

ANGLICA

An International Journal of English Studies

29/1 2020

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Dimensions of Decolonial Future in Contemporary Indigenous Speculative Fiction: Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning*

Abstract

Departing from the traditional representations of the colonial past and its aftermath, speculative fiction emerges as a new important trend in the North American Indigenous literary landscape, allowing Native writers to represent decolonial futures. This article focuses on the representations of the future offered by two recent Indigenous speculative novels: Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) and Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning* (2018), in the context of their decolonial potential. The analysis of the selected literary texts pays special attention to the status of women and its revision, as well as to the re-narrativization of space in the face of the anthropogenic climate change, and their significance to Indigenous decolonial project. In order to facilitate the discussion of the Indigenous speculative novels, the article refers to recent theories in Native American studies concerning Indigenous futurism, Native dystopia, and definitions of decolonization.

Keywords: speculative fiction, Indigenous futurism, decolonization, Indigenous literature, feminism, Anthropocene

1. Introduction

Indigenous writing in North America is currently enjoying a new renaissance, including contributions from already acknowledged authors, as well as new Native literary voices. Louise Erdrich interviewed by Tommy Orange acknowledges this period of flourishing describing it as “the third wave” of Indigenous writing (Orange and Erdrich). While Native American literature is still strongly associated with addressing traumas of the colonial past and their aftermath, recently, a number of Indigenous writers engaged in depicting Native futurities. Departing from the tradition of Indigenous realism, Indigenous speculative fiction emerges, then, as a new significant current in contemporary Native American writing.

Speculative fiction as a literary category is elusive to define and its conceptualizations differ. The label is used by some as an umbrella term for all the non-mimetic fiction, including science fiction and fantasy (Oziewicz 6). This article, however, follows Margaret Atwood's understanding of speculative fiction as the representations of futures that depict "things that could happen but just hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books" (2011, 6). Hence, in this conceptualization, the genre refers to the viable future potentialities emerging from the existing socio-political realities. It is important to emphasize speculative fiction and science fiction's roots as thoroughly Western. Grace Dillon writing about Indigenous futurism acknowledges, then, its inherently contesting and unsettling character: "Writers of Indigenous futurisms sometimes intentionally experiment with, sometimes intentionally dislodge, sometimes merely accompany, but invariably *change* the parameters of sf" (3). In this way, Indigenous authors revise their position both in American and Indigenous literary traditions. This assertion seems also particularly significant when considering the potential of literature, and Indigenous futurisms, in particular, to challenge settler colonial structures and provide space for envisioning decolonial futures.

In this paper, I will explore two recent speculative novels: *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) by Louise Erdrich and *Trail of Lightning* (2018) by Rebecca Roanhorse in terms of their commitment to recognize decolonial potentialities in their representations of futures shaped by climate change. While Erdrich portrays the world on the verge of the apocalypse, Roanhorse represents a post-apocalyptic or, rather, a post-post-apocalyptic world since as stated by the female protagonist of her novel "the Diné had already suffered their apocalypse a century before. This wasn't our end. This was our rebirth" (Roanhorse 23). Louise Erdrich is an acknowledged Indigenous writer of Anishinaabe descent. *Future Home of the Living God* is the sixteenth novel in her prolific writing career. The narrative is written in the form of a journal of Cedar Songmaker, an Anishinaabe woman raised outside of her original culture. In the face of climate change and uncontrollable genetic mutations, the United States collapses, becoming a religious state. In Erdrich's novel, the natural catastrophe is accompanied by a precarious situation of women, especially women of colour, seen as destined to prolong the future of humanity. Rebecca Roanhorse, in turn, emerges as an Indigenous science fiction writer of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo and African American descent, who addresses predominantly a popular audience. *Trail of Lightning* depicts the world after a deluge, referred to throughout the novel as the Flood. Resulting from the impacts of climate change, the rising water erases the United States' West and East Coast. Similarly to Erdrich, Roanhorse imagines the future beyond the United States as a nation state, representing a decolonized space encompassing Navajo territories. In the novel, a female protagonist fights both monsters and patriarchal norms. My objective is to address these two works of fiction in the context of their decolonial potential, emphasizing the ways in which they re-narrativize femininity, re-invent

space, and re-imagine futures. Therefore, the article will respond to the speculative fiction's potential to provide an in-depth social revision.

2. Itineraries of Indigenous Speculative Fiction

Both novels discussed in the article reflect social anxieties fuelled by the upcoming new realities resulting from climate change. In these works, the Anthropocene becomes more tangible than ever before. The environmental crisis certainly shapes contemporary imaginations, rendering speculative fiction more diffused and popular than ever before. Ecocriticism stresses the speculative character of climate change fiction. Alexa Weik von Mossner considers narratives referring to futures shaped by climate change, assuming a speculative character, as the major mode of expression in the age of the Anthropocene for their ability to engage the reader in the imagining of alternative futures. (84). These futures, exposing human interference in Earth's geology, necessitate the consideration of a new set of time dynamics and locate the human against the temporalities of deep time or what DeLoughrey describes as "figuring humanity on a planetary scale" (352). This juxtaposition often leads to dystopic and apocalyptic representations, emphasizing the demise of a human subject in confrontation with a natural disaster.

