

Cars, Cans, and Crying Indians: Automobility, Littering and Indigeneity in 1970s US Environmental Literature

Abstract: *This study examines representations of automobility and littering in Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony (1977) and Edward Abbey's The Monkey Wrench Gang (1975) within the context of the "Crying Indian" PSA, demonstrating how settler environmentalism risks reenforcing stereotypes that oversimplify Indigenous relationships with land. I argue that through scenes of driving and littering, settler and Indigenous conceptions of land are revealed: as something that belongs to people in a colonial sense, and as something people belong with in Grounded Normativity. Native relationships with land emerge as counterpoints to the "Ecological Indian" stereotype and to colonial notions of land ownership.*

A white American man hurls a bag of litter out of a speeding car. It explodes at the feet of Iron Eyes Cody, "America's most famous Native American" (Andersen 403), standing next to a bustling interstate highway, and he sheds a single, iconic tear. This scene comes from the 1971 television campaign against littering produced by Keep America Beautiful (KAB), Inc., which became known simply as the "Crying Indian" Public Service Announcement (PSA). It provided the example *par excellence* of the stereotypical figure supposed to represent all Indigenous peoples in the United States: what anthropologist Shepard Krech labels the "Ecological Indian" (21). Represented in popular fiction, movies, and advertisements as being somehow closer to nature than white settlers, the Ecological Indian supposedly leaves no mark on the land they inhabit, embodying a pure relationship with the natural environment in contrast to the polluting one of white people. One of the better-known ironies of Iron Eyes Cody becoming America's most famous Native American is that, despite being identified by Krech as Cherokee, he was actually an Italian-American actor named Espera Oscar DeCorti—a fact that tells one something about the integrity of Indigenous stereotypes in the media. Another established irony of the campaign is that KAB was actually a front group representing the interests of the same beer, can, and soda companies whose containers produced half of America's litter; admonishing individuals who failed to dispose of their empties in the prescribed manner while privately lobbying against bills requiring the beverage

industry to reuse and recycle its own waste (Strand). One aspect of the Crying Indian PSA that has received comparatively little critical attention is the positioning of the “Indigenous” character in relation to the white litterbug on the bustling highway, and the role of automobility in helping to create and perpetuate the idea of the Ecological Indian.

Stepping out of his canoe onto a riverbank full of litter, Cody walks up onto the edge of an eight-lane highway, and a passing motorist casually throws a bag of trash out of the window of his moving car, as have many before him judging by the state of the riverbank. The camera closes in on Cody’s moccasin-clad feet, firmly planted on the side of the road, as the bag bursts all over them. The focus on Cody’s feet here emphasizes his status as a pedestrian as opposed to the white American in the driver’s seat of the automobile. Whether paddling slowly through rubbish in the river or wading through it at the roadside, the relative immobility of Cody places him in stark contrast to the motorist who throws the bag and immediately disappears from the screen, leaving any sense of culpability or responsibility at the feet of Cody, now receding in the rear-view mirror.

The Crying Indian PSA provides a useful context for understanding how automobility, littering, and Indigeneity were presented in relation to environmentalism in the 1970s. The broad impact of the cultural reaffirmation of the problematic and mistaken idea that Indigenous peoples supposedly exist frozen in a receding past (exemplified by Cody wearing fringed leather clothing and beaded moccasins), in some pre-modern ideal separate from the world of mass-production and mass-automobility, set the backdrop for two novels which Michael Berger claims helped “define the terms of environmental debates” (909–910) in the 1970s: Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977). As my close readings will demonstrate, Abbey’s band of monkey-wrenchers are able to mirror the actions of the white littering driver denigrated in the widely seen PSA without compromising their environmental message, yet Silko’s protagonist Tayo

struggles to engage in these acts without feeling the burdens of colonial and ecological disasters. Operating at the four-way intersection of comparative literature, the environmental humanities, mobility studies and Indigenous studies, I argue that a focus on littering and automobility shows how, when stereotyped as Ecological Indians, Indigenous peoples' relationships with their land lose their intricacies and become constrained, while settler environmentalism, however well-meaning, benefits from these stereotypes and perceives land through a lens of ownership.

