in the world. Ingold suggests that an adequate image to represent this view of life forms is a circle: an individual organism surrounded by a membrane

that separates the internal contents from the environment and mediates the interactions across it, in such a way that "the organism is 'in here', the environment 'out there'" (INGOLD, 2006, p. 12). In short, Western thought understands life as that which emanates from cell-containing organisms, isolated from their environments by a membrane, individually occupying the inanimate surface of the earth alongside other individual beings and only at times interacting with them.

A different perspective is that of indigenous ontologies, according to which life is what emanates from the relationships and exchanges between beings. For these relationships to happen, cells are not exactly required. A rock may accumulate heat from the sun and warm a lizard that decides to rest on top of it; despite the fact that the sun and the rock are not made up of cells, a meaningful association was created between them and the lizard. The important information about life forms, in this perspective, is not what their membranes and inner contents are made of, but rather in what types of relationship beings participate. Life is what happens when all sorts of beings exchange fluxes of energy in their interactions, instead of within a single organism. Contrasting with the previous image of the enclosed circle, Ingold proposes the image of a web of flowing arrows to represent indigenous worldviews. Each arrow is a relationship which crosses other relationships over time and enters into an endless moving web of flows and encounters. Everything, from the earthworms and moss, to the sun and the clouds, runs its energy along traces of life happening and transforming themselves all the time.

> In this depiction there is no inside or outside, and no boundary separating the two domains. Rather there is a trail of movement or growth. Every such trail traces a relation. But the relation is not between one thing and another — between the organism 'here' and the environment 'there'. It is rather a trail along which life is lived: one strand in a tissue of trails that together make up the texture of the lifeworld. (...) It is a field not of interconnected points but of interwoven lines, not a network but a meshwork. (Ibid., p. 13)

To indigenous modes of thought, all beings grow and affect one another through this complex meshwork, actively participating in the creation of its entanglements. Indigenous cosmovisions promote an awareness of the relational and inventive reality of being alive in a world that is, in its entirety, also alive. The land is alive, so is the sky and the air we breathe, despite their aliveness not showing up the same way humans' aliveness does, despite their chemical structures not being the same as ours. The important thing is that everyone contributes their partial role in constantly and responsibly affecting one another in a cosmos that is always becoming, always about to bloom.

In “If You Think about it, You Will See that it is True”, Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr. asserts that modern and native science are founded upon completely different epistemological bases. Modern science’s methodology consists in individualizing and dividing an object of study into the smallest parts possible and testing experimental findings in controlled replicable circumstances, which radically limits the spectrum of things that can be investigated and places a high value in finding absolute truths. In turn, indigenous knowledge focuses more on explaining the relationships between all the events and beings that the people identify as demanding to be explained. Everyone’s (including other-than-human beings’) experiences are worthy of consideration, not only those that allow for replication and analysis by an objective, disinterested observer. He explains that native science findings are always accommodated within the people’s previous knowledge of the world, not breaking apart from it, because their epistemological systems are fundamentally inclusive—even of unexplainable facts. As Deloria puts it: “There cannot be such a thing as an anomaly in this kind of framework: Some things are accepted because there is value in the very mystery they represent” (DELORIA, JR., 1999, p. 46). The epistemological task is therefore to offer a comprehensive and appropriate “pattern of interpretation” for everything of relevance in the world.

According to Deloria, this epistemological task derives from indigenous knowledge’s ultimate goal: “finding the proper moral and ethical road upon which human beings should walk” (Ibid., p. 43), which is different from the pursuit of universal and absolute truths by modern science. In the native view, the universe inhabited by humans and other beings is fundamentally a moral one. In “the moral universe”, everyone needs to act appropriately, respecting one’s personality and place in the world, in order to benefit the community as a whole. That is why the knowledge has to be inclusive: to properly orient people about how to live responsibly in the diverse circumstances life offers. Being a member of the moral universe requires learning, and that is why everyone goes through personal growth: observing the surrounding events, learning from elders who have already observed a lot, listening to the stories, being put to test, being advised against or encouraged in their conduct, etc.. Since humans also have responsibilities in maintaining a balanced web of life, any harm caused to other life forms needs to have a purpose and to allow species to regenerate and enjoy their lives as well. Native knowledge is thus always contextualized, creative, always established in relationship to other-than-human parts, and its goal is to allow everyone to keep living their lives well. As Deloria writes: “In the moral universe all activities, events, and entities are related, and consequently it does not matter what kind of existence an entity enjoys, for the responsibility is always there for it to participate in the

continuing creation of reality" (DELORIA, JR., 1999, p. 47). This shared communal responsibility is always established in relation to that people's land and the specific animals, weather beings and plants in it, whose lives are interdependent with the people's lives. Deloria proposes that spiritual and material covenants that tie everyone together are often settled in old time stories that help keep participants in check for their rights and duties in the maintenance of the community. This is precisely the case for the Sand Lizard stories and gardening practices, which are the backbone of Indigo's and Sister Salt's confidence in their ability to handle their lives outside the gardens.

In a passage while the girls are learning how to collect food from other animals' nests and dig up roots to eat during the months before harvest, Silko presents in a snippet how the Sand Lizards' covenants of reciprocal responsibility with other-than-human beings work:

> She instructed them to be careful whenever they broke into the pack rat's nest to raid the stores of seeds and mesquite beans.
> "Old Ratty does all the work for you, so don't harm her!" Grandma Fleet showed them how to close up the rat's nest after they took what they wanted. Years before, when the refugees flocked to the old gardens, hunger drove the people to eat the pack rats; but the hunger was far worse afterward because there were no pack rats left to gather and store seeds. (SILKO, 1999, p. 47)

The pack rats, referred to with the affection of a friend by Grandma Fleet, have a recognized and respected role in keeping Sand Lizards nourished during the tough months where harvest time has not come yet. No harm should be done because it would bring no good in the long run to neither of the parts. Greed, in this passage, arises from the alienating habit of looking only into the immediate future without thinking of long-term consequences. It is, then, with her baggage of valuing longevity, continuity, participation and respect for other beings that, after getting kidnapped by the police and escaping the boarding school, Indigo decides to embark on the trip with Hattie and Edward in the hopes of soon being able to return home and find her sister.

1.3 REVERSE MIGRATION: GARDENING AND STORYTELLING LEGACIES

Hattie is outside planning garden reforms at her new home in California when she discovers Indigo, who has just escaped the Indian boarding school, lying under the lilac bushes. The reforms are Hattie's own way to resume her mother-in-law's husbandry, which was interrupted 10 years ago after she died. She and Edward Palmer recently got married and she is just getting used to the Riverside estate across the country after living in the East Coast all her

life. At this point, Edward is away for an expedition to the Bahamas and Key West to collect specimens and buy ancient artifacts for resale in the United States, and Hattie plans to surprise him when he returns with beautifully reformed gardens, as she wants to "assure Edward that she was not at all bothered that the expedition had come so soon after their wedding" (SILKO, 1999, p. 73). Her work as a gardener here is closely related to her role as a wife, which she wants to fulfill properly perhaps in order to compensate Edward for the fact that he has married a heretic. Hattie's mother, Mrs. Abbott, makes it a point to tell Hattie that she does not deserve Edward's love, since she is constantly reaffirming that "he was the only gentleman willing to take a heretic to be his wife" (Ibid., p. 75). Her mother disapproves of her pursuit of scholarly knowledge, and she keeps reminding Hattie that "no man wanted a professor for a wife" (Ibid., p. 73). Her father, Mr. Abbott, who greatly believes in John Stuart Mill's theories on women's education, is the one supporting Hattie's wishes to become a scholar of early church history—indeed, he considers Hattie's intelligence formidable.

In a way, Hattie's marriage to Edward offers her the possibility to redeem her heretic soul, not before the church, but before upper-middle class American society. Her gardening plans are a facet of her effort to leave her religious scandal in the past and satisfy her mother's wishes by fitting in the role of a good wife, something she never before aspired to be. The abandoned garden is not the only one in their estate: Edward has continued taking care of his father's lemon and orange groves that extend for acres after his father died. In "A Gynostemic Revolution: Some Thoughts about Orchids, *Gardens in the Dunes*, and Indigenous Feminism at Work", Deborah A. Miranda cleverly remarks that the Palmer's garden has two spheres: while the greenhouse with orchids and other spaces for flower cultivation were Edward's mother's achievement and represented the feminine, the lemon and orange groves were Edward's father's laboratory for grafting and hybridizing new species and represented the masculine. At the age of seven, Edward was deemed old enough to stay in Riverside with his father while his mother and sister Susan visited Long Island during the six hottest months of the year. During these periods, he cried because he had been left behind, but "did not feel as lonely in the greenhouse, surrounded by his mother's orchids" (Ibid., p. 91). On the other hand, he grew to hate even more the odors inside his father's orangery workshop. With time, he adapted to the (lack of) language of his father, who "tolerated him as long as he did not speak unless spoken to" (Ibid., p. 91). From him, he learned how to graft and experiment with his father's *Citrus* trees; their hybridizations resulted in trees that gave lemons, grapefruits, and tangerines all in the same plant. What is interesting to notice is that these experiments brought no benefit to Edward's family or to the ecosystem: as Miranda

notices, "Edward's father is a man who is obsessed with constructing an end product not for beauty, profit or sustenance, but as a gamble, casual messing around with the ways life is constructed [...]. He cultivates an imitation of creativity" (MIRANDA, 2007, p. 137). His grafting gambles are self-absorbed and alienated from the world around him just like Edward's "scientific" money-making enterprise: groves of orange are not endemic to arid California deserts. In light of Ian Tyrrell's comparative study of Californian and Australian horticulture, *True Gardens of the Gods*, which illuminates the process through which both these arid frontier zones were subjected to colonizers' "impulse to create gardens", Ruth Blair explains both Edward's and Hattie's gardening projects as aesthetic ones, which had "moral and somewhat utopian underpinnings" of acclimatizing non-desert species to the often absurdly hot weather, creating a more Eden-resembling landscape (BLAIR, 2012/2013, p. 19). His father's botanist obsession becomes Edward's own, with the difference that his father was deeply bored by the idea of transforming his groves into business—which could perhaps have returned to the family the huge sums of money he spent on weekend gambling trips. Edward, on the contrary, uses his informal knowledge of botany to bring plants from (often Third World) countries on demand by private investors. His obsession now becomes not so much piecing together parts of plants for fun, but to "discover a new plant species that would bear his name" (SILKO, 1999, p. 78), further imprinting in the more-than-human world his meaningless, careless dominance.

In turn, the "feminine" garden has been taken over by overgrown white wisteria, lilacs, yellow and white cascading and climbing roses, white lilies, white irises and white bougainvillea; when Indigo roams around the garden at sunset and encounters the red garden, she mentions all sorts of red flowers: red peonies, red dahlias, red poppies, bright red cosmos, scarlet hollyhocks, blood red dianthus. But these flowers grew too out of control during the time they were neglected, and Hattie now walks through them with pen and paper in hand, like the scholar she is, taking notes of all the changes she wants to make in order to imprint, too, her own vision. Her vision, however, already shows signs of her openness to plants' powers that go beyond mere visual pleasure. The first thing she does the day after Edward departs is to collect and dry rose petals and place them inside the long untouched drawers and closets in order to bring the scent of roses into these forgotten corners of the Palmer house. Likewise, one of her plans is to cultivate "a garden of scents to contrast the heavy sweetness [of the citrus]: wild sage, coriander, basil, rosemary, scented geraniums, and catmint for a start" (Ibid., p. 90). Her sensibility to scents and her resourcefulness hint that she is already a promising friend to Indigo. Despite the fact that these are still ways of seeing the plants as resources, and not relatives, Hattie is ahead of her sister-in-

law Susan in that she interacts sensorially with her surroundings and connects her own needs to the possibilities offered by the plants.

Silko gives us another important reason to let our guard down, at least a little bit, when it comes to Hattie by showing us her thoughts about Indigo and the way she treats and advocates for the child, even if arguing with Edward is needed. After Indigo and Linnaeus, Edward's monkey, find and greet each other in the lilac bushes, it is Hattie's turn to meet the child:

> As the woman knelt to reach under the lilacs to pick up the monkey, she gave a little shout of surprise when she saw Indigo.
> "Oh!" she said as if she had been struck. Their eyes met. She held the monkey close to her.
> "Linnaeus," the woman said, "who is this?"
> ***
> Hattie did not try to coax or drag the child out of the bushes, instead she smiled and nodded as if she was accustomed to visitors in the lilacs. (SILKO, 1999, p. 71-2)

Here we can see that despite being surprised to find a child in the bushes, she still lets her eyes meet Indigo's, which is a sign of mutual recognition and bonding in this novel, as I will argue later. Then she gestures positively at Indigo so that she does not feel threatened: "she did not want to frighten the child any more than she had already" (Ibid., p. 72). Also, she asks Linnaeus to introduce her to Indigo, which could be read as nothing more than a way of speaking to herself, but it is nevertheless telling since directing words at other-than-human beings seems to be a fair indicative in *Gardens in the Dunes* of the characters' disposition to listen to and respect other beings and their perspectives. Sand Lizards do it all the time, and so does Aunt Bronwyn; Edward and Susan never do it. She then decides to move away from the bushes in order not to bother Indigo and continues her walk to take more garden notes, not before leaving a glass of water and bread and jam in front of the lilacs. She asks herself empathetic questions: "[d]id they [the boarding school] feed the children the tribal foods they were accustomed to?" (Ibid., p. 73). While these are the concerns we read in Hattie's thoughts, Indigo's questions are about where the white people get their water to water all these plants and why there seem to be no edible plants in this garden, only decorative flowers.