Kyle Powys Whyte, a Potawatomi scholar, directs attention to the connection between the Anthropocene and dystopia as experienced by Indigenous people, tying the new geological era to the processes of colonial expansion. He emphasizes that the settler colonial project yielded a negative imprint not only on Indigenous populations but also on the environment:

The ecosystems in which we live today are already drastically changed from those to which our ancestors related – a fact which shapes how we approach discussion of Anthropocene futures. Our ways of approaching conservation and restoration, then, are situated at the convergence of deep Anishinaabe history and the vast degradation of settler colonial campaigns occurring in such a short time. I think of this junction as our ancestor's dystopia. (2017, 209)

Hence, Whyte suggests that the environmental crisis associated with the Anthropocene was enhanced by settler exploitation of Indigenous lands. The changes in the environment that occurred during the process of colonization are approached by the scholar as his "ancestor's dystopia" (2017, 209). Then, Indigenous peoples live in the dystopic future today.

Further, Whyte directs attention to the fact that degradation of the environment and changes in ecosystems distorted the reciprocal relationship that Indigenous people had with their lands and its elements, thus, impacting and irreversibly altering their lifestyles. Moreover, the process of adaptation that resulted from

the disruption of Indigenous relational ecologies induces Native people to accommodate new environmental futures:

for many indigenous peoples, the Anthropocene is not experienced as threatening in precisely the same sense because the particular era of settlement I am describing forced many of our societies to let go of so many relationships with plants, animals and ecosystems. Rather, if there is something different in the Anthropocene for the indigenous peoples, it would be just that we are focusing our energies *also* on adapting to another kind of anthropogenic change. (2017, 208)

Therefore, the environmental crisis provides Indigenous communities with a sense of urgency to accommodate change and restore their sovereignty based on relational reciprocity with the surrounding ecosystems. The Anthropocene does not provide for Indigenous people a sense of a shift from a stable past and present to a sense of crisis since their contemporary situation is already a crisis, a dystopia, an apocalypse, or even post-apocalypse (Whyte 2018, 227). Hence, the sentiments of Native speculative narratives pertaining to the Anthropocene might significantly differ from these present in dominant American fiction and not fully correspond to the dominant dystopic and apocalyptic representations.

Contemporary Indigenous literary works respond to the speculative mode of tackling climate change and confront the dominant discourse of dystopia and apocalypse. In “Smudged, Distorted and Hidden: Apocalypse as Protest in Indigenous Speculative Fiction,” Rosalyn Weaver analyses Australian Indigenous futuristic fiction, addressing the poetics of apocalypse and its function of a protest. Even though the article focuses on Australian speculative fiction, it appears to be successfully applicable also to the North American context. Weaver emphasizes that the genre of apocalyptic fiction generally represents the dominant society, exclusive of or even repressive towards people of colour (Weaver 100). Indigenous speculative fiction emerges then as a response to this exclusion, attempting to subvert and unsettle visions of the future. Weaver argues that “Apocalypse offers an opportunity for Indigenous writers to reinscribe the unwritten future with themselves as a significant part of the landscape” (102). Thus, the apocalyptic imagery, again, provides space to reinvent the future in a way that Indigenous peoples reclaim their sovereignty and their connection to the land, disrupting the ties between apocalypse and dystopia. Danika Medac-Saltzman also emphasizes the potential of speculative fiction to re-imagine futures with Indigenous peoples’ presence on the colonized land that contradicts settler narratives of “vanishing Indians.” Moreover, she stresses the potential of Indigenous futuristic works to reflect on the social problems troubling Native communities with an aim to create better futures beyond settler colonialism (143). She argues that “Indigenous resurgence [...] requires us to discard the *-isms* and phobias that come with colonialism – sexism, ageism, and homophobia – in order to remake ethical relationships in this world” (166). Medac-Saltzman positions, then, speculative narratives in

their potentiality to transform worldviews (167), which, in turn, situates literary expression at the forefront of the decolonial project.

