

**Imagining the Anthropocene Future:
Body and Environment in Speculative Fiction
of Selected North American Indigenous Female Writers**

Summary

Despite numerous warnings concerning climate change from scientists and scientific organizations, the most industrialized nations have not put long-term ecological sustainability ahead of short-term corporate profits. Instead, like in Bill Peet's 1970 children's book, *The Wump World*, politicians, business leaders and global elites are behaving like "The Pollutians," who travel from a continent to a continent, a planet to a planet, polluting and then moving on to other pristine habitats without changing their economic and ecological behaviours.

In her paper on "Developing ecofeminist corporeality," Mary Phillips explains that the above-mentioned problem is the result of disconnecting ourselves from our bodies and nature (2016, 57). Human beings physically separate themselves from the effects of the weather in their offices, cars, homes, as a result they cannot feel how weather patterns change. For ecofeminists, such an alienation and instrumental use of nature can be attributed to the "logic of patriarchy." This logic is based on a set of dualisms, such as man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion, in which a higher value is put on the "male," "reason," "mind," rather than on "female," "emotion," "body." Privileging culture over nature has resulted in an instrumental use of the body and environment and led to ecological degradation. Hence, in the 1980s limnologist Eugene F. Stoermer coined the term "Anthropocene," in order to name the epoch in which the forces of human existence began to overwhelm all other geological, biological and meteorological forms and forces. The notion was popularised at the inception of the twenty-first century by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen (Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill 2007, 614). The above-mentioned metaphysical assumptions also have lethal connotations for people who are perceived as others and coincide with the category of negative difference: women, Indigenous peoples, people of colour, and the lower classes. In Western thought, they have been defined as creatures closer to "nature" and hence as being outside the domain of rationality, subjectivity, and agency. The perception of Indigenous peoples as Others has led to exercising colonial dominance over Indigenous people and has been the basis for federal policies and societal treatment of Indigenous people.

The only way to overcome humans' alienation and estrangement from nature is to acknowledge that we are organic beings embedded in nature. Thus, the body is of immense importance in challenging the ways that femininity, nature and emotionality are cast. Literary fiction also has the potential to allow for the comprehension of the abstract future as many writers attempt to write bodies and natures in ways that emphasize their interrelations. Various North American female writers, theorists and activists from the early nineteenth century to the present have presented nature as a habitat for feminist subjects, a place of freedom from the restrictive gender norms of the household. There is also a group of Indigenous feminists who have been struggling for a long time to redefine nature. Native American writing is currently undergoing a new renaissance, including contributions from widely recognized authors and new Indigenous voices. Indigenous futurism emerges as a new current in North American literature, which allows the writers to represent the complex conception of materiality, decolonial futures and the implications of dualistic thinking. What is more, the narrative mode of science fiction allows the female writers to voice their objection to the existing political, economic, environmental imperialisms and assumptions otherwise limited by a realist narrative frame.

The aim of this dissertation is to discuss the way academic theory and selected Indigenous speculative fiction address the possibilities for more complex conceptions of the materiality of human bodies and the more-than-human world. It explores the interconnections, interchanges, and transits that occur between human bodies and nonhuman natures. Imagining human corporeality as what Stacy Alaimo refers to as "trans-corporeality," in which the "human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world," emphasizes how the substance of the human is inseparable from "the environment." In fact, thinking across bodies may help people realize that the environment consists of fleshy beings with their own needs and actions, rather than inert, empty space or as a resource for human exploitation. The movement across bodies also reveals and acknowledges the unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhumans, chemical agents, and other actors as well.

It is crucial to pay attention to Indigenous speculative fiction since, as Kyle Whyte notices, the mainstream fiction, written by such authors as Barbara Kingsolver or Margaret Atwood, erases certain populations, such as Indigenous peoples, who approach climate change having already been through transformations of their societies induced by colonial violence. Mainstream fiction presents dystopian or post-apocalyptic visions of climate crises that leave humans in horrific science-fiction scenarios, however, these narratives do not include Indigenous peoples' perspectives on the connections between climate change and colonial violence (Whyte 2018, 225). Native Americans are rarely the protagonists of mainstream

science fiction and fantasy, and when they are, they are usually not situated in a world that is specifically Native, like the Navajo reservation. Many science-fiction tales imagine aliens invading planet Earth, aiming to replace usually white people, and cataclysmic wars bring about the end of the world. What is more, while literary scholars have focused on the ecocritical analyses of science fiction written by mainstream writers, scant critical attention has been given to the genre of science fiction created by contemporary Indigenous writers and in particular Indigenous female writers. Although women have been creating science fiction from its beginnings, the genre has been long identified mainly with male authors writing for male readers.

The first chapter traces the roots of dualistic thinking, which has led to the loathing of the body in Western thought as well as colonisation, gendered development and violence towards Indigenous people. The chapter also provides some insights into selected federal policies and societal treatment of Indigenous people in North America, which has been a result of the conflict between Native American and Western worldviews. The second chapter looks at different philosophical attempts at challenging mind-body dualisms. It introduces some of the theoretical models, questions, and arguments of the dissertation, focusing on how philosophy, including feminist corporeal theory and environmental humanities, have engaged with the materiality of human bodies and nonhuman natures. The theories introduced in these chapters will serve as lenses through which selected novels are analysed.

The third chapter provides the theoretical background necessary for understanding the Native American Worldview. There are fundamental differences in the perception of the world between American Indians and nontribal cultures like the American mainstream. According to traditional Indigenous beliefs, the relationship between people and the land is understood in terms of intimate kinship bonds. This chapter discusses other crucial concepts, such as Indigenous knowledge, relatedness, spirituality, oral tradition, and the expansive conception of persons, to mention a few. The significance of this relationship is emphasised in Indigenous novels and stories, which are also a source of traditional knowledge passed from generation to generation.