The relationship between these two characters develops slowly and affectionately, since Indigo builds her trust with caution as Hattie proves her reliability by being considerate of Indigo's feelings and questioning or standing up against Edward on multiple occasions to stop him from being inadequately rude to the child. Of course she has much to learn and change, as demonstrated by the instances in which she trusts Edward's prejudicial views of indigenous

people and of Indigo's potential future as a housemaid, but the seeds are there for a friendship stronger than Hattie has with anyone else in her life. Indigo, in turn, grows attached to Hattie but never ceases to plan ways to find her sister and return to the old gardens. For the time being, however, she decides it is best to accompany the white couple to Europe because she would rather do that for now than be sent back to the boarding school.

After crossing the country by train—as explained in section 1.1, a symbol of the United States' successful expansion westward with devastating consequences to native peoples—they stop at Long Island to visit Hattie's parents and Edward's sister Susan. During their stay, they switch activities back and forth between the houses since the two families are close neighbors. The Abbott garden is, in many ways, Hattie's father's own laboratory where he comes up with the strangest ideas for philanthropy, such as raising dwarf goats and pigs that could be kept in cities, and creating vegetable hybrids that he thinks could alleviate hunger among the poor. Mr. Abbott does not seem to care for the animals much while carrying out his experiments; unsurprisingly, the pigs have organized revolts to escape countless times, giving Mr. Abbott at least some headaches. Besides, as Terre Ryan notes, behind his charitable enterprise there was a hidden concern among the East Coast high society about the arrival of new immigrants who had to be taught American ways of dealing with the land, a concern filled with moral and religious undertones. Ryan argues that gardening in nineteenth century America, especially among the wealthy, had a purifying quality against the greed that had been infecting the country: dealing with the land provided an encounter with the divine through which horticulture became "a form of moral calisthenics" (RYAN, 2007, p. 121), the novelty of which was Mr. Abbott's mission to spread around. This is also tied to the fact that the events of the novel happen near Frederick Turner's declaration of the closed frontier in 1893: "with the continent entirely conquered and settled and its Native peoples more or less incarcerated on reservations, the American landscape garden provided a blank canvas on which the gardener could impose control and exercise his or her fine art" (RYAN, 2007, p. 121-2).

The blank canvas upon which Mr. Abbott realizes his morally charged project to instruct the poor is the same one upon which Susan wishes to assert her own dominance. She places herself as the controlling force in her garden since it is one of the few things in her life she can exert control upon—we know that her husband "managed Susan's finances closely" (SILKO, 1999, p. 162). Ryan quotes "British landscape gardening diva" Gertrude Jekyll's famous saying that the combination of plants is "the nearest thing we can know to the mighty force of creation"[4]

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[4] JEKYLL, Gertrude. **Wood and Garden**. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1899.

(JEKYLL apud RYAN, 2007, p. 125). Therefore, through large-scale reforms, Susan places herself as the closest thing to the Creator. Paradoxically, there is very little of Susan's authentic input into the garden's affairs since she mostly copies what European gardeners establish as trends. A very funny passage occurs when Edward thinks to himself about the foolishness of her pursuit of the latest trend, which consists of the natural curves of the English gardens: "He wondered if his sister realized how fickle garden fashion was; the so-called English garden was already passé" (SILKO, 1999, p. 190). To reach the effect of already out-of-fashion gardens, Susan goes to the lengths of hiring men to build entirely new hills. Moreover, the one who has the actual skills and spends time and energy tending to the plants is not even Susan, but her Scottish gardener. He knows how to protect transplanted non-endemic species from the Long Island weather, he knows how to induce blossoms and how to make flowers' colors pop. Susan's creative vision is limited to the arrangement of colors, shapes and sizes, but even that sensibility is not her own: there is no inherent affection or meaning behind her garden choices, there is only the assimilation of a fashion taste developed elsewhere.

Perhaps the most important relationship she creates with the plants she "cultivates" (between inverted commas because her knowledge about caring for plants is likely close to zero) is the fact that they conceal the only relationship where her true desires seem to escape: her extramarital affair with the Scottish gardener. It is not a coincidence that the peak of Susan's ostentation as a "gardener" and member of the Long Island high society is called The Masque of the Blue Garden, her yearly ball held under the full moon. Everything about her is masked, concealed, invisible, because she cannot honestly present herself vulnerably to the world. Her capacity to establish truthful, secure, nourishing relationships is thus severely hindered. She discards her plants as mere aesthetic accessories to elevate her own status: "they had to last only one night—the night of the ball" (Ibid., p. 184), she says of the blue Asian bugloss cultivated in a greenhouse and transplanted only a few hours before the guests arrived. At times, we are able to catch a glimpse of Indigo's reaction to her excesses, and her thoughts often tell us of violence. When Susan becomes obsessed with transplanting two giant beech trees from an old farm to her freshly built hills, Indigo's description is horrifying:

> wrapped in canvas and big chains on the flat wagon was a great tree lying helpless, its leaves shocked limp, followed by his companion; the stain of damp earth like dark blood seeped through the canvas. As the procession inched past, Indigo heard low creaks and groans—not sounds of the wagons but from the trees. (Ibid., p. 183)

Resonating with her grandmother's teachings about the souls within all things, Indigo perceives sadness even in the stone statues that are being taken for auction after Susan decides they only belonged in unfashionable Italian gardens: "In the contrasting light, the pale figures piled on one another in the wagon made a macabre image. [...] The arms of the many women statues were flung upward in fear" (SILKO, 1999, p. 190). This scene, Ryan notices, is likely a nod to the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre, a bloody episode in American history after which the bodies of 200-300 dead Lakota Ghost Dancers who resisted against assimilation and reservation life were left unburied for days, until they were frozen in their positions like statues. Indigo's perspective informs us that behind the ideas that make these gardens possible, there is a historical legacy of violence.

After the night of the ball, the trio boards the ship to Europe; their first stop is Aunt Bronwyn's home in Bath, England. Barbara K. Robins suggests that their travel is a "Reverse Migration" eastward, retracing the path of the colonizers to the East Coast and then to the Old World (ROBINS, 2007, p. 38), which implies perhaps a reexamination of the stories and legacies the colonizers left behind, and also of the stories and legacies that remained *despite* colonial and Christian domination. Silko includes in this investigation the pagan cultural traditions within Europe, presented to us through Aunt Bronwyn's and Laura's gardens. In her interview with Ellen Arnold mentioned in the introduction, Silko tells the story of how she became aware of and decided to give space to possibilities of European indigeneity in her novel. In 1994, during her tour to promote *Almanac of the Dead*, she was able to hear the struggles of her East German readers who found hope in her book; besides, she was able to see a cat cult in Rome, to sense her German ancestors' spirits, and to see the pagan practices at Fasching Festival in Zurich:

> I mean Europe is not completely Christianized. The missionaries were not completely successful. There is a pagan heart there, and the old spirits are right there. (...) So going into *Gardens in the Dunes*, I had a tremendous sense of the presence of the oldest spirit beings right there in Europe, and that lots of Europeans, even the ones that don't know it, are still part of that. As hard as Christianity tried to wipe it out, and tried to break that connection between the Europeans and the earth, and the plants and the animals—even though they've been broken from it longer than the indigenous people of the Americas or Africa—that connection won't break completely. That experience was so strong that I wanted to acknowledge it a little. (SILKO, 2000, p. 166-167)

The connection the old people of Europe had with the earth is represented through Aunt Bronwyn's and Laura's pagan beliefs, which honor fertility, creativity and the balanced interaction with other-than-human beings. Both women study pre-Christian cultures and

incorporate those beliefs into their gardening practices. Not only that, but they easily bond with Indigo, believe her and engage with her perception and intelligence in ways that Hattie and Edward are utterly unable to do.

By the time they arrive in Bristol, England, Aunt Bronwyn is waiting for them at the port. On the ride to the train station, the group passes by what used to be the slave market and Indigo remarks that she and her sister know how to escape slave hunters, but Hattie tells her there are no slave hunters active in the United States. Indigo gets serious and retorts: "'I've *seen* them, Hattie,' Indigo said breathlessly. 'We were on the hilltop with Grandma Fleet. Off in the distance we saw the children tied together in a line!' Indigo could tell Aunt Bronwyn believed her but Hattie and Edward did not" (SILKO, 1999, p. 231). Indigo's reading of Aunt Bronwyn's empathy is accurate—as their other fruitful and friendly interactions later confirm—, she never doubts Indigo's experience and smartness. Her perspective is also similar to the Sand Lizards' when it comes to an awareness of the fact that other-than-human beings have their wishes, make decisions and perform activities whose meaning humans often have no access to. When the trio arrives at Aunt Bronwyn's cloister home, she tells them about the fact that the rocks of the cloister walls always resist renovations:

> Long ago workmen on the old cloister complained that stones loosened and removed by day were found in their former locations the following day. Edward smiled at Aunt Bronwyn's tale:
> "So the fairies replaced the stones at night", he said.
> Aunt Bronwyn shook her head. The stones themselves had moved without any aid from brownies or fairies. Indigo's eyes widened. Aunt Bronwyn nodded her head decisively.
> Oh yes indeed. This is the land of the stones that dance and walk after midnight. (Ibid., p. 237)

In this passage, we can identify Edward's disbelief conveyed through irony and Indigo's marvel at the possibility that the rocks did not want to be replaced. While Indigo is honestly excited at the story, beneath Edward's teasing we can almost hear him saying that such a thought is foolish, twisted, and worse, utterly non-scientific! At best, he would think dancing rocks are an "interesting folktale", precisely the expression he uses to comment on the *professoressa*'s ancient pagan stories later in Italy (Ibid., p. 300). This passage offers a sense of how the interactions between the more open-minded, connected to the earth characters and Edward tends to go throughout the novel. Hattie, on the other hand, at this point keeps a safe distance from the beliefs of her aunt and Indigo, but her curiosity and puzzlement cause her nonetheless to later feel annoyed at Edward's insistent skepticism. Aunt Bronwyn most certainly registers these nuances,

but never ceases to be vocal about her views on the agency of beings that surround her. When she decides to introduce Indigo to the white cattle in her garden, she makes a point to greet each and every cow, calf or bull; as she is doing so, Indigo watches and notices that "they were fond of their mistress" (SILKO, 1999, p. 239). At the absence of visitors, Edward thinks to himself in disgust, the old woman probably lets the cattle enter and roam around the cloister, too. Not only the white cattle, but the stones are also good friends with her. After a few days, when the two women and girl are taking a walk through the gardens, Aunt Bronwyn explains that

> she had seen praying stones and cursing stones. There were stones that turned slowly with the sun to warm both sides of themselves, and stones that traveled at night to drink from the river and returned by morning. There were stones that danced at high moon and stones that danced in the light of the moon! (Ibid., p. 252)

Indigo is fascinated at the stone stories, and so is Sister Salt when later Indigo tells her about the stone worshippers of England. Sister Salt reminds her that their own grandmother had stories of stones that played tricks, sweated and even urinated, and the sisters have good laughs together. This further demonstrates the connections between the pagan European and Sand Lizard traditions and remarks that there are people who treat other beings as relatives in many different places. Aunt Bronwyn not only loves the stones, cattle and other local animals from a safe distance, she is also willing to put her own body on the line to protect them. She is a member of the Antiquity Rescue Committee, a local group that protects ancient oak and yew groves, old stones, and even toads during their periods of migration; they even got "on their hands and knees in the mud to help the toads cross busy roadways safely. But it wasn't until she began to study the artifacts of the old Europeans that she discovered carved and ceramic figures of toads were worshipped as incarnations of the primordial Mother" (Ibid., p. 241). In a way, Aunt Bronwyn's garden also reaches further than the land around the cloister to encompass a larger ecosystem, since she feels responsible for and acts in the protection of species that have both environmental and spiritual importance for her people. Through her activist work, she also protects the balance of European political and economic affairs, since, according to her, "[t]he wars of Europe were terrible consequences of centuries of crimes against the old stones and the sacred groves of hazel and oak", since these were the places where the "good folk", or the fairies, who were in fact the spirits of the dead, resided (Ibid., p. 252). And so these ancient beliefs and practices, derived from Celtic, Norman or Roman stories, were kept alive. The connection to the land does not break completely, "despite the persecution, the old customs persisted—dairy keepers spilled a bit of

milk for fairies, morning and night [...]. People still bowed to the standing stones at crossroads and threw coins into springs and lakes" (SILKO, 1999, p. 261).

The pre-Christian legacies that Laura[5] embraces in her Italian garden stem from other traditions and beliefs. The many statues she "cultivates" range from ancient Greek figures, such as the minotaur, the centaur, and Medusa, to figures from pre-Roman cultures dedicated to goddesses of fertility, often portrayed as having mixed human and snake, bird or bear body parts. These statues honor childbearing and mothering, as many of them hold children in their arms, feature a big pregnant belly, are breastfeeding or even collecting their own breast milk in large basins. As Laura explains, breast milk was linked to raindrops for the old people. Edward is outraged at her reckless decision to leave these ancient statues out in broad daylight: "he was amazed their hostess, who called herself a scholar, risked rare archaeological artifacts simply to decorate a garden" (Ibid., p. 293). However, Laura tells them about her visits to "dour and depressing, even suffocating" museums in East Europe, after which she decided at once that "the figures of stone and terra-cotta must have fresh air and sunshine, not burial in a museum" (Ibid., p. 294). Besides, she was not unaware of weather damage: the figures were carefully wrapped and taken inside once the first rains started falling every winter. Laura thus proposes a form of scholarship that does not distance the researcher from the things they wish to know, or objectify and reduce these things to mere objects of study; rather, she gives her sculptures the right to a life of their own out in the garden. This is likely Silko's hint at indigenous peoples' fight for the repatriation of looted artifacts to their communities, where they shall have life, reintegrated to their original culture's contemporary practices and identity.