3. Conceptualizations of Decolonization

Diverse theories of decolonization emerged after WWII when the world witnessed the demise of colonial empires and formation of the new post-colonial states, including an influential theorization formulated by Franz Fanon (1961). Concurrently, the field of postcolonial studies emerged in reaction to the need for describing the colonized people's condition following the decolonial process. It is important to stress the particular situation of the United States as the settler nation-state for Indigenous populations inhabiting its lands have never regained their ancestral territories. Thus, the American context might significantly differ from postcolonial realities in other parts of the world. When approaching Native literature as decolonial practice, it seems vital to address the ways in which it is conceptualized by contemporary Indigenous scholars. Even though decolonization seems to be a self-explanatory notion signifying the process of the undoing of prevalent colonial structures, there are different conceptualizations of how to subvert them. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonial Methodologies*, functioning as a constitutive text in the field of Indigenous studies, establishes foundations for conceptualizing decolonial efforts within the academia. Smith argues that decolonization necessitates "constant reworking of [the] understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism" (Smith 25). Therefore, the definition of decolonization may be based on the undermining of prevalent imperial structures, by means of demonstrating their imprint on the colonized Indigenous peoples and their seized land. The process of comprehending the mechanisms of settler colonialism, then, constitutes an opportunity to subvert it. Similarly, a Metis scholar, Zoe Todd engages in the theoretical discourse concerning the decolonization of academic spaces. She asserts that academic spaces must be based on challenging the taken-for-granted ideas and standards that exclude Indigenous knowledges and the means of their production (Todd 19).

The postulates for the decolonization of thought and imagination constitute, then, one of the ways of approaching decolonial efforts. This conceptualization of decolonial struggle is critiqued by some of the Indigenous scholars as not effective since it does not exhibit a high potential for transformation. Tuck and Yang argue:

When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation.

When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym. (Tuck and Yang 3)

Thus, this vision of decolonization departs from its conceptualizations discussed above. Tuck and Yang perceive the movement of decolonizing the mind as perilous in that it functions to reduce settler guilt (3). Therefore, they argue a vision of decolonization that would return lands and power to Indigenous peoples: "decolonization in exploitative colonial situations could involve the seizing of imperial wealth by the postcolonial subject. In settler colonial situations, seizing imperial wealth is inextricably tied to settlement and re-invasion" (7). This radical conceptualization of decolonial future erases settler futures from the equation.

Tuck and Yang's idea of "seizing imperial wealth" (7), however significant, is put into confrontation by numerous Indigenous scholars. Smith defines decolonization as "a totality that places capitalism, patriarchy, White supremacy, and Western Christianity in radical contingency [...]. The task ahead is to detach and *dethink* the notion of sovereignty from its connection to the Western understandings of power and base it on indigenous notions of relationship" (Smith 244). Similarly to Smith, Sandy Grande's conceptualization of decolonization entails transcendence of power relations in favour of the restoration of relationality as the structuring praxis. She argues decolonization beyond power relations as defined by settler colonialism on which the notion of ownership is based. Further, Grande emphasizes the importance of restorative justice as the foundation of sovereignty and, after Warrior, postulates Indigenous future that would not become separatist (244–245). In the same spirit, decolonization's orientation in the future is stressed by Andrea Smith, who argues that "[d]ecolonization entails not going backward to a precolonial past but a commitment to building a future for Indigenous peoples based on principles of justice and liberation" (224). Thus, her "Native Studies at the Horizon of Death" presents a critique of the conceptualization of decolonization that necessitates the rejection of everything that is non-Indigenous in order to meet the standards of authenticity (224). Smith's understanding of decolonial efforts is particularly relevant to this paper since it stresses the importance of re-imagining Indigenous futures: "our project becomes less of one based on self-improvement or even collective self-improvement and more about creation of new worlds and futurities for which we currently have no language" (225). Addressing future Indigenous worlds, speculative fiction attempts to engage in decolonization precisely in this way. Indigenous writers present, then, the social critique of extractive economies and environmentally irresponsible politics. Founding their fiction on Indigenous perspectives, they attempt to re-imagine and re-narrativize the poetics of the apocalyptic future to include Native peoples, inherently engaging in decolonial efforts.

4. The Anthropocene and Feminist Dystopia in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of Living God* (2018)

In *Future Home of the Living God*, the apocalyptic future is tied closely to the Anthropocene as global warming and climate change alter evolutionary processes on Earth. Religious fanatics take advantage of the situation of crisis, creating a religious state that oppresses women. Erdrich started writing her novel after the 2000 United States presidential elections won by the Republican candidate George W. Bush Jr. and decided to finish it after 2016 elections won again by a Republican candidate, Donald Trump. The timing of the publication of *Future Home of the Living God* is not coincidental as the writer openly states the political character of her work when interviewed by Margaret Atwood (Atwood and Erdrich). For Erdrich, both Bush Jr.'s and Trump's presidencies indicate a step back in terms of both women's rights and environmental policy in the United States. Representing imprisoned women destined to procreate and prolong humanity in the face of environmental crisis, her novel disguises fears that emerge from the contemporary socio-political situation. The world represented by Erdrich has been often compared to the one represented by Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* published in 1985 (Martínez-Falquina 164–165). This parallel demonstrates that the fragile condition of women prevails, which might be also spotted in the popularity of the television series produced in 2017 by Hulu and based on Atwood's novel, as well as the publication in 2019 of *The Testaments*, a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*. The recent rise of the radical right in many parts of the world seems to strengthen the sense of precarity surrounding women's condition and creating the need for speculative narratives, such as Atwood's and Erdrich's, that illustrate the mechanisms of oppression and provide space for the revision of current policies. Therefore, *Future Home of the Living God*, inscribing itself into the tradition of feminist dystopia and presenting a strong political message, envisions the future immersed in current anxieties in order to reflect on contemporaneity from a larger perspective. The representation of what Martínez-Falquina calls "the proleptic mourning" renders Erdrich's novel "a powerful political practice, thus confirming the activist impulse often found in contemporary Native literature" (176) and, hence, its engagement in the movement towards decolonization.