For generations of American environmentalists, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is regarded as a foundational, if controversial, text in the wilderness protection movement, directly inspiring the action-based environmentalism of groups such as *Earth First!* (formed 1980), who aimed to prevent the incursion of modern industrial development into wild spaces, mimicking the sabotage tactics of Abbey's fictional characters. Critics have noted the novel's continuing influence in shaping contemporary American environmental thought, with a swathe of recent scholarship arguing for the value of Abbey's self-consciously hypocritical and imperfect brand of "trashy environmentalism" (Seymour 192), given what they see as the impossibility of any other form of environmentalism from within (petro)modern societies.ⁱ While these studies make valuable contributions by asserting that a degree of complicity should not preclude one from taking action against normalized forms of environmental destruction, almost none of them make any reference to Abbey's problematic portrayal of Navajo people in novel, nor how stereotypes of Indigenous peoples more broadly informed settler environmentalism in the 1970s (and beyond). One exception is Kevin Trumpeter who, drawing on KAB's "Crying Indian" and the sordid history of the anti-littering movement, argues persuasively that the frequent littering Abbey's characters engage in should be read as anti-authoritarian rather than anti-ecological (19). Trumpeter briefly mentions the representations of the Navajo reservation in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, when Abbey

unceremoniously describes “the beer cans and pop bottles, the squashed aluminum and broken glass, the plastic six-pack carriers and forgotten wine jugs of Navajoland USA” (Abbey 274). Rather than reading this as bigoted, Trumpeter claims, it too should be considered part of Abbey’s challenge to the Crying Indian campaign, a campaign that relies upon perpetuating “the romanticized and ahistorical imagery” (22) associated with the Ecological Indian stereotype. However, Trumpeter does not mention that Abbey’s fictional radicals are primarily motivated by a desire to conserve the landscape which they, as settler Americans, claim as their own, maintaining an inherently colonial relationship to land which contributes to Indigenous erasure.

Recent scholarship considering *Ceremony* from an environmental perspective has sought to demonstrate the importance of Indigenous voices in stories told about climate change, engaging with studies which name “colonialism as responsible for contemporary environmental crisis” (Davis & Todd 763).ⁱⁱ While automobility is not the focal point of these studies, it is a somewhat surprising omission in discussions of climate change in *Ceremony* given the significant role of cars in exacerbating both the climate crisis and protagonist Tayo’s individual crisis in the novel. Although ample scholarship on *Ceremony* emphasizes Tayo’s personal identification with the landscape of the Southwest, and the significance of the land itself in Laguna Pueblo culture, no study has yet focused on how Silko utilizes cars and cans as symbols of a colonial consumerism in which land is understood as belonging *to* people, rather than people belonging *with* the land. As such, this article seeks to address a gap in the scholarship on *Ceremony*, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and the Crying Indian PSA by demonstrating what environmental stories about automobility and littering in the 1970s can reveal about settler and Laguna Pueblo relationships to both land and the idea of belonging, and, ultimately, about how a recognition of land’s agency is a vital aspect of Indigenous resistance against both environmental destruction and settler colonialism.

To do this, I will be engaging with a number of Indigenous scholars' theorizations of why belonging *with* land is antithetical to land belonging *to* (colonial) individuals. Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) describes his notion of "grounded normativity" as the "place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice" (13), situating the question of land as central to the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism. Also arguing that Indigenous thought and theory is grounded in the living land, Vanessa Watts (Mohawk) conceptualizes these ideas as "Indigenous Place-Thought," which "is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts" (5). This stands in contrast to colonial interactions with land, in which it is something, Watts notes, "to be accessed, not learned from or a part of" (5), mapping on to Patrick Wolfe's assertion that the concept of settler colonialism, in whatever form it takes (including environmentalism), is essentially motivated by "access to territory" (388). Reading *Ceremony* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* alongside what Kyle Keeler has called the "literature of landed resistance" (4), a collection of key Indigenous concepts that work against colonial impositions to commodify and possess land, I will demonstrate how the attitudes of Abbey's characters towards littering and automobility ultimately reveal that their form of trashy environmentalism, however well-intentioned, still boils down to protecting what they see as belonging *to* them. Comparing scenes involving cars, cans, and the influence of the Crying Indian PSA in these two novels underscores the complexities and conceptual distances between settler environmentalist and Laguna Pueblo relationships to land, distances that are underplayed in stereotypes such as the Ecological Indian.