There is also Laura's hybridization of black gladiolus, cultivated in an open garden where they grow to the hundreds, perhaps thousands. Even Edward's arrogant posture melts at the impressive effect. Hattie and Indigo feel absolutely enthralled both for the sight and the wonderful fragrance the black garden gave off. Laura explains to them, "[t]o the Old Europeans, black was the color of fertility and birth, the color of the Great Mother" (Ibid., p. 296). In comparing the environmental legacies running beneath the gardens in *Gardens in the Dunes*, Ruth Blair writes of the Italian garden: "Laura's formal garden has, like the gardens in the dunes, old bones and is, as well, recuperated by the presence of ancient sculptures, by its 'wilder' spaces, and by ancient botanical connections (...). This garden, too, we seem to be being told, has indigenous roots" (BLAIR, 2012/2013, p. 21). Thus, Laura and Aunt Bronwyn are engaged in letting surviving

[5] Laura's name is a tribute to Laura Coltelli, Silko's friend and Italian translator with whom she spent three weeks in Italy. Coltelli also edited a collection of essays on *Gardens in the Dunes*, released in 2007 by Pisa University Press. Many of the essays from this collection greatly contributed to this work.

ancient European cultures get fresh air, breathing life into that which could be "buried in a museum"—these European indigenous cultures were buried under the patriarchal principles imposed by the Catholic Church. Besides, they likewise recognize the material and spiritual connections between all sorts of beings; value openness, flexibility, creation and nurture; and remain in deep connection with the land and its beings.

Therefore, through these cultural values, Aunt Bronwyn and Laura are able to draw connections between their own points of view and Indigo's, inscribing themselves in transnational alliances that find points in common between different perspectives, recalling the Sand Lizard teaching: share, don't be greedy. In fact, two types of sharing take place in Indigo's interactions with these women: gift-giving and storytelling. Aunt Bronwyn gives Indigo multiple paper packets filled with all sorts of seeds for her to plant in the desert back home, accompanied by a notebook where she previously wrote instructions for cultivation, and left many blank pages for Indigo to write her own gardening findings. Laura gives her gladiolus corms and seeds with hybridization instructions; and, when she sees that Indigo keeps Aunt Bronwyn's notebook with already many of her own notes, she decides to give her a wooden box filled with lots of colored pencils for Indigo to draw, too. These are gifts for her garden and also gifts for her to make art and take notes; these are gifts that allow her to use modern art and study tools (the notebook, the pencils, the pen) to express her native perspectives and nourish herself and her people with drawings of Rainbow and notes that will help her garden back at home flourish. In many ways, her use of these tools is similar to Silko's use of the novel genre to advance her indigenous views of gardening and storytelling.

The second type of sharing is precisely storytelling: indeed, storytelling moments happen between Indigo and their hostesses in both European gardens and, not coincidentally, never happen with Susan or Hattie while they are at their respective gardens. Hattie begins to tell Indigo stories by the time they start travelling by train: she reads stories about a Chinese monkey from a book she took along thinking it might help Indigo suffer a little less about her friend Linnaeus being left behind in Riverside. Aunt Bronwyn and Laura, in opposition, tell their stories as they remember them, orally. After hearing Aunt Bronwyn's many fun stories of the fantastic special abilities of King Arthur's knights, Indigo offers a Navajo woman's stories about ancient giants whose blood drops became lava peaks. They also exchange stories about Aunt Bronwyn's white cattle and their connection to the moon, marked on their crescent-shaped horns. After hearing about Indigo's story of the snake that lives at the spring back in the dunes, Laura tells everyone about the tales told by snake worshippers still living in villages near the Black and Adriatic sea—

in all these stories the snakes are the protectors, not the threats. To Indigo in particular, Laura tells the story of a white princess who helped the poor village people all day but had to return to the forest at sundown without being seen. One man who fell in love with her followed her into the woods and saw her transform into a giant white snake. These stories create bonds between human and other-than-human beings, portraying animals and plants as smart and deserving of respect. Besides being a fun way to spend time, their story exchange acts as a bridge between their different cultures.

In "Domestic Resistance: Gardening, Mothering, and Storytelling in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*", Stephanie Li observes that in this novel the three practices are connected: a prosperous gardener is the one who tells good stories about their gardens and the one who knows how to nurture other beings like a mother does. According to her, this perspective is closely tied to indigenous women's reclaiming of domestic native life as a rich source of empowered strategies of resistance against colonial powers. This way, "[t]he stories about gardening and mothering presented in Silko's novel explore how narrative encodes cultural identity and empowers individuals to embrace the earth as a nurturing force rather than as a resource to be exploited and abused for capitalistic profit and personal gain" (LI, 2009, p. 20).

In "Reinventing Nature: Leslie Marmon Silko's Critique of Euro-American "Nature-Talk", Joni Adamson argues that Silko's novel *Almanac of the Dead* reveals the inner workings of many modern capitalist discourses on the environment—even coming from those that wish to protect it. In doing so, she contrasts the ideology of white millionaire conservationist entrepreneurs to the ancient grassroots indigenous ways of existing in a more-than-human world. The colonial ways of conceptualizing "nature" or "wilderness" are what Adamson calls Euro-American "nature-talk", present in *Gardens in the Dunes* through Edward, Susan and Mr. Abbott's husbandry practices, which can all be traced back to nineteenth-century imperialist ideas. This journey through beautiful gardens is Silko's story of how we can, as Adamson puts it, "gain an understanding of how particular Euro-American discourses on nature have brought us to this point" and look to indigenous ways of gardening and storytelling in order to "reinterpret and reinvent nature and the environment" (ADAMSON, 2001, p. 177-8). This way, legacies of connection or disconnection to land are narrated through various gardener characters with different perspectives and value systems. Indigo's relationship to each of these gardens calls attention to a Native American reading of Euro-American and European pagan cultures, and reveals that gardens and plants are not only beautiful and interesting, but also decidedly historical and political.

2 “AS MANY SEEDS AS YOU CAN CARRY HOME”: INDIGENOUS COSMOPOLITICS AND THE SENSUOUS

2.1 A SEED GATHERER’S COSMOPOLITICAL DREAMS

In Chapter 2, I argued that the gardener characters in *Gardens in the Dunes* draw from different legacies of gardening and storytelling, which may allow intimate interactions with the more-than-human world or, otherwise, turn them away from that connection, offering them a view of other creatures as devoid of subjectivity. These legacies are historical and political, in the sense that they derive from or challenge colonial and capitalist structures—the same structures that oppress those who live by traditional ways of life. Sand Lizard gardening maintains a balanced community of shared responsibility with all sorts of creatures, including the rain clouds, the insects, the rattlesnake; Aunt Bronwyn’s and Laura’s gardens are organized according to pre-Christian belief systems, mobilizing the participation of cattle, snakes, birds, rocks and plants. Meanwhile, Edward’s garden retains patriarchal divisions and tells a story of neglect and loneliness, and Susan’s garden tells a story of hidden truths and social status. Much of the novel, however, happens not in steady places like gardens, but while the characters are in motion. Grandma Fleet and the sisters travel between the old gardens and the town of Needles a great deal, coming to live in town for some years. Sister Salt moves from the school to the dam site to the Chemehuevi sisters’ house and finally back to the gardens. We can even follow Big Candy through many pages travelling through the desert chasing after Delena, who stole all his money to take to the Mexican revolutionaries. And, of course, there is our trio’s trip across the United States and around Europe, during which Hattie awakens to transformative truths and to her place in the world, Edward faces the consequences of his arrogance, and Indigo makes many new friends. In this section I intend to tie Indigo’s gardening practices to her travelling skills, in opposition to Edward’s ways of travelling and his frustrated attempts at economic ascent, to suggest that Sand Lizard worldviews also support Indigo as a cosmopolitical traveler.

In “A lexicon rhetoricae for ‘journey’ literature”, Dan Vogel proposes different categories for travelling in fiction, taking into consideration factors such as the structure of the plot, the character’s motivation for travelling, whether the trip triggers some sort of personal

transformation or realization for the character, and whether the reader shares the character's perceptions or not. His classification is handy to better see how much the trio's modified Grand Tour[6] takes on a different meaning to each of the characters. Hattie's trip can be characterized as a going-forth: a seemingly meaningless travel, whose meaning surfaces to the character only by the end of the narrative but is foreshadowed to the reader from the beginning. As soon as we are introduced to Hattie, we also come to know about her supposed heresy, the disapproval of her conduct by high society and the anxiety and melancholia it created in her through flashbacks. We know she negotiates her position at the margin of her parents' social circle, we know she is bold and smart, we know that there is still a lot about herself and her world that she has not acknowledged. When she becomes attached to Indigo and decides to invite her on a trip, there is some sort of inner discovery we expect her to undergo; but Hattie herself is perhaps only subconsciously aware of this at the beginning: she is drawn towards Indigo and towards paying her subversive aunt a visit, that is all. As Vogel puts it, "the hero of a 'going-forth' feels stirred only by possibility, not by a preconceived vision of his goal" (VOGEL, 1974, p. 189).

Edward, in turn, is on a quest. He has a clear goal of obtaining the cuttings of *Citrus medica* to plant in his Riverside estate in the hopes of recovering financially from his past failed expeditions, and the narrator shares knowledge of this goal with the reader. That he fails his mission is telling of how doomed his goal was from the beginning. Another layer of irony is added to Edward's quest if one knows that, in reality, citron cuttings were indeed brought to California for cultivation in 1880 but "[t]he trees suffered severe cold damage in 1913 and, within a few years, the project was abandoned" (MORTON, 1987, s.p). Even if Edward had managed to bring the cuttings, a few years later he would have lost the trees anyway. Meaning attribution is extreme is Edward's case: a successful trip may either save or bury his financial life.

On the other opposite of the spectrum is Indigo, for whom the trip is a journey. Describing the journey, Vogel uses the example of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, saying that this character "had no particular goal in mind; apparently he fell into his adventures on the road to London willy-nilly" (VOGEL, 1974, p. 185-6). Just like that, willy-nilly, Indigo ended up in Hattie's garden and was invited to go to Europe with them. Up until a certain point in the narrative, she still makes plans to escape as soon as they reach Needles, and when they reach

[6] The characterization of the European tour in *Gardens in the Dunes* as a version of the Grand Tour is drawn from Brewster E. Fitz's *Silko: Writing Storyteller and Medicine Woman* (2004, p. 191). The Grand Tour was commonly performed by upper-class European young men (at times women) who sought to visit Europe's most culturally efervescent capital cities in order to access their cultural patrimony through museum visits and conversations with the cities' most recognized intellectuals.

Grand Central Station she looks for trains heading back West. After these attempts fail, however, she figures she might as well go with them to Europe, since she might meet the Messiah from the Ghost Dance, who headed east with his family and a few dancers to escape the police More than that, perhaps her mom might be among the dancers who escaped, too. After Hattie promises that upon their return to the US she and Indigo will go back to Needles to find her family, Indigo eases into the trip, and takes her time to meet other places and cultures, exchange stories, collect seeds for her gardens and make friends. At the end of the journey, she has of course learned a lot (new plant species, drawing with colored pencils, etc.), but none of that learning has messed with her understanding of herself as a Sand Lizard girl. In Susan's house, she looks in the mirror and laughs at her white girl clothes: "now a Sand Lizard girl was loose in the white people's world" (SILKO, 1999, p. 159). She laughs her situation off instead of feeling insecure or delegitimized; rather, she has dreams that constantly remind her to "gather as many new seeds of flowers and trees as she could find on this *journey* so she did not disappoint Sister Salt and Mama, or Grandma Fleet" (Ibid., p. 176, added emphasis).

Both Edward and Indigo are knowers of plants who obtain, in their travels, new species to be grown back home. They could both be read as cosmopolitan botanical travelers, deriving new possibilities of cultivation from the places which they visit, acclimatizing non-endemic species. But cosmopolitanism proposes an anthropocentric view of a single (natural) world to which humans of different cultures belong as citizens, which is not a fair account of Indigo's friendship with other-than-human beings. More importantly, there are fundamental differences between their practices. The seeds and corms Indigo obtains are mostly given to her as gifts by Aunt Bronwyn and Laura. Edward also gives her the orchids by the end of the novel before she and Hattie depart to Needles to find Sister Salt. Extending the analysis of Indigo's gifts to animals, we notice that Rainbow and Linnaeus were also gifts, from Susan and Edward respectively, although these did not come as much from a place of sharing, but as bribery and riddance. On the other hand, there are seeds that Indigo collected "unauthorized", but these will be taken back home to grow in her people's gardens and nourish her people only; contrary to Edward's, Indigo's plants never become commodities. Even when the grown gladiolus flowers become useful for the Chemehuevi sisters to negotiate peace with their neighbors, the Christian Indians, they are exchanged as gifts and not as products to which a price has been attributed. Edward also begins collecting orchids as gifts to his mother, but soon his mother's acquaintances become customers and his orchid-collecting expeditions now serve the purpose of profit. Another important difference has been identified by critic James Barilla: Edward

always collects "cuttings, not seeds, a key distinction when it comes to the interests of the plant itself. Seeds are symbols of biological sovereignty and wildness; cuttings represent the transformation of the plant into commodity" (BARILLA, 2007, p. 168). In stark contrast to Edward's self-interested grafting, Indigo's means and ends can be traced back to Vine Deloria, Jr.'s concept of a moral universe: she shares responsibility for the nourishment of her more-than-human community in the gardens, but also for these plants she encounters elsewhere, and for the other beings that gain nourishment or aesthetic pleasure from such plants. Indigo's gathering practices never cause an imbalance to the ecosystems she then leaves behind, nor does she take more than she needs.