The protagonist of Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*, Cedar Songmaker, grows up in a liberal, supposedly, adoptive family reflecting dominant values. Thus, the young woman is alienated from her original, Indigenous culture. Cedar's Indigeneity is exoticized, or even, fetishized by her adoptive parents, who call her an "Indian Princess" (Erdrich 4). The protagonist's exalted exotic ethnicity determines her femininity. There is a sense of expectation for her to exhibit interest in nature to fulfil the stereotypical perception of Indigenous people as living close to nature. Cedar acknowledges her position of social privilege, living in a middle-class affluent family. Her Indigenous heritage emerges as a peculiar

and alluring feature that makes her stand out from the rest of the children at her holistic-education liberal school. However, her Indigeneity is rather imaginary, not anchored in genuine cultural practices: “I had no clan, no culture, no language, no relatives. Confusingly, I had no struggle” (5). She calls herself “a theoretical Native” (4). Cedar imagines herself, then, as an outsider since her connections to her Indigenous culture are superficial and her position of privilege separates her from the experience of oppression faced by Indigenous communities in the United States.

Despite Cedar’s inability to relate to the Indigenous struggle, she attempts to cherish her Native heritage. Being a devout Catholic, she assumes Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (also known as Lily of the Mohawks), the first official North American Indigenous saint proclaimed by the Catholic Church, as her paragon of femininity. Practicing Catholicism is a symbolic rebellion against her adoptive family values and allows her to define her identity outside of other people’s expectations. Cedar points to the hybridity of her identity: “I have integrated both my ethnicity and my intellectual leanings into my faith first by analyzing the canonization of the Lily of the Mohawks, Kateri Tekakwitha” (6). In *Indian Pilgrims*, Michelle Jacob addresses Saint Kateri as an ambiguous and complex Indigenous female figure, whose story has been used and abused in both Indigenous and Christian narratives. The Catholic Church portrays Tekakwitha as a blessed virgin, who transcended the savagery of her people (Jacob 141). In the settler consciousness, Kateri’s conversion to Christianity dignifies her and separates her from the rest of her people. Thus, there is an element to the Mohawk saint’s rejection of her own spirituality in favor of Christian religiosity that may appear, at least, problematic. However, contemporary Indigenous people, especially women, have embraced Kateri as a role model, an ideal of Indigenous femininity. Thus, Jacob argues that she functions as their source of empowerment (141). Cedar’s attraction to the Saint, isolated from her Indigenous culture and confiding in God, parallels her own situation of non-belonging and searching for her identity in religion.

While initially, Saint Kateri constitutes an important point of reference for Cedar in her Catholic magazine project, *Zeal* (Erdrich 6), further in the novel, the protagonist departs from the Christian-informed femininity. Her pregnancy and the precarity it imposes, as well as her visit to her biological family, encourage Cedar to re-define her approach to womanhood. The attitude of *Zeal* changes under the influence of the woman’s stay at the hospital. Cedar finishes the last issue, hiding after her epic escape from the institution. Her letter to subscribers conveys a strong feminist message, elevating women’s pain and identifying with Mary in her suffering (204–206). This theology does depart from the traditional rhetoric of the Church that emphasizes the male subject. Moreover, during her labor, Cedar sees saints that are passive: “The saints were silent” (264). At the same time, she has a vision in which she inherits a song for her baby: “I heard the other song, the women’s song, between the contractions. I heard your baby song” (264).

Cedar's acquisition of the song connects her to her Indigenous roots and the tradition of storytelling. It, thus, marks the novel's immersion in Gerald Vizenor's concept of *survivance* that stresses the significance of the continuation of Native storytelling in their survival and resistance (Vizenor 85). Another song that she hears presents the ancestors singing: "The soul is not in the body. The body is in the soul" (Erdrich 264). This scene further disrupts the Catholic way of perceiving femininity as detached from the body. The acknowledgment and praise of the corporeal emerging from the passage, reflect the transformation of Cedar's womanhood.