Two remarkably similar scenes of automobility and littering in both novels see their male, US Army veteran protagonists driving down desert roads in the Southwest, measuring distances by how many cans of beers they drink and then hurl as empties out of the window. On a journey of "Two and half six-packs" (18), Abbey's George Washington Hayduke sits

back and savors “the exhilaration of the sun, the rush of alcohol through the bloodstream, the satisfaction in his jeep running full and cool and properly” (18), before “Tossing his empty beer can out of the window” onto “Indian country” (26). Despite performing essentially the same actions as the white driver in the Crying Indian PSA, Hayduke is still able to enjoy the feeling of speeding across the landscape: Abbey informs the reader that Hayduke “was happy” (18) as he launches his beer can from the car onto Navajo territory. For Tayo and his Laguna Pueblo friends in Silko’s *Ceremony*, who find themselves driving past bars every “ten or fifteen miles” on Route 66—or “every six-pack” (223)—these same acts of drink-driving and littering provoke very different feelings. Picked up from the side of the road by his friends Harley and Leroy, Tayo is immediately handed a warm beer which spurts all over him as the already-drunk Harley tries to prevent the speeding truck from “swaying from one side of the road to the other” (222). When he does get the beer to his lips, “it stung his tongue,” making him feel “thin and dizzy” (222). Nonetheless, Tayo finished his beer and “threw the can out of the window,” but far from feeling exhilarated, satisfied, or happy, Tayo “was feeling something terrible inside [...]” (223). While Hayduke, the Tucson-born former Green Beret, heroically traverses the landscape, “annihilat[ing]” (Abbey 18) the space between himself and the high country—or what he possessively calls “Hayduke’s country” (18)—the half-Laguna Pueblo, half-white Tayo looks like “just another drunk Indian, that’s all” (Silko 224).

While Silko wrote *Ceremony* with the Crying Indian PSA as part of the cultural backdrop, Tayo’s story takes place in the 1950s, pre-dating this specific instance of Ecological Indian stereotyping. Such stereotypes, however, have been a feature of US automotive culture since its inception, whereby Indigenous peoples (as a homogenous unit) were marketed as part of the scenery to be enjoyed from the comfort of one’s touring car while driving across Indigenous lands to offer the best views of the Natives (P. Deloria 166–167, Bowman 6). The most famous of these roads is Route 66, which passes directly through

Laguna Pueblo land and, at the time *Ceremony* is set, still carried all traffic passing through the area, with the New Mexico leg of Interstate 40 not opening until 1957. Approximately half of the 2400-mile highway passes over lands still held by Indigenous people, through 30 different tribal nations, yet the roadside attractions that litter the route are notorious for presenting an inaccurate and monolithic image of Native peoples (Landry). For those who are just passing through, like the “white tourists” in *Ceremony* who drive “down 66, stopping to see the Indian souvenirs” (99), the road is about escaping, satisfying a nostalgic craving for an imagined time and place before the destructive consequences of the same modernity which makes such journeys possible. For those such a Tayo who live on the road, however, Route 66 continually transports white settlers onto Pueblo lands, acting as a constant reminder of colonial incursion and the shame conveyed upon his family for his being part white. It is the memory of “the white men who were building the new highway through Laguna” and how they had “pointed at him [...] elbowed each other and winked” (Silko 53) that frames Tayo’s relationship to Route 66 and automotive culture more broadly. The fact that he conceives of cars as “white things” (189) demonstrates the extent to which Tayo has internalized stereotypes that insist on Indian pedestrianism, contrary to the long history of Indigenous participation in automotive culture,ⁱⁱⁱ but this fact also alludes to the idea that road-building projects and automotive excursions facilitate an “imperialist nostalgia” (Rosaldo 13–14), whereby colonizers seek to experience the cultures and landscapes that they are in the process of destroying.