Cosmopolitics, as proposed by science philosopher Isabelle Stengers, is a useful political concept to understand Indigo's gathering and acquaintance-making. Despite being a response to questions that arise from the fields of history and philosophy of science, cosmopolitics has been productively connected to indigenous cosmovisions. In their work, Marisol de la Cadena and Joni Adamson explore the intersections between growing environmental concerns within Western thought, including the concept of cosmopolitics and native epistemologies and practices, which have always tied more-than-human beings together. Stengers proposes cosmopolitics as a way of "slowing down reasoning" (STENGERS, 2005, p. 994) by calling attention to the uncertainty and slipperiness of the so-called objective and disinterested perspective and changing the status of the established truth to only one among many coexisting other truths. Instead of proposing one universal and neutral way of dealing with political questions, Stengers invites us to imagine what other worlds are at stake in a situation—who else should have the power to decide and has not been invited; who even counts as a political participant, either as an enemy or an ally. The excluded participants she is calling our attention to are all those *idiotic* characters (she uses Deleuze's term) whose discourse would defy the preconceived notions and disturb "politics as usual": those whose perspectives and knowledges are seen as non-human, or at least less-than-human. These beings are idiotic because their perspectives are dismissed as belief or they are regarded as simply not having a perspective at all—it would be ridiculous to listen to them. This she exemplifies through the case of experiments on animals. She asks if the same decisions would be made concerning experiments on animals if the researcher who argues for the necessity of such experiments were placed "in an *oikos* that demands that he or she think 'in the presence of' the victims of his or her decision" (Ibid., p. 997).

In “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond ‘Politics’”, Marisol de la Cadena describes how a thousand “idiotic” indigenous protesters gathered in 2006 at the *Plaza de Armas del Cuzco* to assert that they would stand “in the presence of" other-than-human beings, thus invoking the right of the mountains in a demonstration against a mining project near the Ausangate mountain. For de la Cadena, the presence of ritual dancers at the demonstration indicates a concern about the integrity of the Ausangate mountain chain that reaches beyond what modern environmental justice discourse could offer. Besides commonly recognized arguments against mining, like the devastating consequences for air quality, or the contamination of local peoples’ harvests, for instance, they brought forward the concern over how the Ausangate Mountain *itself* would react. Indeed, her friend Nazario Turpo, a local *pampamisayoq* (or “ritual specialist”, by the usual translation), told her later that his personal reason to attend the demonstration had been that “Ausangate would not allow the mine in Sinakara, a mountain over which it presided. Ausangate would get mad, could even kill people. To prevent that killing, the mine should not happen” (DE LA CADENA, 2010, p. 339). This represents an engagement that the local native people have with the mountain as subject and as a political participant. In other words, it shows an indigenous cosmopolitics which thrives on spirituality and breaks the divide between nature as the object of science and humans as the subject of politics by placing earth-beings as political actors deserving of representation and rights.

Thus cosmopolitics implies that, in politics, the multiple worlds of those involved in a decision should be taken into account, instead of recognizing only a singular, universally acceptable, “objectively” and “logically” defined world. Stengers writes that, in her theory, “cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulations of which they could eventually be capable” (STENGERS, 2005, p. 995). Cosmopolitics is thus a way of giving the same political weight to those worlds that are currently deemed incapable of acting as political beings, that are idiotic or that are said to have nothing useful or reasonable to contribute to the matter, such as animals and earth beings. After all, “[i]t is not an objective definition of a virus or of a flood that we need, a detached definition everybody should accept, but the active participation of all those whose practice is engaged in multiple modes with the virus or with the river” (Ibid., 1002). This allows for partial articulations between divergent worlds that do not amount to total and univocal understanding: worlds that remain incommensurate. For the political decision to occur, full understanding of what it is like to inhabit the Other’s world is not needed. This is what critic Aarthi Vadde,

building on Édouard Glissant, calls "consensual opacities" (VADDE, 2009, p. 528): the shadowed areas of the other's existence that are required for a relation to be possible. Otherwise, the other becomes commensurable, and no boundaries separate our worlds—not the boundaries of language, not the boundaries of the body. The wish for a world without any boundaries is evidently not what guides the politics of Indigo's travelling. Her posture is of interaction, of negotiation. She is fully present as a positioned participant in her relationships with more-than-human creatures: she is a Sand Lizard girl, a seed collector, a storyteller, a child to Mama, grandchild to Grandma Fleet, sister to Sister Salt, a relative to the Sand Lizard mother and to Grandfather Snake, a friend to Rainbow, Linnaeus, Aunt Bronwyn, Laura and Hattie. And she understands her role in these interactions not as a burden, but as her partial contribution to the mutual bonds that nurture her, too.

Sand Lizard teachings play an important part in making Indigo the prosperous traveler she is. Through learning how to respect other life forms and relate to the lifeworld as the bearer of many worlds, she is able to acquaint herself and establish a respectful relation even with the most difficult creatures. She knows where she came from and where she will return to: the old gardens in the dunes. She knows what her people's stories are, what their way of doing things is, and how she intends to carry out her own contribution to the Sand Lizard people. After getting the gift of colored pencils from Laura, Indigo reassures herself that her adventure in the white people's world, despite being demanding, will bring back invaluable gifts:

> Indigo studied her dark face in the oval mirror of the washstand and laughed at herself because she realized she was forgetting how dark she was because all around her she saw only lighter faces. Grandma Fleet would really laugh and Sister Salt would probably pinch her and tease her for becoming a white girl, not a Sand Lizard girl. She didn't care. Wait until they saw all the seeds she gathered and the notebook she brought back with the names and instructions and color sketches too. (SILKO, 1999, p. 285)

Thus, Indigo is able to face the harsh contrasts between her culture and the white people's culture by focusing on the goal of bringing home something interesting. In order to gather and bring something home, she creates non-commensurable relationships of mutual sharing—sharing stories, seeds, care. In "'Seeds Must Be Among the Greatest Travelers of All': Native American Literatures Planting the Seeds for a Cosmopolitical Environmental Justice Discourse", Mascha N. Gemein argues that the contrast between Indigo's seed gathering and Edward's thieving is precisely a contrast between cosmopolitical and imperialist ways of meeting the other. In her words, by incorporating cosmopolitical gift-exchanging among

women characters from diverse traditions rooted in respecting the land, “Silko suggests that ecological recovery and self-determination across the world is bound to each subject’s home territory and a loose network of the like-minded” (GEMEIN, 2016, p. 496). The like-minded characters forge sincere, although consensually opaque alliances, and Indigo is thus successful in following Grandma Fleet’s teachings about travel and seed collecting:

> Grandma Fleet always advised the girls to collect as many new seeds as they could carry home. The more strange and unknown the plant, the more interested Grandma Fleet was; she loved to collect and trade seeds. Others did not grow a plant unless it was food or medicine, but Sand Lizards planted seeds to see what would come; Sand Lizards ate nearly everything anyway, and Grandma said they never found a plant they couldn’t use for some purpose. (SILKO, 1999, p. 84)

Sand Lizard gardening, travelling and gathering entail an openness to the strange, to the unpredictable, and encourages to live in wonder about how plants may defy human expectations and knowledge. Sand Lizards’ view of *chance* is different from Edward’s father’s grafting gambles. While his gambles (with plants and with money) are a justification for his absence from his family life and his responsibilities, Sand Lizards instead trust that plants probably have things figured out in a way that they do not, and trust themselves and their creativity to put a plant to use. This encourages Indigo to fall in love with gladiolus flowers, regardless of the futility and vulgarity white characters see in them. She constantly dreams that she is back at the old gardens, where “planted among the corn, beans, and sunflowers, were bright swaths of red, pink, yellow, orange, purple, and black gladiolus flowers as tall as the tasseled corn” (Ibid., 373). Her trust in gladiolus proves fruitful when, by the end of the novel, they became both a gift to appease the Chemehuevi sisters’ conservative neighbors and a source of food for the Sand Lizard. There is room and a role for everyone in the gardens of Indigo’s dreams.

2.2 KISSING FLOWERS: THE SENSUOUS IN COSMOPOLITICS

Indigo’s disposition for cosmopolitical travelling does not simply emanate from her inner intentions: she carries the Sand Lizard ways of making acquaintance with the different. When Indigo arrives at a new place, she knows that that place is different from all others she knows—the plants, the water bodies, the wind all probably have different personalities from the plants, water bodies and winds she already knows, just like what happens when meeting new people. Indigo is a cosmopolitical traveler: she is aware that there are many worlds

coexisting with hers. Therefore, she takes her time to orient herself in the new place with the new beings, and all her senses are put to use in that task. Upon their arrival in Bath, “Indigo was amazed at how damp and green the air smelled in England. Water, water everywhere, it seemed” (SILKO, 1999, p. 233). A few pages later, before drifting off to sleep, she was “listening to the gurgles deep in the belly of the earth; the sounds were more watery here in England” (Ibid., p. 247). Her notice of local humidity is narrated to the reader not through the sight of water bodies (which she has of course seen, since Aunt Bronwyn’s cloister stood near the river) but through the smell of the air and the sounds below the earth, which she heard when everything else was dark. Noticing humidity and dampness, among other things, helps her establish herself in this new world and feel safer, attuned to the environment.

Her senses are also a source of orientation and delight when she first finds herself in Hattie’s garden. Despite the fact that she is already making plans to escape—thinking about the food, water and other resources she would need to get back to the old gardens—she enjoys what this garden has to offer her.

> She went from flower to flower, burying her nose in each blossom as deeply as she could, licking the sweet pollen from her lips. The night air was delightfully cool and the sensation of the rich damp soil under her feet made Indigo want to dance. (...) As she danced, Indigo looked up at the great field of stars like so many little bean blossoms; Grandma Fleet could travel up there now, but where were Sister Salt and Mama tonight? (Ibid., p. 82)

Now, these flowers are not just scenery: these are flowers whose pollen she has licked, flowers that watched her dance, together with the star flowers in the sky, which belong to the world where her grandmother travels. She has arrived in and greeted this garden using her senses and her imagination, and tracing it all the way back home to Grandma Fleet. Those same tools of sensation and creativity are the ones she uses to play games with Rainbow: “Then Indigo pretended the breeze from his wings was pushing her along with magical power to make her fly” (Ibid., p. 288). The flying game with Rainbow becomes a means of resilience through the many nights in which she dreams that, with Rainbow’s wings and a bit of magic, they are flying over the sea back to North America, and from the sky she can see the old gardens.

Integrating the existence of beings from elsewhere into her own people’s knowledge is another strategy to create bonds. At least three times she approaches plants that are known to her as old friends from the old gardens. When she decides to take a walk alone through the surroundings of Susan’s estate she finds a field of tall corn; she is hungry, so she takes one to eat: "The white kernels were different—smaller and sweeter—than Sand Lizard corn, but this

still was Mother Corn, who feeds her children generously" (SILKO, 1999, p. 166). This new place is not so new: Mother Corn feeds her children in other places, too. When she returns and they go for a walk around the Abbott family's garden, she sees big yucca plants (Figure 3), which also grew in the Sand Lizard gardens, growing among cherry trees: "Indigo touched the sharp tips of the leaves carefully and watched the bees, fuzzy yellow with pollen, in the throats of the flowers. 'Hello, Old Man Yucca, how did you end up here?'" (Ibid., p. 178). Finally, while visiting Aunt Bronwyn's cloister garden, Indigo catches a familiar scent and looks around looking for familiar plants, until she finds a datura plant, which she did not recognize at first because it is much taller than the datura back at the Sand Lizard gardens. She then greets her: "Hello, old friend. You sure grow tall in England. Are you trying to get closer to the sun?" (Ibid., p. 245). By talking to these familiar plants as the old friends they are, she incorporates yet another of Grandma Fleet's teachings: the plants listen, so always greet each plant carefully.