Future Home of the Living God presents a juxtaposition between the spiritual vision of femininity and womanhood defined by its reproductive potential and genetic sequences. Being a feminist dystopia, the novel explores the role of women in the project of human survival. The misogynist social order depicted by Erdrich allows for the systematic imprisonment of women and their forceful impregnation in order to save humanity (259). Cedar herself defines her femininity in terms of genetic data, trying to assess the genetic background of her child in the face of the biological crisis (576). The protagonist relates to her Indigenous genetic configuration as being one of the survivors of epidemics that decimated Native populations during the colonial contact:

Nine of every ten of us died of measles, smallpox, what-have-you. As a descendant of that tough-gened tenth person I had some natural inherent immunity, but still. (58)

Thus, her genetics set her at the top of the evolutionary ladder. Further, Cedar attempts to bridge her heritage with that of her Asian American inmate referring to their genetic similitude: "We possibly share the major DNA haplotype B marker found in most American Indians as well as people in Ulaanbaatar" (134). The remembrance of one's ancestry emerges as situated in one's body and its biological configuration (67).

This interest in DNA can be associated with the genetic research conducted on Indigenous peoples and its exploitation voiced as problematic by Indigenous scholars (Tallbear 2013; Smith 2012). Genetic material is greatly valued in the reality portrayed by Erdrich. To protect humanity, Womb Volunteer centers collect genetic material, encouraging people to become donors (Erdrich 90). The ontological uncertainty surrounding future human beings provides space for genetic research considered unethical before the crisis to flourish (93). The practices of genetic research on human beings, hazy in terms of their ethics, might meet with social support in the situation of a crisis as they represent the effort to reproduce and prolong humanity. Cedar's liberal adoptive mother, Sera, represents this reasoning: "We should invest in one of those genetics companies. They'll try to turn this thing around with gene manipulation. It will be big" (54). This may direct attention to the already functioning companies aiming to trace peoples' Indigenous descent and having a mission to study common human ancestry through genetic

data (Tallbear 26–27). Erdrich, then, comments on the appropriateness of such institutions and the ethical questions surrounding their work.

In the world represented by Erdrich, the means of protest are limited since the Church of the New Constitution perfects surveillance of its citizens, especially women. This constant control is carried out with the use of sophisticated technologies thanks to legislation based on the existing law in the U.S. introduced during Bush Jr.'s presidency under the name of the Patriot Act (72). The new system not only eavesdrops on peoples' phone calls but also takes control of their personal computers, spying on them with the use of the device's camera, microphone, and speakers. Cedar is contacted in such a way by a big-brother-like bot figure called Mother several times (Erdrich 68). Since all the technology is used as a means of tracking down pregnant women, Cedar must destroy all of her devices and rely on the old-fashioned and coded ways of communication in the form of letters and notes. In order to endure undisclosed through pregnancy, one has to rely on others, but the situation makes trust between people utterly fragile. Despite all her efforts, Cedar is captured in her home by a woman of color named Bernice and locked in a detention institution for pregnant women (124). Staying in the prison-like hospital, Cedar, instructed by her inmate, engages in covert practices of protest, weaving a belt out of the unraveled blanket yarn to escape from the institution (131). The plan of escape succeeds thanks to the help of Cedar's family members, showing that bonds between people are stronger than the system of oppression and demonstrating that collective efforts may expose and take advantage of the weak points of the new order. Yet the woman's further attempts to hide on the reservation fail as she is discovered by "random pilgrims" during a collective prayer to Saint Kateri and captured to be imprisoned again (248–249). Cedar's recapture strengthens the dystopian character of the novel, in which a woman is not able to liberate herself from the systematic oppression. Therefore, Cedar's journal that she continues to write even though it is banned by the institution, emerges as the last sign of protest. The narrative becomes a means of contention against the suppression of the female voice.

In the novel, not only femininity but also space and the environment are revised and re-defined in the face of apocalypse. As the climate becomes warmer, evolution becomes distorted. The apocalypse is then tied directly to the Anthropocene. The species evolve in unpredictable directions giving rise to interspecific hybrids: Cedar observes a creature that is an intersection between a bird and a lizard (91–92). Space becomes densely populated by emerging species (91). Thus, from the ecological point of view the apocalypse, surprisingly, surfaces as a period of flourishing. Cedar's father Glen observes the anti-linear and anti-progress character of the genetic mutations:

So if evolution has actually stopped, which is by no means fact, it is only speculation, and if evolution is going backward, which is still only an improbable idea, then we

would not see the orderly backward progression of human types that evolutionary charts are so fond of presenting. Life might skip forward, sideways, in unforeseen directions. We wouldn't see the narrative we think we know. Why? Because there was never a story moving forward and there wouldn't be one moving backward. (54–55)

The changes that occur in the environment cannot be controlled or reversed by human subjects and, therefore, they deconstruct the metanarrative of scientific progress characteristic of Western societies. Furthermore, the thriving of other species decenters the human and returns the agency to the non-human subjects.