There is no reason why Tayo or any of his fellow Laguna Pueblo citizens could not or should not be able to enjoy this scene of driving, drinking, and littering as much as the white settler Hayduke in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*; it is only that Tayo feels as though he is doing something wrong because he is performing the actions, as he sees it, of a white person. As suggested by the winking road builders, 66 was responsible for bringing Tayo’s mother and

father together, and thus for the white side of his heritage about which he is made to feel a great shame. The idea that the “earth and the animals” may not be able to distinguish between him and white settlers, that “they might not understand that he was not one of them; he was not one of the destroyers” (189), haunts him as he drives down the road.

It is in this sense that Tayo feels like he is betraying the “earth and animals” (223) which contributes to his increasing sense of disconnection from the landscape after he turns and watches the empty beer can he has just thrown from the window “bounce into the tall grass and tumbleweeds beside the road” (223). The fact that he turns around to watch the can rather than simply forgetting about what he has left behind distinguishes his attitude from Hayduke’s (and the white driver’s in the Crying Indian PSA), but the experience of drinking and driving soon dulls this attention to the landscape: “Beer made the feeling recede and slowed down the beating of his heart. The truck’s motion and the beer were soothing; the steel and glass closed out everything. The sky, the land were distant then; trees and hills moved past the windshield glass like movie film” (223). In one sense, this passage exemplifies the disconnection from the landscape on either side of the road experienced by all (modern) drivers, as the “steel and glass” of the automobile “closed out everything” elemental, leaving only images that flash “past the windshield glass like movie film” (223). The windshield (or windscreen), notes Enda Duffy, “is very close to the movie screen” in the sense that it denies physical contact with the land one sees from the car, suggesting “that the scene outside might exist only as a virtuality” (164). But while perceiving the landscape of the Southwest like a “movie film” might feel good for Hayduke, perhaps recalling heroic cowboys in westerns galloping across the desert, Indigenous people such as Tayo have historically been rendered somewhat less heroically in that medium, and it is this combination of dispossession and historical misrepresentation that makes Tayo unable to enjoy the idea that he is becoming disconnected from the landscape.

The geography of the American Southwest makes it very difficult to cover the large distances between settlements without a car, regardless of whether one is a white settler, a citizen of the Navajo nation, or a member of the Pueblo Nations. Yet Tayo still feels uncomfortable engaging with automobility, hampered by stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples that make him look like “just another drunk Indian” (224). Such stereotypes, exemplified by the Crying Indian, not only affect how Indigenous peoples are viewed externally, but, according to Vine Deloria Jr. (*Standing Rock Sioux*), can also have a limiting effect on internal self-image: “Because people can see right through us, it becomes impossible to tell truth from fiction or fact from mythology,” Deloria writes, and “the more we try to be ourselves the more we are forced to defend what we have never been,” because the American public “feels most comfortable with the mythical Indians of stereotype-land who were always THERE” (1–2). These ideas certainly apply to Tayo who, watching “headlights and taillights moving east to west” down Route 66, “felt alone, as if that world was distant from him” (94). He feels that the drivers, to echo Deloria’s words, can see right through him, as it is only after he leaves the roadside space and returns to the “world of crickets and wind and cottonwood trees” that “he was visible” (96). Highways such as Route 66 both connect and separate spaces, bisecting Laguna Pueblo and cutting Tayo off from the automotive world. And it is not only the road but also the infrastructure associated with it that enforce the profile of Deloria’s mythical Indians from stereotype-land, as Tayo discovers when he enters a gas station. In the eyes of the station attendant with the “milky white face,” Tayo is out of place and immediately perceived as a threat, assumed to be either drunk “or there to steal something” (143). Stereotyped as a drunken criminal the moment he steps into an automotive space, Tayo’s solution is to retreat back into the world he is told he belongs in—that of pedestrianism. Instead of continuing to hitchhike in the oil truck that brought him to the gas station, Tayo decides after this encounter that he “didn’t want any more rides. He

wanted to walk until he recognized himself again” (143). For this reason the scene of drink-driving and littering discussed earlier is so dissociative for Tayo: he cannot (yet) imagine a form of automobility that is not predicated on colonial and ecological violence.