Figure 3 - Yucca plant in the Mojave Desert

Source: The American Southwest (s.d., n.p)

Indigo's ease in greeting, touching, playing with, dancing for other-than-human beings is similar to the stories David Abram tells about the time he spent in Indonesia, where he researched the correlations between magic and medicine among sorcerers and healers from the local villages. Slowly, he tells, he began to realize that the power to heal derives from the shaman's connection and intimacy with the more-than-human world. In fact, he proposes that all healers are first magicians; they not only heal a person's symptoms but the cause of the symptoms, which is never located within the individual person but in the community—more precisely, "the source of stress lies in the relation between the human community and the natural landscape" (ABRAM, 1997, p. 21). He then describes his own process of awakening his senses

to understand the languages spoken by these other-than-human creatures. One of the most paradigm-shifting experiences for him was when he found shelter from the rain inside a small cave. At some point he noticed he was surrounded by interconnected spider webs which were being woven by countless spiders at the same time before his eyes; in the dark, he could see the spiders working, and he described it as if he "was watching the universe being born, galaxy upon galaxy" (ABRAM, 1997, p. 19). This was the first of multiple experiences with other-than-human beings that revealed to him new worlds and possibilities of perception and communication beyond what is human. About the spiders, he writes:

> [T]hey were my introduction to the spirits, to the magic afoot in the land. It was from them that I first learned of the intelligence that lurks in nonhuman nature, the ability that an alien form of sentience has to echo one's own, to instill a reverberation in oneself that temporarily shatters habitual ways of seeing and feeling, leaving one open to a world all alive, awake, and aware. (Ibid., p. 19)

The opening of one's senses to the "magic afoot in the land" is what he calls the sensuous of the lifeworld, the lived, smelled, experienced texture that only an attunement to the more-than-human offers. Indigo's sensorial and embodied ways to perceive the world also encompass her consistently repeated act of looking deeply into the eyes of the animals she meets. When she meets the monkey Linnaeus in Edward and Hattie's garden, the first thing both of them do is exchange a long look into each other's eyes, as if to communicate their intentions: "[s]uddenly a little bearded man no taller than a turkey stood in front of her; he seemed surprised to see her too. He crouched down so he could look her in the eyes. He wore red leather around his little neck. His eyes were golden brown and calm" (SILKO, 1999, p. 71). Notably, she perceives him as a little bearded man, since at the time she still does not know about monkeys; similar to her greetings to the plants, she integrates him into the knowledge of the world she has. Later, in her first meeting with the parrot Rainbow, when he is still kept in a cage and nameless in Susan's garden, Edward remarks that he looks ill and Susan explains that he is sad since he recently lost his mate. After that, "Indigo watched the parrot open its eye from time to time to gaze at her; it seemed to know it was the subject of discussion" (Ibid., p. 187). The next day, after Indigo accidentally sees Susan and her gardener having (extramarital) sex, Susan gives her the parrot, probably in order to convince Indigo not to tell others about what she saw. Indigo then goes to his cage to feed him cookies and make friends with him, when once again the eye contact comes into play:

> For an instant *their eyes met* before the parrot sank his hooked beak into the tip of Indigo's finger.
> For an instant Indigo was shocked by the fiery pain that pulsed in her fingers and hand; tears ran down her cheeks as she clutched the bleeding finger against her body and squeezed it hard to stop the dizzying pain. Her heart was pounding in her ears from the bird's surprise attack.
> "But I love you!" Indigo cried as the parrot nonchalantly scratched the top of his head with the claw of one foot. "Then let me out of the cage," *the parrot seemed to say with his glittering eyes*. (SILKO, 1999, p. 193-4, added emphasis)

Being able to look into the eyes of the other, to interact with them sincerely, to read the other's feelings and intentions and react accordingly is a key cosmopolitical ability in *Gardens in the Dunes*. Once again, David Abram's words are fitting. Upon returning to the United States, he noticed that he started to gradually lose the trust of the lifeworld; animals did not come to greet him anymore, he was not as open to the sensuous as he was when he was living in Indonesia's villages: "the more I spoke *about* other animals, the less possible it became to speak *to* them" (ABRAM, 1997, p. 25). He started suspecting, then, that his culture's insistence in arguing against the awareness and sentience of animals, plants, earth beings and the like was not the consequence of proper reasoning, but symptomatic of "a strange inability to clearly perceive other animals—a real inability to clearly *see*, or focus upon, anything outside the realm of human technology" (Ibid., p. 27). Western culture's inability to see is epitomized in Edward's character: he frequently averts his eyes from objects or beings that could potentially awaken him from his state of alienation. Even more telling is the fact that he carries his camera around everywhere he goes: while Indigo confidently exposes her retina to the potential risks or benefits of an interspecies relationship, Edward needs a glass lens to position himself always as the photographer and the other as the photographed. It is symbolic that his camera box is the hiding place for the citron cuttings he manages to steal from the Corsican farmers. Indigo mocks his inability to see when, in Laura's garden, he feels embarrassed at the *professoressa*'s fertility sculptures shaped like sexual organs and forbids Indigo to see them. Indigo laughs at "the sights white people didn't want children to see", and makes up a song that perfectly teases Edward's disconnection from the lifeworld: "See you can't see what you see. See you can't see what you see. See, see, see!" (SILKO, 1999, p. 302).

According to critic Margara Averbach, Edward "represents the way in which the mask of science becomes truth for the ones who wear it. (...) He cannot see the consequences of his acts on Earth. (...) He cannot see that he is part of the machine of destruction he speaks against most of the time" (AVERBACH, 2001, p. 556). He continues to avert his gaze from his acts

and from his participation in creating a common reality, which only leads him to trust the wrong people. He becomes friends with the Australian doctor, who is actually setting up a scheme to steal Edward's money, which Edward in his turn has withdrawn from Hattie's bank account without her permission, and carefully directs Edward's towards death by giving him an "experimental treatment" for pneumonia. Despite receiving multiple warnings and signs of his fate, which might open doors for him to wake up to those around him and their feelings, Edward simply does not recognize them as warnings because he displays no awareness of his own wrongdoings and of his need to change. He even reads aloud a prayer to the Celtic goddess Sulis when they are visiting Bath's springs, without realizing it is a prophecy for himself: "'To the goddess Sulis. Whether slave or free, whoever he shall be, you are not to permit him eyes or health. He shall be blind and childless so long as he shall live unless he returns'—the next word is illegible—'to the temple'" (SILKO, 1999, p. 258). However, instead of returning to the temple, he develops another plan to rescue his finances by investing in another risky imperialist enterprise. Concomitantly, he becomes addicted to belladonna medicine, which helps ease his pains in the injured leg and calm down his recurring anxiety episodes.

Thus, lacking the ability to see himself as part of a more-than-human community and exist within it in balanced ways, Edward is greatly disfavored to face his own troubles successfully. To this, Edward would likely respond that seeing other-than-human beings as political participants may be a pleasant idea, but unfortunately, it is not factual. He might even use an argument similar to Heidegger's, which Deborah Bird Rose responds to in "Cosmopolitics: the Kiss of Life". According to her, in an attempt to identify the ultimate difference between humans and other animals, Heidegger bases his argument on the morphological difference between the human hand, and animals' paws or claws. Apparently, "the hand is capable of giving whereas the paw or claw is only capable of grasping", so goes his argument (ROSE, 2012, p. 105). Building upon the responses given by Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway and Lana Turner, Rose articulates a counter argument: the boundaries between giving and taking are, first of all, fuzzier than we may believe, but more than that, there are so many other body parts that animals can use to give. There is no reason to choose the paw or claw as the only way other creatures would have to share, communicate or even create art. A resident of Sydney, Australia, she brings countless examples of flying foxes' use of their wings to, at times, scare off enemies and, at other times, guide the newborn babies—flying foxes give birth upside down—towards the mother's nipple and cuddle them warmly. Besides, flying foxes' tongues are of major importance for their sexual practices, both before and after

penetration. In the first large-scale study of oral sex in other-than-humans, Chinese researchers reached the conclusion that fruit bats likely perform oral sex for pleasure. Rose argues that it seems reasonable to assume that the same is the case for Australian flying foxes. In addition to that, another clever way in which they use their tongues is for pollinating Eucalyptus trees (Figure 4). According to her, "flying foxes are readily able to know when trees start to bloom hundreds of kilometers away from where they are camping, and to fly off to find the nectar; scientists do not know how they do this" (ROSE, 2012, p. 109). Upon reaching the trees, their long tongues are perfect to stick out into Eucalyptus flowers and lick the nectar; in the process, their furry bodies pick up the flowers' pollen and spread around 70% of it: "at that meeting of tongue and blossom, life happens: there is an interspecies kiss of great eloquence" (Ibid., p. 109). And, as she elegantly argues through Lana Turner, in a kiss it is harder to decide between giver and taker.

Figure 4 - Flying foxes resting on Eucalyptus tree.

Source: Echidna Walkabout (2020, n.p)

Heidegger wrote that animals were "poor in world" compared to humans; seen through Indigo's cosmopolitical seed collecting, Abram's sensuous lifeworld and Rose's interspecies kiss, the reverse is true: "in separating himself from animals, Heidegger made himself 'poor in world'", and so does Edward (Ibid., p. 106). By contrasting Indigo and Edward as travelers, Silko provides a native anticolonial possibility for bridging geographical distances and finding like-mindedness in other creatures. These cosmopolitical alliances allow humans to trust the intelligence of other-than-human beings with their own worlds. When Indigo and the flowers from Hattie's and Edward's garden greet each other with a kiss, they are pointing a way of strengthening bonds and state their interdependence as co-creators of the lifeworld, anywhere they might be.

3 “LOVED AGAIN”: GYNOSTEMIC BALANCE AND THE EROTIC

As proposed in the previous section, Indigo’s sense of presence and assurance upon arriving in a new place derives mostly from her perception of and interactions with more-than-human beings. She never finds herself detached from the world; she may feel terribly homesick or angry with Hattie or Edward, but she is rarely at odds with the plants, the sky, the water, the wind, the animals. She dances around them, touches them, and thus gets to know them intimately, not as an object separate and distant from herself but as a source of sensation, of experience, of bodily awakening, of connection to the land. I called this relational attitude cosmopolitical, and it greatly informs Indigo’s gardening and seed collecting, which she learned through Grandma Fleet’s stories about other Sand Lizard gardeners.

The cosmopolitical aspect of Sand Lizard gardening practices, which proposes a positive view of travelling and of incorporating new and unknown plants, is paralleled by Sand Lizard erotics. While Indigo’s perspective informs us of Sand Lizard gardening and travelling, it is through Sister Salt that we learn about Sand Lizard views of sexuality. When she is telling the Chemehuevi sisters the best Sand Lizard stories she knows, the girls ask her about Sand Lizards’ wild sexual practices. Sister Salt tells:

> Sand Lizard mothers gave birth to Sand Lizard babies no matter which man they lay with; the Sand Lizard mother’s body changed everything to Sand Lizard inside her. Little Sand Lizards had different markings, and some were lighter or darker, but they were all Sand Lizards. Sex with strangers was valued for alliances and friendships that might be made. (SILKO, 1999, p. 202)

Sister Salt regards having sex with strangers as highly fruitful, because it can create bonds that, in the end, bring benefits to the Sand Lizard people. Especially *women* having sex with strangers is valuable, since the children born from their sexual encounters with non-Sand Lizard men always become Sand Lizards. This way, female sexuality is in no way a taboo, but that which allows more children to be born into the people. Likewise, sexual pleasure is also valued, as is demonstrated through Sister Salt making some money during her free time by having sex with the dam construction workers—an activity she considers a lot fun and a good way to spend her free time. The men are mostly nice to her, and she does not have sex with the ones she dislikes.

Thus, Indigo is surprised when Edward forbids her from seeing Laura's fertility figures, because, for her, there is nothing wrong with what they show. The Sand Lizard sisters are taught from a young age about how sex is important to form alliances within and outside their people, sexual attraction and pleasure building connections that can develop into beneficial exchange for both sides and greatly aid the people to face adversities. This attitude towards sexuality closely resembles the one presented by Silko in the Laguna Pueblo stories of Yellow Woman, or Kochininako, who benefits her people through her sensuality and fertility. In "Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit", Silko tells one of Yellow Woman's stories, set in a time when the Laguna people were facing drought and hunger and she had to travel each day further to get water and food. In one of those travels, she has to go as far as the Plains and meets Buffalo Man, who is really handsome and strong.

> Kochininako falls in love with Buffalo Man, and because of this liaison, the Buffalo People agree to give their bodies to the hunters to feed the starving Pueblo. Thus Kochininako's fearless sensuality results in the salvation of the people of her village, who are saved by the meat the Buffalo People 'give' to them" (SILKO, 1996, p. 71).

In this essay, Silko tells us that Yellow Woman was a figure she greatly admired as a child because she was fierce and brave to act on behalf of her people. She knows how to think outside the box in such a way that her solutions are often inventive and smart. Silko tells us "Kochininako is beautiful because she has the courage to act in times of great peril, and her triumph is achieved by her sensuality, not through violence and destruction" (Ibid., p. 72). If Yellow Woman's sensuality is understood as her capacity to listen to her own desires and bravely draw connections that prove beneficial, it shows many similarities to Indigo's skills as a traveler. Her cosmopolitical travelling requires her first to be secure of her own place and role in the cosmos so that she can establish relationships that truly nurture her. In many ways, Indigo's seed collecting and friendship-making arise from her own desire—her delight for gladiolus flowers, for instance—and, in the end, bring her people an advantage—being able to eat the gladiolus corms (Figure 5) —, just like in Kochininako's story with the Buffalo Man. Kochininako's stories are also related to Sand Lizard sexuality as told and practiced by Sister Salt. Her love relationship with Big Candy allows her to place her and the Chemehuevi twins' laundry business near his gambling and beer tents, a business partnership that greatly increases their gains. Besides, Candy loves and cares for her in a way that makes it bearable to be away from her sister, mother and grandmother. Sex with him or with the Mexican worker Charlie

makes her pregnant with Little Black Grandfather, who becomes her primary concern and the person she wants to love and care for the most. When Big Candy suggests that the baby will not survive because it was born premature and seemed too small and weak, Sister Salt's desire for him turns into disappointment and grief; at the same time, the dam is almost finished and Delena, who throws tarot cards, foresees a flood in Sister Salt's future. She then decides it is time to move away from the dangerous dam site and Big Candy's negligence, taking the baby to a safe place with Maytha and Vedna. Her decisions are guided by her own wishes and needs; she trusts her perceptions when it comes to both creating the relationship with Big Candy and breaking it when it starts to harm her.