Winter emerges as a significant motif emphasizing the importance of the changing climate in the novel; it becomes a symbol of the nostalgic past. Cedar expresses her longing for “a ghost season” (110). The past before global warming becomes a vision of a paradise (265). Winter imagery haunts the novel as its gradual loss foreshadows the apocalypse. The ending of the novel in a poetic tone restores the story of the lost winter, the “cold heaven” (266). Cedar continues the story emerging from her own memories and imagination, recounting her last experience of snowfall (266–267). In this moving passage, for a moment, the past becomes the present and fiction becomes actuality. The re-imagining of the past narrated by the protagonist constitutes the continuation of stories carrying the remembrance of interweaving personal and collective histories. Erdrich stresses, then, the power of storytelling and its capacity to empower and transform realities. Thus, *Future Home of the Living God* functions within the poetics of *survivance*.

When it comes to political structures, Erdrich envisions in her novel a future beyond the United States as a nation state. However, the new order introduced by the religious fanatics, seeing Christ's return in the natural disaster, does not seem to be perfect. By renaming the streets after biblical verses, the new system parallels the process of colonization, imposing new order through cartographic domination: “All the street signs were changed overnight. It was a massive project, impressive. Even the streets with numbers got switched” (101). In the Church of the New Constitution, people suffer from food insecurity: “I hand him a list of high-protein and long-shelf-life items. I'm glad I shopped when I did, but I'm nervous. I tell him we need a water filter, and he raises his eyebrows and says, *Where am I going to get this?*” (81) Moreover, the gun market expands as the sense of danger becomes more imminent (85). While the society represented in the media mirrors white supremacist ideology (44), the citizens are surveilled by the system using technology present in their households (68). When including the repressions against women: their criminalization and imprisonment, the political world depicted by Erdrich reflects the dystopian fears of contemporary Americans.

Paradoxically, the apocalyptic future of the United States provides opportunity for the tribal community on Anishinaabe reservation to mobilize in their fight for sovereignty. Eddy, Cedar's Native American stepfather, emphasizes the

importance of Indigenous peoples' ability to adapt to the changing circumstances informed by the process of colonization:

"Indians have been adapting since before 1492 so I guess we'll keep adapting."

"But the world is going to pieces."

"It is always going to pieces."

"This is different."

"It is always different. We'll adapt." (28)

This assertion ties Eddy's worldview to the theory proposed by Whyte that approaches contemporaneity as a dystopia. The sense of the crisis motivates the man to mobilize the community to fight for the return of their ancestral territories (103). The dystopian present sparks radical resurgence and decolonial aspirations, since the Anishinaabe tribe takes advantage of the situation to regain Indigenous territories following the decolonial project voiced by Tuck and Yang. Interestingly, Eddy's failure to reform tribal education after his graduation with a PhD degree from Harvard undermines his masculinity, which ends up in his chronic depression (21). The situation of the crisis then provides him with the opportunity to reach his full potential and restore his warrior masculinity (227). Moreover, the tribal community protects its pregnant members: "We are not giving up our pregnant tribal members. Our women are sacred to us" (227), which stresses Indigenous values of reciprocity that clearly oppose dominant attitudes. The novel does not provide the outcome of the Anishinaabe mobilization. However, it succeeds in envisioning future space, in which such a movement can potentially emerge. In this way, Erdrich reclaims the connection to the land and legitimizes its restoration to Indigenous peoples, manifesting Leanne Simpson's decolonial poetics of *land as pedagogy*, which accentuates the capacity of stories to disrupt settler colonial permanency (152–153).

The title of the novel strengthens its speculative character. It appears on a banner that Cedar sees during her journey to the reservation (13) and is displayed there by a religious institution to warn people about the upcoming apocalypse. However, the title may be also interpreted as a sign of Indigenous *survivance*. Cedar's due date is set on 25th December (6), which ties the date of birth of her baby with the symbolic date of Christ's birth. Then, Cedar's son may be the eponymous "Living God." This would create a sense of continuation of humankind and re-narrativize apocalypse, since the "God" represented by Erdrich would sooner be aligned with the secular than the sacred. The subversion takes place also at the conceptual level of imagining future children as not-wholly human. Cedar reflects on the ontological problem surrounding future generations. She counters the narrative of them being heathens comparing it to the dispute on the human status of Indigenous peoples during the early colonial times (205). "Future Home" of the "Living God" emerges as the post-apocalyptic space that is yet to come. The fact that Indigenous peoples were able to survive and adapt to their colonial

dystopia provides a sense of hope. Cedar acknowledges her role as the transitioning generation, who has to be sacrificed: “I realize this: I am not at the end of things, but the beginning” (92). Her diary and songs provide her baby with a source of connection to his heritage, his source of storytelling, the culture that he and his offspring will be potentially able to recuperate and celebrate.