Automobiles, like the infrastructure required to support them, frequently represent government encroachment and threats to Laguna life in *Ceremony*. The US Army recruiter who convinces Rocky and Tayo to enlist (in a conflict that will kill Rocky and leave Tayo mentally scarred) is first identified by the “Government car” parked ominously in the town center (59). The dangled promise of car ownership is one of the reasons why Rocky is sold on the idea of signing up: “Look at that guy, the recruiter,” he urges Tayo, “[h]e’s got his own Government car to drive, too” (67), the first of several examples that equate the armed forces with automotive culture as routes into being accepted as “real” Americans (or *not* Indians). These same “Government cars” remind Tayo of the US Army doctors whose methods of dealing with his post-war PTSD involved keeping him locked in white rooms (221), and the officials who come to take the first measurements for what would ultimately become the Jackpile uranium mine on Indigenous land “were driving U. S. Government cars [...]” (226). Furthermore, in a society that Philip J. Deloria (Standing Rock Sioux) claims has ideas of progress linked “not only with technology, but also with thrift” (144), selling faulty cars to Indigenous people becomes another method by which the white settler characters in *Ceremony* reinforce the stereotype of Indian incompetence. When Tayo hears the “loud busted muffler” (145) on Harley’s truck, he almost makes a joke about “how the white people sold junk pickups to Indians so they could drive around until they asphyxiated themselves,” but decides that it is ultimately too close to the truth, reminding Tayo of the historical case of the US Army captain “in the 1860s who made a gift of wool blankets to the Apaches: the entire stack of blankets was infected with smallpox” (145–146). These dishonest dealings on the part of white people represent more than just a rip-off—the modern equivalent of “the selling

of Manhattan Island for twenty-four dollars in beads and trinkets” (P. Deloria 144)—they pose physical danger to the Indigenous car occupants. Tayo wonders how long it would be before this old truck swerved off the road or head-on into a bus” (Silko 156). The answer is not very long at all, as the bodies of Harley and Leroy are found among the rocks below the highway, “the old GMC pickup [...] crushed around them like the shiny metal coffin the Veterans Office bought for each of them” (240). Whether as soldiers in the US Army or drivers on US government highways, a place in a “shiny metal coffin” is what awaits those Laguna citizens who seek white symbols of belonging in *Ceremony*.

While drinking and driving in the steel cab of the car (the shiny metal coffin) seem to distort Tayo’s sense of self, perpetually taking him further away from where he wants to be, these same acts have a rejuvenating effect on Hayduke, whose logic is that if one drinks, one should “drive like hell. Why? Because freedom, not safety, is the highest good” (Abbey 28). Screaming down the highway “at a safe and sane 70 per” while “rejoicing [and] scarfing up more beer” (28), the violence of automobility does not concern the former Green Beret, whose love of “the touch of oil” (28) and “all things well made and deadly” (20) could refer equally to both guns and cars. Although Hayduke’s goal is ultimately to oppose automotive infrastructure projects, his equation of freedom with drinking and driving suggests that he, to some extent at least, buys in to the construction of the open road as a space for (particularly post-war white male) drivers to live out fantasies of escape. As Anna Hill has noted of Don DeLillo’s protagonist David Bell in *Americana* (1971) from earlier in the decade, travelers can indeed feel liberated when they imagine this romanticized highway (Hill 5). Hill is one of a number of critics in recent years to have complicated the cultural imagining of the road as “a symbol of independence unburdened by the constraints of rooted life” (1), citing “large-scale environmental issues” (1) as part of the reason authors, including DeLillo in *Americana*, began to rethink the meaning of the road.^{iv} Such environmental issues are inseparable from

the issues of colonialism and land ownership inherent in the literal construction of roads across Indigenous lands.

Despite enjoying the freedom from responsibility associated with his version of automobility, Hayduke, like Tayo, also places great significance on physical contact with the landscape of the Southwest. Waking up with a hangover, it is the act of preparing his wilderness survival kit ahead of a long journey on foot through the desert that makes Hayduke feel that life “was returning” (99). Marching across the sandstone “felt good” (102) to the now-pedestrian Hayduke, who gets the sense as he walks among the local fauna that this “wilderness at least would support pastoral man for a long time to come” (107). In fact, the primary motivation behind the gang’s acts of monkeywrenching is to preserve as much of the landscape as possible as “roadless, uninhabited, a wilderness. [...] *Keep it like it was*” (82—original emphasis). The idea that drinking, driving, and littering are all essential components of this task as well as acts in which Hayduke takes active pleasure is an irony on which the varying tones of Abbey and Silko’s passages are predicated.