Figure 5 - Gladiolus corms

Source: The Old Farmer's Almanac (s.d., n.p)

As far as Indigo's travelling and relationship to plants is contrasted with Edward's, Sister Salt's sexuality is perhaps contrasted with Hattie's. Gender roles in Hattie's society differ greatly from that of the indigenous characters; while Hattie's role as a woman suppresses her intelligence, independence, curiosity and sexual desire, Sister Salt, Indigo, Grandma Fleet, Maytha and Vedna voice their opinions, conduct themselves in the world with self-reliance, and never invalidate their own desires and wishes. Of course, there are times when Indigo expresses discomfort in Edward's or Susan's presence, for instance, but decides not to protest their actions and harmful words. However, she remains silent to avoid an unnecessary quarrel, since she knows the success of her return home for the time being partially depends on these people. Because she knows what she feels, she uses concealing as a temporary survival strategy. Sister Salt also at times suppresses her discomfort in the same way Indigo does, and still she is

much quicker than Hattie in realizing her relationship with Big Candy has started to hurt her and her child more than to nurture them. One of the causes for the discrepancy between these women's relationships to their own feelings may be the expectation that each of their cultures has for their roles as women. In "A Gynostemic Revolution: Some Thoughts about Orchids, *Gardens in the Dunes*, and Indigenous Feminism at Work", Deborah A. Miranda remarks that views of gender in modern Western culture arise from an imbalance between masculine and feminine energies. Hattie's culture—represented by her mother, the thesis committee, the other women and men of her age in high society—is permeated by patriarchal ideology, which "exaggerates biological differences between men and women" and "turns them into sources of power to one group, disempowerment for the other" (MIRANDA, 2007, p. 136), thus suppressing "feminine" nurturing energies. Meanwhile, Sister Salt's culture considers both energies important, and both energies are found in everyone: strength or nurturing do not belong to any group of people. As Silko remarks in "Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit",

> The traditional clothing of Pueblo women emphasized a woman's sturdiness. Buckskin leggings wrapped around the legs protected her from scratches and injuries while she worked. The more layers of buckskin, the better. All those layers gave her legs the appearance of strength, like sturdy tree trunks. (SILKO, 1996, p. 68)

It is a positive thing for the Pueblo people, then, that women look resilient and vigorous, demonstrating that they could perform tasks of primary importance for the people, like chopping wood. On the other hand, these women are the same who breastfeed, sing lullaby songs, cultivate gardens, and weave baskets. That strict gender division that tosses strength to one side and caring to the other, which causes so much suffering to Hattie throughout her life, is not present in Sand Lizard worldviews, for Sand Lizards inhabit a world that is balanced, where strength, caring, intelligence, child-raising are valued no matter who possesses these qualities. Another Pueblo story tells of how Thought Woman and her sisters created a balanced world by imagining it into being:

> In this universe, there is no absolute good or absolute bad; there are only balances and harmonies that ebb and flow. Some years the desert receives abundant rain, other years there is too little rain, and sometimes there is so much rain that floods cause destruction. But rain itself is neither innocent nor guilty. The rain is simply itself. (Ibid., p. 64)

Nothing is absolutely bad in and of itself: things can *become* bad if they occur in unbalanced ways. Big Candy's obsession with making money to open his own restaurant crosses healthy limits when he is so busy with work that he has no time and love left for Sister Salt and, later, for their baby. Sister Salt's decision to get away from him comes from her realization of this imbalance: money-making alone was never the problem for her, who was a business owner herself.

Likewise, Miranda proposes that Edward's recurrent poorly thought-out decisions stem from the lack of gendered balance in his outlook on life. With an absent mother, having to conform to the attitudes of a cold and distant father leaves him with the need to play the role of a "masculine" man: "Edward does not know how to create, how to access and allow the sharing of gendered powers. (...) Edward is convinced that the only sure way to possess wholeness, financial success, and freedom from self-doubt is to steal, control, or manipulate" (MIRANDA, 2007, p. 139). His openness to Hattie's pursuit of scholarship and his not minding about her heresy are less the product of a recognition of how pervasive and unfair patriarchy and the church are, and more the product of his exaggerated trust on "objective" scientific truths. Often his amateur scientific perspective leads him to criticize the church, benefitting Hattie, but it also makes him an annoying skeptic who discredits the opinion and experience of all the women around him, especially the ones who display some form of spirituality. At every opportunity during the Europe trip, Edward positions himself as the one who knows better than any of the female characters. This happens to basically every woman he encounters: Hattie, Indigo, Susan, Aunt Bronwyn and Laura are all victims of his disregard. He feels annoyed at Indigo's refusal to obey him and behave as he believes it is appropriate of a future maid; he places Susan below him because of her futility and lack of aesthetic appreciation for the statues of her previous Italian garden; he despises Aunt Bronwyn's outspokenness about her pagan beliefs and her intimate contact with the cattle; he discredits Laura's scholarship and regards the fertility figures she displays as inappropriate, "objectionable objects" (SILKO, 1999, p. 302). Yet, as Averbach notices, to him the Minotaur and Centaur, also exposed in Laura's garden and arguably monstrous, are far less intimidating; "what bothers him is not the supposed monstrous quality of the figures but the alien quality, the exotism (...). The truth is that, at least, the Centaur and Minotaur are masculine monsters, a point of great importance with Edward" (AVERBACH, 2001, p. 557).

In relation to Hattie, however, his posture is never directly contentious, for he believes that she is a woman of science—albeit one that makes many mistakes in interpreting her own

experiences. He repeatedly discredits her alarms about the Australian doctor when she suggests that he might be an imposter who uses his position to assault women. The first time she reaches out to him to reveal the abuse, he “laughed out loud at such a suggestion. He was confident Dr. Gates was no imposter because they had talked a good deal over late night toddies about their professional training. (...) Edward was quite satisfied Dr. Gates was reliable” (SILKO, 1999, p. 274). Alarmingly, Edward displays no sign of concern and caring for her well-being; even if she might have exaggerated the assault because of the medicine, she was still clearly in great distress. Moreover, Hattie was not the only one under the effect of some substance: he was drinking whiskey while talking to the doctor, so his perceptions could have been just as twisted as hers under the effect of belladonna. As Averbach argues, the point is that, just like Hattie’s thesis committee who bestows on her the label of heretic for citing non-authenticated ancient gnostic scrolls, Edward “can only interpret the world ethnocentrically and they really believe theirs is the only possible interpretation from the supposedly neutral point of view” (AVERBACH, 2001, p. 557). What they lack is a cosmopolitical understanding of themselves and of others, but despite his many previous failures and mistakes, Edward shows no signs of regret or realization during the entire novel, and perhaps he is the character who most needed it to avoid his death in Dr. Gates’ hands.

In turn, Hattie’s character is arguably the character who most undergoes changes and realizations, and that becomes clear through her increasing misunderstandings with Edward. The disparity of worldviews between them becomes evident as soon as they are confronted with the task of deciding what to do with Indigo. Even if at this point there is only a thin veil separating their mindsets that Hattie cannot see (because she is so relieved that she found a man who accepted her), we can see that their ideas for Indigo are very different. After Edward’s arrival, they go to Linnaeus’ cage inside the glass house and find his water bowl empty; Hattie realizes the child she found before in the bushes might have drunk it. Before Indigo comes out of her new hiding place, Edward goes inside and returns with a rope to tie her. To that, Hattie replies, “the rope really was beyond the limit!”, since the child was harmless, but Edward retorts “Hattie had no experience with Indians—certainly not these wild Indians” (SILKO, 1999, p. 106). Edward then leaves the scene to urge the boarding school to come pick Indigo up and Hattie’s thoughts invade the narration.

> Both the child and the animal seemed to know their holiday together would soon end. A terrible wave of sadness and hopelessness welled up in Hattie, more overwhelming than anything she had felt during the thesis scandal, and her eyes filled with tears. She might not know much about “wild Indians” but

> she did know they were human beings. (...) His [Edward's] tone revealed something disturbing about his impression of her—something she could not yet identify. (SILKO, 1999, p. 106)

His impression of her is that her empathy for Indigo comes from a place of ingenuity and foolishness—he was the only one between them to know how to "deal with Indians": tying them up. But contrary to his impression, what is actually shown in this scene is Hattie's much better developed emotional intelligence, since later she is able not only to make Indigo comfortable to leave her hiding place but also to communicate with her. This reveals a sense of responsibility and an ability to draw connections, which Hattie already had before the trip to Europe, when new experiences lead her to a greater awakening. In fact, through long flashbacks we learn Hattie loved reading since she was a child and she had always disliked the idea of getting married. She wanted to pursue scholarship in theological studies, more specifically in early church history. However, her interest is not in the static beliefs imposed by the priests, but in the texts that challenged the church's most foundational (and patriarchal) ideas. While she is walking around planning garden renovations, her thoughts go to her past and we are transported to her many experiences with heretic texts, which she loves for their alternative renderings of Jesus' ideas and the centrality that female characters assumed. When she is able to access translations of heretic texts and the old manuscripts kept in Dr. Rhinehart's library (which, by the way, was organized by color in such a way that "the effect was of a lovely strange garden" [Ibid., p. 96]), she feels ecstatic: "The thrones of the twelve disciples will be near his throne, but the thrones of Mary Magdalene and John the Virgin [sic] will be higher than the thrones of the disciples. Amazing! Hattie thought. Fantastic, remarkable. The heresy was plain to see, and yet she was spellbound" (SILKO, 1999, p. 99). Her curiosity for the ideas these texts presented drives her to read loads of books and texts out of sheer pleasure—her scholarship is interested, driven, engaged. Thus, she formulates a bold hypothesis: "that Jesus himself made Mary Magdalene and other women apostles in early church!" (Ibid., p. 101). Through her memories of the time she spent researching, the reader learns that she is extremely intelligent, dedicated and insightful, and her claims are bold. However, over the course of the narrative, there are still many instances in which Hattie will avoid talking to Edward about something for fear he might think her foolish, despite his intelligence not being up to hers.

One night at Aunt Bronwyn's cloister, she dreams of a strange version of the Boston Commons, the park in Boston where she had taken a walk with her Harvard classmate Mr. Hyslop before he offered her a ride home in his coach and assaulted her. After Mr. Hyslop's crime, "her confidence in her entire life and her very being were changed forever" (SILKO,

1999, p. 103); that, together with the committee's decision to declare her a heretic, caused her to live with severe anxiety and melancholy for a long time until Edward took her for a wife. She wakes up from her dream of the Commons and finds herself laying down in one of the stones in Aunt Bronwyn's garden, from where she sees a luminous white glow traveling through the corn and sunflowers. These are plants the Sand Lizard cultivate back at the old gardens, and the fact that the glow she saw chose these plants to roam through could signal Hattie's perspectives are shifting. But her sleepwalking during the night is enough for Edward to become gravely alarmed, so she decides not to confide in him about her vision of the glowing light. She probably made the right decision, because later, in Corsica, Hattie, Indigo and the citron farmer's family see the luminous image of the Holy Mother appear on a wall, and Edward (who had been away stealing the citron cuttings [Figure 6]) calls it "religious hysteria"; upon hearing this, Hattie "barely held her temper" (Ibid., p. 320). More than once after the dream with the luminous glow she considers confiding in Aunt Bronwyn or Laura and asking if they knew anything that could explain to her what she had seen, but she always fails to initiate the conversation.

Figure 6 – Citron fruit

Source: Wikipedia (s.d., n.p)

The thought of talking about the glow causes Hattie to feel anxious, and it is only fair, since the sight of it awakened many buried feelings in her. After waking up from her sleepwalk in the garden, she returns to her bedroom to try to sleep, but she can only stay up with racing thoughts:

> Words from her thesis notes cascaded before her mind's eye, then suddenly scattered as if suddenly the words were dry leaves blowing away in the wind: poor judgement, bad timing, late marriage, premature marriage, dread of childbirth, sexual dysfunction. (...) The rooms of the Riverside house would not let her be—that house presided over by her dead mother-in-law intruded into her thoughts, room by room followed by the gardens overgrown and sparse and the glass house of orchid skeletons in pots all around the monkey's cage. Suddenly she realized they must help the Indian child return to her sister and mother! This was all wrong! How foolish she had been! (SILKO, 1999, p. 249)

In this moment, she realizes her past foolishness not from Edward's perspective, but from a new perspective of her own that she is allowing to take shape with the help of her experiences with Indigo and Aunt Bronwyn. At the same time that her "conversion" is spiritual, opening her up to the matriarchal stories and beliefs of ancient European cultures, it is also erotic, since it provides her a completely different perspective of her own gender. The erotics she is getting to know is defined, according to Miranda's terms, as an indigenous erotics: it differs from "Western ideas about the erotic as hedonistic, excessive, selfish indulgence in purely sensory pleasure", and instead "works via the creative life force to re-establish a whole, *balanced* energy: to remake the ground, both physical and spiritual, that humanity has lost in an unwise and out of control worship of the destructive" (MIRANDA, 2007, p. 142). Miranda calls that balance a gynostemic balance, using the metaphor of the orchid's gynostemium, an organ responsible for both masculine and feminine functions in the reproduction of orchids. The gynostemium is the symbol she chooses for a model of gender and sexuality that is not polarized and divisive, but integrative and balanced. Tellingly, the gynostemium is not involved in Edward's activity of collecting orchids: they die after they end their life cycles outside their endemic environments because their sexual reproduction through the gynostemium is highly environment-dependent. Therefore, the metaphor that lies in the opposition between Edward's grafting and Indigo's seed gathering acquires another dimension: Edward's method of reproduction is asexual, while Indigo's requires a number of careful interactions, including pollinizers' kisses, like the flying foxes that kiss Eucalyptus flowers, so that the mother plant is able to produce seeds following sexual reproduction. This way, seed gathering also has an erotic, loving dimension, as does all gardening. Hattie learns this from Aunt Bronwyn when she declares that her aunt's gardening ideas will serve as an inspiration for her to show the overgrown Riverside gardens that "they were loved again". To that, Aunt Bronwyn responds that, yes, "if a garden wasn't loved, it could not properly grow!" (SILKO, 1999, p. 240).