The next chapters are devoted to the analysis of selected works written by contemporary North American Indigenous female authors, including African-American/Cherokee Zainab Amadahy's *Moons of Palmares* (1997) and *Resistance* (2013), Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo/African-American Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning* (2018) and Mohegan Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel's *Oracles* (2004), Georgian Bay Métis Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) and Anishinaabe Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*

(2017). The dissertation explores the way the selected Indigenous writers challenge the separation of nature and culture. My reading also focuses on the way the Indigenous female writers conceptualise nature and whether they acknowledge the agency of the more-than-human world, which is crucial for environmental ethics. The dissertation is concerned with the way the selected American Indigenous authors represent the relationship of human bodies with the natural and cultural environments. I look at the way the connection between women and nature is represented in the work of the selected writers. What is more, the following reading reveals the Indigenous writer's perspective on technology and science. It describes how the selected authors juxtapose western sciences with Indigenous knowledge (science) and discuss the way the authors represent their relevance to sustainable development.

Chapter 4 discusses the works of African-American/Cherokee writer Zainab Amadahy, particularly *Moons of Palmares* (1997) and *Resistance* (2013). In her novels, Amadahy illustrates the connections between body, class, race and place-based injustices. Racism has been premised on the rational triumph of mind over body and it also results from savage discourses based on a Cartesian dualism between cerebral European and the physical savage. Following Stacy Alaimo, racism is also discussed as environmental, which allows to prove how socio-political forces produce landscapes that affect human bodies. Instead of showing the human body as an enclosed entity, it demonstrates that the body is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments, including industrial environments and their social/economic forces. Zainab Amadahy links landscape, labourers and women by portraying their parallel plights. Forced to constantly maximize its "efficiency," the body of the worker is treated like other "natural resources." *The Moons of Palmares* also draws attention to the still prevalent colonial assumptions about family life. The writer addresses the true causes of environmental damage and inequality in order to preserve both nature and vulnerable humans from exploitation and encourage to develop environmental practices that will foster the vital symbiosis of human beings and the non-human world. The novels also touch upon the issue of technology and its impact on women. The chapter also delves into the ways Amadahy conceptualizes the environment and its agency.

The next chapter focuses on Rebecca Roanhorse's and Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel's speculative fiction. The novels depart from what Donna Haraway refers to as "the Man-making tales of action with only one real actor, who is the hero, the world-maker, tend to defer "the suffering of earth-rotted passivity beyond bearing" (2016, 118). Indigenous artists narrate tales where the knowledge of multitudes of the living Earth is not scarce. The chapter examines the way the novels reimagine heroism through a female Native American protagonist that differs

from the oppressive Western ideal of a hero. It also discusses how rocks and plants exert material agency in the novels of Rebecca Roanhorse and Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel. Unlike in traditional literary depictions of botany, the writers present plants and rocks as living beings, thus, challenging the perception of life and nonlife. The chapter also addresses the cultural violence and disregard that has dominated the Western perception of animistic cultures and expresses the need to rethink the theory of animism.

Chapter 6 is entitled “Biopolitical futures: Indigenous bodies, Native American DNA and making kin in the Anthropocene” and is devoted to the discussion of Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) and Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), which indicate the continuity between recent sites of extraction of biovalue and a longer history of dehumanizing and dispossessing Indigenous people. The exploitation of biovalue interrogated in *The Marrow Thieves* has specific and important connections to Indigenous people, who have been objectified by colonial perspectives that conflate them with the natural world rather than see them as subjects in their own right. The chapter discusses the way Dimaline’s novel reflects on the relation between genetics, Indigenous bodies and Indigenous ways of articulating kinship and belonging. In addition, this chapter interrogates practices of biotechnology related to pregnancy and reproduction as illustrated in Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God*. It discusses the relation between women’s bodies and control over social reproduction as a basis for the growth of capitalism. The chapter explores how the boundaries between science and religion are blurred in Erdrich’s speculative fiction. It is emphasised that it is crucial to respect non-human others and “make kin” outside of normative familial (or species-bound) structures.

The considerations lead to the conclusion that the Indigenous writers represent coalitional bonds with the human and more-than-human others in their environments and argue for an environmentally sustainable and healthy relationship between the body and the Earth. Matter is represented as vibrant and alive, which results from the Native American worldview, where land is considered an extension of the body, thus, perceived as living. What is more, the concept of matter as possessing agency aligns with the ideas expressed by the researchers in new materialism, including Jane Bennet and Diana Coole.

The dissertation also discusses the way the above-mentioned authors explore the concept of time in their works. Instead of presenting the events in a linear progression, the writers present history as a continuum without a beginning and an end. The past and present bear almost the same meaning when a government’s legitimacy derives from the ongoing occupation of stolen land as well as questionable interpretations and violations of Treaty negotiations. Such a

perception of time results from Native American philosophy in which “circle” occupies an integral role.

Moreover, in their novels, the North American Indigenous writers disconnect from the dominant representations of femininity and masculinity, and contest white privilege and other racialized conceptions of a human subject. Thus, they decolonize our imagination through disengagement from the institutions of power. Therefore, Indigenous speculative fiction can be considered an intensive practice aiming at inventing new ways of thinking. It involves disidentification from anthropocentric values, which entails the loss of familiar ways of thinking and representation in order to make room for creative alternatives. Following Deleuze, I refer to this process as an active “deterritorialization.”

Paula Wicrowel