5. Post-Post-Apocalyptic Landscapes in Rebecca Roanhorse’s *Trail of Lightning* (2019)

Analogously to Erdrich’s novel, Rebecca Roanhorse’s *Trail of Lightning* focuses on a female protagonist. The narrative attempts to restore the position of women in Indigenous communities, as well as emphasize the importance of including women’s issues in the decolonial struggle. The protagonist, Maggie, is a strong woman and an emerging monster slayer, abandoned by her mentor, Neizghání, who is a monster slayer figure and one of the most prominent deities in the Navajo mythology. In Diné storytelling, he is the son of the Changing Woman and one of the Hero Twins, who becomes the most powerful monster slayer, his name signifying “Slayer of the Enemy Gods” (Link 24–36). Further, one of Maggie’s acquaintances is Ma’ii or Coyote, a Navajo trickster figure. He functions as the driving-force of the plot and his actions expose a creative force that may introduce both chaos and order (37–54). Thus, Roanhorse, in her futuristic world, incorporates Navajo myths and legends that motivate the progression of the plot. Characters from Diné storytelling are recycled in a way that stresses their continuity within Navajo consciousness. They are not mythological, distant, and abstract figures, but real-life characters that carry their complex identities in the contemporaneity. The mythical is alive and constitutes an integral part of reality. The novel offers a kind of resurrection of the mythological realm in the apocalyptic future, representing it as ever-existing and temporally paralleling any historical moment. This way of approaching Navajo mythological characters is bridging the novel with the Indigenous tradition of storytelling, where the fictional merges with the actual and real in an ongoing process. Thus, Roanhorse’s novel can be approached as a narrative of *survivance*. However, it seems vital to acknowledge that Roanhorse herself does not come from the Navajo culture, and the vision of the Navajo community and its future represented in her novel has been criticized by some members of the Diné community (Reese 2018; Diné Writers’ Collective 2018). Nonetheless, I have chosen to discuss the novel in this article as it seems to include a relevant commentary on decolonial Indigenous futures.

The mythological scaffolding of the novel, discussed above, does not provide a utopian vision of the world, especially for its female protagonist. In the world represented by Roanhorse being a woman is precarious. Apart from being abandoned by her teacher, Neizghání, Maggie also carries with her a memory of abuse:

“I fight a wave of memory. The remembered feel of a man’s weight holding my own body down, blood thick and choking in my mouth as powerful fingers grip my skull and slam my head into the floor. A strong smell of wrongness in my nose” (Roanhorse 9). Violence is then strongly identified with masculinity, which creates a sense of a brutal affirmation of patriarchal structures. Coyote in his trickery and deceitfulness is yet another character not to be trusted. Ma’ii turns out to be the master planner of the vile conflict between Maggie and Neizghání:

The battle between them turns into violent and misogynist spectacle. And then [Neizghání’s] bloody lips are on mine, forcing my mouth open with his tongue as he kisses me. He is rough, brutal and possessive. I taste iron and salt. Holding my throat in his one hand, mouth still on mine, he reaches down with the other hand, wraps his fingers around the hilt of his weapon, and thrusts his lightning blade up and under my ribs. Digging for my heart. (243–244)

Thus, the battle between Maggie and the monster slayer exposes the clearly toxic character of their relationship – one based on violence and disrespect. The protagonist asserts that the life of brutality is the only one she knows: “The violence is familiar, simple. Something I understand” (228). Maggie’s attitude is then shaped by her exposure to the predominantly male social interactions that promote violence and domination. It seems that Roanhorse attempts to, however in a controversial manner, comment on the contemporary condition of Indigenous women emphasizing their ongoing oppression and the prevalence of patriarchal structures. A Navajo scholar Jennifer Nez Denetdale also addresses in her research the contemporary patriarchal structure of the Diné community as a replication of the colonial heteronormative patriarchal gender norms (135). She emphasizes that the project of decolonization must address power structures surrounding gender relations and unsettle them (146). Hence, Roanhorse’s female figure attempting to dismantle the patriarchal and highly hierarchical system seems to be adding to the decolonial character of her novel.

Trail of Lightning represents an Indigenous heroine’s struggle on a decolonized Navajo territory. The (post-)post-apocalyptic world depicted by Roanhorse allows for the Navajos to possess their own independent nation-state, Dinétah. Then, the novel imagines the future beyond colonial domination and the United States as a settler country, manifesting the vision of fully decolonized and sovereign land. The novel not only reclaims Navajo territories but also restores its stories: at the level of both its structure, based on myths, and the theme of recuperating stories from digitalized oral history interviews (286). This provides a sense of their continuation and, thus, *survivance*. Further, the mythological characters included in *Trail of Lightning*, as well as the feminine agency inscribed into these stories, create the space to reinvent and re-legitimize Indigenous presence on their land, positioning the novel in alliance with Leanne Simpson’s concept of *land as pedagogy*. However, decolonization does not bring about a utopian

future. The resources are scarce and monsters endanger Diné future. Sugar and coffee become luxury products, nearly impossible to obtain (28). Natural resources deplete; the protagonist uses alcohol to ignite her car (119). The scarcity follows the overabundance and extractivism of the former world. However, some people still exploit the limited resources that are still available, surprisingly part of them being tribal chiefs since “Greed is universal” (54).