It is interesting to notice that both Edward's and Hattie's relationships with sex and intimacy cause them anxiety. As mentioned above, the luminous glow makes Hattie think about sexual dysfunction and late marriage. No confirmation was made before about Hattie possibly having a sexual dysfunction, but her anxiety and melancholy, in addition to her mother insisting she would never be loved by a man and Mr. Hyslop's sexual assault are likely to have taken a toll on her—enough for her and Edward to have settled upon not having children together, which is a way of saying that both partners fear sexual intimacy and the consummation of their marriage. The couple feels deeply disturbed and embarrassed by Laura's statues for their honor of sexual pleasure and child-nurturing. However, Hattie's empathy towards Indigo in Riverside and her hypothesis concerning the female principle in early church already suggest that her worldview is more open to intimacy and female pleasure than Edward's is. Their dissonant sexual desires come into conflict when, after seeing Laura's ancient artifacts and drinking some glasses of wine, they are feeling tipsy and joyous:

> They laughed together and Hattie felt a sense of camaraderie with her husband that filled her heart with passion. As he sat on the edge of the bed, she leaned over and kissed him ardently on the back of the neck. In the glow of the wine they forgot themselves and the awkward moments and embarrassments of their previous attempts at sexual intimacy. (Ibid., p. 292)

The narration here is likely embedded with Hattie's point of view, framing this new intimacy as a source of pleasure and an opportunity to put behind their previous awkwardness, perhaps incited by her earlier contact with the fertility statues. Edward, however, seems not so pleased and more confused as he says to himself later that Indigo had probably "stirred Hattie's maternal instincts" (Ibid., p. 292) and made her suddenly want children—as if Hattie's desire for caressing and pleasure were reduced only to her maternal instincts, not possibly a desire for *him*. The vulnerability and the loving required for sex—and for other activities, such as participating in honest conversations, welcoming, apologizing, nurturing, hugging, etc.—is out of Edward's reach since he distanced himself from his own feelings and the other's feelings, too. His leg injury, recalling Henry James' mysterious back pain and Oedipus' ankle injuries, causes him recurring pain even when the wound itself seems to not be swollen or reddened, and on multiple occasions it is that pain that impedes him from having sex, walking to the US embassy to pick up the letters from his private investors, and participating in activities with Hattie and Indigo. As argued by Brewster E. Fitz, "[t]he wound functions like a metonymy for the cognitive and emotional gap created by Edward's scientific and exclusionary perspective"

(FITZ, 2004, p. 212), and in Averbach's words, the injury, a "symbol of his incapacity to really travel (meaning to know and accept the *difference* he finds in other places), to really learn from Otherness (as Indigo and Hattie do) will finally kill him, together with the science he wants so much to help advance" (AVERBACH, 2001, p. 557). He is unable to realize the harm he causes, and insists on presenting his reasons for theft and conquest as noble: his reasons are scientific as opposed to people who are downright evil. Deep down, however, what he faces is hopelessness, anxiety, and increasing dependence on analgesics. On the way to Corsica he recalls that when he was left to die in the forest fire caused by his partner in Brazil, he was ready to "let go of himself forever in the rushing water" (SILKO, 1999, p. 312) before rescue arrives through the Mestizo brothers and the orchid-finding monkey he then adopts and names Linnaeus. This wish to let himself float into non-existence returns precisely when they arrive in Cervione and he is getting more anxious about stealing the citron cuttings, indicating that somewhere deep down he probably dreads this activity, and he wishes to escape himself and his worldview. If only he had learned to be in the world through a gynostemic balance that allowed him to listen to the cosmopolitical views of women around him, he might have found ways around his decadent health and financial situation that could actually bring him tranquility and wholeness.

Hattie's going-forth travel allows her to undergo precisely the changes that Edward resists: by letting herself be affected by the Other, be it through her relationship with Indigo or her experiences with Aunt Bronwyn and with Laura, Hattie faces the challenging task of shifting her worldview and becoming someone else. Her complete disappointment in Edward for his crime and for his use of her and Indigo as a façade is only a final blow to any hopes she had of living a normal upper-class American life. Much before, while walking through Aunt Bronwyn's stones, groves and springs, she had finally seen why her aunt had chosen to live in the old cloister—a decision often questioned by Hattie's family in the United States. With her hand dipped into the water of a spring, she admits: "'This is a very special place," Hattie said. "I understand why you stay here" (Ibid., p. 242). This is an indication that for the first time she is more than merely a visitor to her extravagant aunt; she can see the magic of the place herself. In Corsica, because the weather is too hot and she and Edward cannot sleep comfortably in their bed, she considers joining Indigo sleeping on the floor: "she thought how easy it would be to take a sheet and pillow to the floor to sleep, but of course that was silly" (Ibid., p. 313). Here, she can see herself sleeping like Indigo because, different from her, the girl is sound asleep in the cold tiles, but she still refrains from doing so. However, after Edward's criminal intentions

and acts are revealed and she asks for the divorce, much of her pride in not looking silly or foolish starts to vanish, and now memories of the indigenous cultures she met bring her soothing. Thinking of the bright glow in Aunt Bronwyn's garden becomes not a source of anxiety and shame, but something that brings her "a feeling of peace" (SILKO, 1999, p. 327), until the memory of the glow seems "more real now than her [thesis] manuscript or her marriage" (Ibid., p. 372). Thus, we know that her views about marriage and about scholarship and knowledge within the models prescribed by her culture will never suffice to bring her true fulfillment. Back in Riverside, after she and Edward have another discussion about the Australian doctor, she slams the door in his face and begins crying: "The longer she cried, the better she felt—the numb misery washed away in the tears; it was as if *her old self* molted away as she cried, and with it went the disappointment" (Ibid., added emphasis).

However, in discussing Hattie's ending, Stephanie Li argues that while Indigo's indigenous modes of resistance to violence are constructive and long-lasting, Hattie's are destructive and harmful. Similar to Yellow Woman as mentioned before, Indigo's strength is not destructive, but enabled by her cosmopolitical sexuality: her attunement to her wishes and feelings, her friendship with more-than-human beings, and her capacity to benefit her people. She takes care of herself and of others through Grandma Fleet's stories, which integrate her into a more-than-human world and teach her how to be a responsible participant in the creation of reality. According to Li,

> The consequences of such contrasting relationships to the earth is profound: while Indigo is able to sustain her sense of self despite the separation from her family, Hattie remains lost and uncertain about her future and her basic purpose in life. Although Indigo is the literal orphan in the text, Hattie's estrangement from the earth leaves her far more vulnerable to exploitation. (LI, 2009, p. 26)

Indeed, at the novel's end Hattie is assaulted and nearly killed; she finds refuge in the Chemehuevi and Sand Lizard girls and stays with them during the Ghost Dance. But her parents find her there and try to coax her out of the company of the Indians. While Hattie manages to escape her father's grip and runs to hide in the alleyways of the town of Needles, the police puts an end to the Dance. In a breakdown of anger and disappointment, she ignites a fire that ends up burning half the town; yet, in her eyes, the fire is beautiful: "the reds as rich as blood, the blues and whites luminous, and the orange flame as bright as Minerva's gemstone" (SILKO, 1999, p. 473). Despite the beauty, Li argues, the fire is

> a sign of Hattie's failed resistance. It does not succeed in bringing about justice or improving the lives of women like Hattie; it ultimately causes immense destruction. The garden images flame for moments, lacking the longevity and sustained power of stories like those of the Sand Lizard people. (...) Her failure is best demonstrated by her departure to England; she cannot constructively confront oppression in the United States. (LI, 2009, p. 34-35)

In a different reading of Hattie's ending, Ruth Blair remarks that Hattie deserved a better opportunity to become constructive and balanced, given that she demonstrated generosity, understanding and courage throughout the narrative. Blair writes:

> As if the assault isn't enough, she escapes from her mother and father who've come to fetch and look after her and burns down the livery stable of her rapist. (...) And the last we hear of Hattie, she is with Bronwyn, traveling to Scotland to look at more old stones and then on to Italy. How sad that such a modified (as I said above) independence is granted to this lively, intelligent woman. (BLAIR, 2012/2013, p. 23)

On the one hand, Li interprets Hattie's ending as an indicator of her inevitable, inescapable inability to act as a Yellow Woman of sorts: bold, creative, constructive and caring. Her decision to leave the United States is yet another demonstration of how disconnected, hurt, uprooted she inherently is. Blair, in turn, believes Hattie should already have been able to serve the struggle against colonial forces within the United States—she deserved an opportunity to stay and be constructive, she was ready to do that. I disagree with both critics' opinion of her leaving for Europe: that it either attested to her incapacity or did not measure up to her capacity. Hattie leaves the United States much more for an utter impossibility to stay: she knows she does not belong to the old gardens with Indigo; her parents already believe her to have lost all her sanity when they find her at the Ghost Dance. Going back to Oyster Bay is unacceptable for her at this point: first of all, she "refused to serve as the living example to frighten young girls judged too fond of studies or books" (SILKO, 1999, p. 452), and if one thing is crystal clear to her after all the cruelty she suddenly perceives in the world around her is that "she could never return to her former life among the lies" (Ibid., p. 459). Besides, she is bankrupt since Edward secretly withdrew all the money from her bank account before being hospitalized to pay for his share in the ore business with the Australian doctor. She has nowhere to establish herself in America for the time being, but her aunt and her friend Laura are more than happy to welcome her and be a source of understanding.

In addition to that, Hattie's journey towards a European indigeneity from which she could potentially build the connection to the earth that Li speaks of is still incomplete at the end

of the novel. Instead, she has experienced a profound awakening to the violent workings of the society she was raised in, and her feelings are, understandably, of anger and revolt. She still needs to go after a source of nourishment and connection that may allow her to build a different, rooted erotics for herself that will help her benefit her community (perhaps the community of Bath residents). In that task, going to live with Aunt Bronwyn to "look at more old stones" and learn from these ancient pagan cultures is perhaps the best, most dignified path she could have taken. Furthermore, her roots in the United States were not completely burned down: by the end of the novel, she sends pictures and (gifted) money to the Sand Lizard sisters, thus maintaining their friendship and helping them navigate the settlers' economy more comfortably.

I strongly agree with Li's reading that "Hattie's violent conflagration does little to combat forms of oppression, whereas Indigo's quiet perseverance and commitment to the basic necessities of life prove to be the most resistant actions of all" (LI, 2009, p. 35). However, I believe Hattie's ending is promising in the sense of allowing her to (re)establish a gynostemic balance through which she can continue her aunt's gardening and storytelling legacies, and hopefully her work in protecting endangered groves, stones, fairies and toads. As I argued in Chapter 3, Hattie's travelling is a going-forth, and I see her ending not as an ending exactly, but as the continuation of that going-forth. Perhaps mirroring the way in which Indigo's, Aunt Bronwyn's and Laura's stories have provided Hattie with the tools to transform herself—in her relationship to the erotic, to mothering, and to the land—Silko's text also gives the readers tools to initiate a transformation in themselves.

"WE WILL OUTLAST THEM": RESEEDING STORIES

Through Indigo and Sister Salt, *Gardens in the Dunes* shows us how native worldviews allow two orphaned girls to navigate the Other's world with confidence while maintaining a caring attitude. They are backed by their people's stories, which position them as responsible participants in the co-creation of reality together with more-than-human beings. The narrative is told through their perspective but also through characters from Euro-American backgrounds, especially Edward and Hattie, whose conduct is often ironically contrasted to the Sand Lizard sisters'. This dissertation discussed three axes around which this contrast is narrated: gardening, travelling, and erotics. Around these three themes, the narrative organization Silko creates reveals the intimate, interpersonal and interspecies workings of imperialist and native worldviews that respectively produce and resist to historical processes of land dispossession and conquest. In this work, each of these three themes was approached in three distinct chapters.

The first chapter focused on gardening in the many dimensions it assumes in the novel. It opened with a discussion of Gilio-Whitaker's analysis of environmental deprivation, the act of disrupting the relationships of interdependence between indigenous peoples and other-than-human beings, as a tool of settler colonialism to weaken these peoples' resistance via destructive disruption of their sources of nutrition, energy, water, etc.. Then, it articulated Gilio-Whitaker's work to Dunbar-Ortiz's definition of settler colonialism in the United States as genocidal and central to understanding the country's history. From these studies, it became clearer that indigenous gardens correspond to the land a people takes care of, and thus Indigo's idea of gardening not only greatly differs from that of the other characters', but is also in itself a tactic of resistance and endurance against colonial violence. This chapter also analyzed Indigo's gardening practices in more depth, drawing from Vine Deloria, Jr.'s concept of a moral universe: the moral responsibility indigenous peoples' share with their other-than-human counterparts to maintain a world in balance. Furthermore, it approached Indigo's worldviews through Tim Ingold's considerations about the different concepts of life for indigenous and Western ontologies. Finally, it discussed the many cultural legacies that support the gardening decisions of different gardener characters: from Edward's father and mother's gender-split garden and Hattie's renovation plans for it; to Hattie's father's philanthropic experiments and Susan's exaggerated and careless manipulation of plants; reaching Aunt Bronwyn's protection of stones and groves, and Laura's

sanctuary-like garden of ancient goddesses. Significantly, these two European women, who are tied to an ancient European indigeneity, have in common with the Sand Lizard their attitude of sharing, which involves their gifts of seeds and corms for Indigo's garden and their act of exchanging powerful stories, which integrate the community of listeners to a more-than-human world.