The apocalypse leading to the rise of Dinétah is a direct result of climate change. Global warming and the rising sea levels lead to the Flood erasing vast North American territories: “I mean, climate change was Florida flooding and California drought” (70). Thus, again dystopia is tied to the Anthropocene. The Flood and the emergence of the Sixth World parallel the Navajo origin story, assigning the creation of the World to an original flood and outlining five consecutive worlds that include the colonial reality of the fifth world: “And the color of the fifth world was white” (Link 14). Thus, again the novel discloses its mythological undertone. The realities of the fifth world, which is identifiable with our close future, transpire in the text. Energy Wars, massive protests against extractive multinational corporations that become a major civil unrest, destabilize the situation in the former United States and lead to bloodshed and casualties (Roanhorse 132). There is a group of people that engages in the protection of the environment against the project of a Transcontinental Pipeline (132), which parallels the contemporary Indigenous agency in protesting construction of new pipelines across the country, Water Protectors at Standing Rock protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline being the most prominent example.

Roanhorse approaches the contemporary political landscape addressing President Trump’s rhetoric of the Wall. The rise of the radical right ideologies connected with the election of Donald Trump as the U.S. president, whose main postulates include building a wall dividing the U.S. from Mexico, is featured in the novel. Interestingly, Dinétah also creates a Wall to defend their borders:

the newly formed coastline that stretches from San Antonio to Sioux Falls, or the continued civil unrest in New Denver. But generally Dinétah is just as isolated and insular as it was before the Big Water, and most locals don’t seem to notice either way. The Wall. The Tribal Council approved it back when the Energy Wars first started. Most Diné supported the Wall. We all grew up with the stories that taught us that our place was on our ancestral land, the land within the embrace of the Four Sacred Mountains. Others call the Wall absurd, saying it’s some paranoid attempt at border control that’s destined to fail, just like the wall the doomed American government tried to build along its southern border a few years before the Big Water. (22)

The isolationism represented by Dinétah is problematic for the protagonist and may be seen both as a commentary on the current politics of the U.S. government, as well as the attempt to re-think the present in order to improve the future. *Trail of Lightning* depicts the Wall as an absurd and unsuccessful project, being one

of the reasons for the collapse of the United States. Therefore, Roanhorse uses the Wall poetics to critique the vision of decolonized space based on separatism as it eliminates the possibility of beneficial exchange (48). This proposition reflects Grande's theorization of decolonial efforts as being directed to emphasize reciprocity and restoration instead of power structures, which inherently lead to othering and isolationism (244–245).

6. Conclusion

Visions of the future represented in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning* conceive the survival of Indigenous communities in the face of climate apocalypse. The novelists acknowledge the prevalence of settler colonialism in the contemporary United States in order to invent futures beyond its power structures. Interestingly, the dystopic devastation emerges in both narratives as parallel to the mechanisms of colonization. Erdrich and Roanhorse address the perilous character of patriarchy and unsettle it. This elevation of the female subject emphasizes the need for restoration and reinvention of the position of women in Native communities as an integral part of the decolonial struggle. Indigenous speculative fiction engages, then, in the project of ideological decolonization, proposed by, among others, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in order to create more sustainable and inclusive Native futures. Further, speculative apocalyptic visions of the future depicted in the novels, paradoxically, provide space for Indigenous peoples to mobilize in their efforts to restore their lands and sovereignty. However, imagined decolonial futures do not appear to be utopian. Thus, the representations offered by Erdrich and Roanhorse point to the fact that regaining territorial sovereignty should not be the sole ambition of decolonial movements. This perspective seems to put Tuck and Yang's conceptualization of decolonization into a frame of reference that highlights the necessity to liberate Indigenous communities from colonial ideological frameworks for their future well-being. Both Erdrich and Roanhorse comment on changing environments, locating the apocalyptic visions of the future within the context of the anthropogenic climate change. Native endurance in the face of the Anthropocene stresses Indigenous ability to adapt to the changing environments, inherited from the history of colonialism, as well as it provides a social critique of contemporary politics and extractive economies leading to unsustainable futures. Perhaps, then, decolonization as a metaphor present in Indigenous speculative fiction might shape the path for better tribal futures. It seems that by providing room for the re-imagination of space and future beyond the colonial domination, the novels inherently engage in decolonial efforts.

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