The second chapter turned from the steadiness of gardens to the movement that happens in the novel, most importantly Edward's and Indigo's divergent views of travelling: while Edward goes to different places to steal, appropriate and smuggle rare botanical species for his own financial benefit, Indigo takes the opportunity of travelling to genuinely meet and learn from the Other. Taking from Stengers' concept of cosmopolitics, this chapter argued that Indigo's travelling is deeply cosmopolitical (instead of cosmopolitan), because she creates bridges not only between her own culture and others' cultures, but also between herself and other-than-human life forms. She recognizes the agency and participation of mountains, rivers, animals, plants and other beings in the interactions she has with them. Besides, her acquaintance with more-than-human beings was understood through David Abram's notion of the sensuous, a way of perceiving the world that is deeply attuned to other life forms' ways of communicating. For example, she often uses eye contact and language to establish a bond with new beings. Significantly, Indigo's openness to the other and the unknown allows her to establish safe connections that support her in places far from home. Her attitude was contrasted with Edward's distance from the world, since he is always hiding his intentions and feelings and is unable to connect sincerely with other people, let alone other-than-human beings.

Gardening and travelling practices seem to be, to a large extent, related to sexuality in *Gardens in the Dunes*. The third chapter derived its discussion of the erotic from the story of Yellow Woman and Buffalo Man as told and interpreted by Silko and from Deborah A. Miranda's discussion of how gender functions differently for Edward and Hattie and for the indigenous characters in the novel. This chapter is indebted to Miranda's argument that the indigenous erotic is not limited to Western views of sexual pleasure as self-indulgent and hedonistic exchanges, but instead the indigenous erotic relates to pleasure as a force that drives creation, connections, care, and alliances—much similar to Silko's reading of Yellow Woman's stories. Through this distinction between Western and indigenous erotics, this chapter analyzed Hattie's character development through her changing relationship to sex, fertility, and mothering, understanding that the patriarchal culture she was raised in promotes an imbalanced relationship between gender roles. In opposition to that patriarchal culture, indigenous gender systems promote a "gynostemic

balance", as proposed by Miranda. Thus, Hattie's process of becoming aware of the violence behind the imperialist society she was raised in can be understood, from a different perspective, as a process of reestablishing a gynostemic balance to her understanding of herself.

Here, it is of utmost importance to stress that, in *Gardens in the Dunes*, Silko skillfully weaves these contrasts between native and non-native worldviews by organizing how characters' points of view surface into the narrator's voice. This arrangement of voices is characteristic of free indirect speech, a literary technique widely employed by nineteenth century European writers such as Gustave Flaubert, Jane Austen and Henry James, already mentioned in the introduction. In "Delight: An Appreciation of Henry James", Silko writes that "*Gardens in the Dunes* owes a considerable debt to Henry James (...) with his work that revealed that narrative point of view is essential to the meaning of the story" (SILKO, 2012, p. 212). By allowing the writer to navigate different perspectives, this technique creates space for showcasing the ironic discrepancies not only between different characters' points of view, but also between what the characters think and what the narrator tells. Hans Robert Jauss and others have credited free indirect speech as a technique that dismantles objectivity, becoming a subversive literary form to poke at the inconsistencies of European common sense (MORETTI, 2013, p. 98). Franco Moretti avowedly opposes that interpretation of the employment of free indirect speech, offering a different one that identifies something beneath the "subversive" multiplicity of points of view. In *The Bourgeois*, he proposes that behind the characters' voices that are allowed entrance into the narration in free indirect speech, the narrator's voice orchestrates and authorizes them in such a way that its proximity to one character shows a validation of the value system manifested by that character. In the classical bourgeois novel, the chosen character(s) usually expressed the values of the dominant society. According to him,

> In a fully homogenized society, as bourgeois France has become according to Flaubert, free indirect style reveals, not the power of literary techniques, but their *impotence*: its '"objective" seriousness' paralyzes it, making opposition unimaginable; once the entropic drift begins, and the narrator's voice merges with that of the characters (and, through them, of bourgeois *doxa*), there is no way back. (Ibid., p. 100)

As such, in the context of bourgeois Europe this use of point of view may be less subversive and more complacent than we believe, since the characters themselves derive their points of view from the bourgeois *doxa*, as does the narrator that organizes the characters' voices. The effect of this narration style is, then, homogenizing. In *Gardens in the Dunes*, however, the bourgeois voices belong precisely to those white characters whose manners and opinions Silko

places under an ironic light through Indigo's reactions and responses. One of such instances is when the couple has only met Indigo in their garden and, since she has not said a word, they believe she does not understand English. Edward then goes inside and returns with a book of linguistic research about indigenous desert languages, from which he reads random words in all types of languages to see if any sparks a reaction in her.

> Edward went through the Agua Caliente and Cocopa words and was just beginning to struggle with words in Mojave when a big smile spread across the girl's face and she laughed out loud. The monkey chattered excitedly and climbed to the cage top. The girl stood up and looked down at them confidently. "I talk English", Indigo said. "I talk it way better than you talk Indian." (SILKO, 1999, p. 108)

Indigo's English learning happened without any sort of written support: she listened to others talking and at times practiced talking to others. By contrast, Edward's method of understanding her is to turn to linguistic studies, and as we can see in other passages, Edward truly believes studies about native peoples can tell him more about Indigo than Indigo herself. In turn, her engaged language learning is much more efficient in making her fluent and enabling her to communicate. In this passage, Indigo's boldness and intelligence are contrasted with Edward's arrogance and clumsiness. Thus, Silko's use of free indirect speech narration in *Gardens in the Dunes* fulfills the reversed function of dominant Euro-American writers' use: instead of being subservient to dominant points of view, it reveals how native worldviews respond richly and efficiently to the problems of the world and to Euro-American thought. While Edward believes that his cultural archive, in the form of linguistic studies and artifact catalogues, contains Indigo's world and language, Indigo's wit proves larger than his beliefs about her people's incapacities and his own people's achievements.

Thus, Silko's use of free indirect speech has the effect of triggering a shift in perspective, especially in the reader who is still immersed in the same imperialist ideas that support Edward's thoughts and actions throughout the novel. In that sense, her writing promotes an effect James Ruppert has famously named mediation, an achievement of contemporary Native American fiction. According to him, mediation is the process through which indigenous writers articulate the modern and native worlds in their stories, providing readers the means to "see through" the discourse of the Other. Mediational texts present non-native and native worldviews in a way that the readers move back and forth between them, between each of their "chronological depths" (RUPPERT, 1995, p. 12), their articulations of meaning, and, in the case of *Gardens in the Dunes*, their engagement with the more-than-human world. This is not only a shift in perspective within

the possibilities offered by bourgeois thought, but a movement between whole epistemologies: a shift between worlds, as proposed in Stengers' cosmopolitics. As Ruppert writes,

> Through the process of reading the text, the readers become something, someone they were not before. But more than that, if readers are open to the successful mediational text, they will tend to question their set of culturally determined assumptions about narrative, meaning, and life. (RUPPERT, 1995, p. 12-3)

In short, Native American fictional texts "aspire to change readers" (Ibid., p. 11). Silko's story in *Gardens in the Dunes* is thus an attempt—a successful one—to invite the readers, especially those not familiar with native ways of thinking, to reconsider their cultural biases and perhaps instill a change of conduct, albeit on an individual level. That is the power of stories that Thomas King discusses in "'You'll Never Believe What Happened' Is Always a Great Way to Start". In this essay, King tells the story of a woman who fell from the sky on a planet (Earth) that was, at the time, only made of ocean. Since she needed some dry land to live on, she and the fish, the whales, seahorses and others put dry land together on the back of a turtle, with rivers, lakes, waterfalls, land animals, trees, mountains, etc. In comparing this creation story to the Christian creation story of the Garden of Eden and the original sin, King asks:

> What if the creation story in Genesis had featured a flawed deity who was understanding and sympathetic rather than autocratic and rigid? Someone who, in the process of creation, found herself lost from time to time and in need of advice, someone who was willing to accept a little help with the more difficult decisions? (...)
> What kind of a world might we have created with that kind of story? (KING, 2003, p. 27-8)

King suggests that the stories we tell to define our world and ourselves are powerful and dangerous, since it is from them that we will learn how to create our world. He invites "Do with it [this story] what you will. (...) But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (Ibid., p. 29). We can see the impact stories have on the characters in *Gardens in the Dunes*: the stories about greed and sharing that Grandma Fleet tells the sisters help them thrive, while the stories Edward and Hattie were raised with confuse and misguide them. In the end, Hattie refuses to become a story, a cautionary tale for girls who love reading and learning; she crosses the Atlantic Ocean searching for the stories she needs to sustain herself. Sister Salt gets away from Big Candy because he had already created a deadly ending for their baby before giving it a chance to grow and tell his own

story. Likewise, Silko's novel is a story that offers a deeper understanding of how non-native and native epistemologies work in the world, in interactions among species and among people. This way, *Gardens in the Dunes* is a powerful story, in that it enables readers to rethink their own participation in creating reality. In interview with Ellen Arnold, Silko talks about the potential contributions of this novel:

> *Gardens in the Dunes* really is about now. It all connects together and it gives you a psychic and spiritual way to try to live within this. (...) It gives you a way, but it gives you a quieter, more personal, more interpersonal way. (...) I guess it's offering people another way to see things and possible ways to connect up, in a spiritual way, to withstand. (SILKO, 2000, p. 183)

Therefore, the novel points out possible ways of resisting colonialism and its harmful consequences that reside in the subjective and interpersonal levels of everyday existence. As *Gardens in the Dunes* seems to point out, for the implied non-native reader, the way Silko talks of in this passage has to do with becoming connected to the land again, retrieving a sense of respect and responsibility to the more-than-human world, which is represented by Hattie's awakening process. For the implied native reader, the way may be to creatively reaffirm their identity and place in the world and find means of resistance that allow for a dignified existence, represented by Indigo and Sister Salt. In both cases, finding a good way to "live within this" involves telling and listening to the right stories. The Sand Lizard stories within *Gardens in the Dunes* value an openness to the unpredictable and a self-reliance for building relationships that are mutually beneficial. As a traveler that incorporates unfamiliar plants into her own people's gardens and diet, Indigo demonstrates the importance of change, flexibility, and adaptation in maintaining some autonomy to live in ways that nurture oneself and other beings—especially in a world dominated by people who seek to destroy any balance. This way, Silko emphasizes the adaptive, insightful, and environment-specific nature of native resistance, disputing the idea that indigenous knowledge is stagnant and belongs more to Edward's anthropological and linguistic studies than to creating a future.

This position reflects that of Betonie, the Navajo medicine man who helps Tayo heal in *Ceremony*. In planning the ceremony that would heal not only Tayo, but the whole world, Betonie says, "I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong. (...) things which don't shift and grow are dead things" (SILKO, 1977, p. 126). Betonie says that immutability is exactly what would please witchery people—the people who harm the world, destroying indigenous peoples and other-than-human beings,

destroying the balances. Just like Uncle Josiah's cattle become part of the wind, Betonie considers growth and change as signs of strength and resilience, the only way to overcome the limitations that the settlers impose on native communities.

The many stories in *Gardens in the Dunes* emphasize growing, listening to oneself and to others, making the changes necessary to the ongoing creation of a better world, and introducing new elements to the gardens and the stories that are the people's sustenance. In addition, the novel contains cautionary tales about greed, selfishness and skepticism. Grandma Fleet tells the sisters about how, at a time, the people were so hungry that they forgot about the importance of sharing the harvest with the other animals and the rain clouds, forgot to store seeds for next planting season, and forgot to leave some of the food to dry on the ground so that the gardens would be able to reseed themselves. For this, the people were even hungrier the following year because they were unable to reseed the gardens. The teachings of Sand Lizard herself highlight the importance of always sharing, always being careful with the seeds so that, next season, the gardens can reseed themselves: the plants must outlast humans. Likewise, *Gardens in the Dunes* is an act of making sure that something can reseed; and that something is the native way of thinking, which is integrative and balanced. The stories she offers readers become seeds left in the land to, perhaps, be the next ones to grow. Silko finds a way for these indigenous cosmovisions to outlast herself through the readers, who may then practice the lessons learned and take their place as responsible members of a more-than-human community.

In conclusion, in *Gardens in the Dunes* Silko adopts a typically nineteenth century Euro-American literary form that complied with the bourgeois common sense and transforms it into a tool to promote a greater understanding of indigenous worldviews. She presents the Sand Lizard characters as capable of intelligently responding to Western cultural biases and of richly and generously facing challenges and caring for others. In a beautiful story of colorful scented gardens, she reveals and counters colonialist and imperialist ideas; as mentioned in the introduction, plants are "the most political thing of all". Sand Lizard gardening, cosmopolitics and gynostemic erotics are some of this story's themes from which we can extract learning. Much like Grandma Fleet trusts that unknown plants may return something to the Sand Lizard, Silko's political literary project is a bet on the readers' capacity to listen to the story and go on planting, incorporating, drawing connections that resist the violence that tries to destroy lives every day. As the Yaqui Gypsy character Delena prophecies on her way to aid the Mexican rebels: "We will outlast them. We always have" (SILKO, 1999, p. 462).

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