The language in Abbey uses to render the moment that Hayduke becomes aware of this irony reveals a great deal about the differences between how Hayduke and Tayo conceptualize their relationships to the landscape. Looking down at the heavy tourist traffic (from inside his own vehicle), Hayduke’s problem with automobility seems less to do with its encroachment onto wilderness areas in general and more to do with the idea that they are encroaching on *his* wilderness: “*My way*, he thought, they’re going *my way*; they can’t do that” (27—my emphasis). Even as he reminds himself that he is “doing it too,” having just driven, drank, and littered his way to his lookout point, he dismisses this as his right to be “an elitist” (27). Because he does not see that there are stereotypical representations of white settlers such as Hayduke as ecological wardens, ultimately responsible for the welfare of natural ecosystems, Hayduke is able to make peace with his own contradictions and maintain

the narrative that his actions are still heroic, because he is still going, as he sees it, above and beyond. But even acknowledging Abbey's challenge to the individual responsibility mindset pushed by corporate campaigns such as KAB, Hayduke's notion that the wilderness is an uninhabited space where he and he alone may test himself against the elements is essentially an elitist view which fails to account for the colonial impact of US military projects (such as the Jackpile uranium mine) and automobility on Indigenous relationships with that same so-called "wilderness."

Patrick Wolfe's claim that settler colonialism is "premised on the securing—the obtaining and the maintaining—of territory" (402) could also be applied to the notion of wilderness conservation. The two are closely related in the sense that the US definition of wilderness in the 1964 Wilderness Act explicitly designates "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man [sic], where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (Wilderness Act)—a definition that persists to this day—denying the existence and even the possibility of any kind of human relationship to land where the land does not need protecting from its human occupants. Declaring lands that Indigenous peoples lived with(in) as empty and then claiming ownership and therefore stewardship of those lands "cannot be separated from the larger project of Indigenous dispossession and erasure" (Curnow and Helferty 148), and thus it becomes clear that forms of environmentalism based on land ownership (including the "trashy environmentalism" championed by many scholars of Abbey) perpetuate settler colonial relationships to land.

While the monkey wrench gang may still seek to protect it from ecological damage, the idea of land as something to be possessed is behind its protective motives. Hayduke's destination, as he drunkenly speeds along at the beginning of the novel, is "Lee's Ferry, the Colorado River, [and] the Grand Canyon," or what he conceives of as "Hayduke's country [...]. And it better stay that way" (17–18). Similarly, Doc Sarvis refers to the Colorado River

as “my river,” before Bonnie Abzug corrects him: “Our river” (12). From then on, the Doc is more careful, describing “*our* national forests [...] *our* streams and rivers” and “*our* wildlife” (52—my emphasis) as examples of natural things that belong *to* the American public, and so should therefore be protected as one protects any private property. These examples show a clear difference between settler and Indigenous understandings of land rights that can be seen throughout *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, where every member of the gang believes that “public” land owned by the federal government belongs to them as US citizens, and they are therefore free to do as they please. As Seldom Seen Smith falls to his knees at the roadside praying for an earthquake to take down the Glen Canyon Dam, he is admonished by a park ranger who tells him that he “can’t pray here. This is a public place. [...] United States Government property” (34). Later, when another ranger attempts to search the Doc’s car, Bonnie tries to claim that because they are in a “people’s park,” the ranger has no right to detain them (210). The ranger, however, points out that they are “not [in] a people’s park” but “a national park,” also the property of the US government (210). An obvious irony rests in the idea that government-owned land becomes public property in that it first had to be taken from Indigenous peoples, who well understand that they are not the US citizens to whom these parks belong. Hayduke sees no irony in his anti-authoritarian claim that “the wilderness belong[s] to *us*. This is Indian country. Our country” (87—original emphasis), emphasizing how notions of belonging *to* are inherently colonial, and antithetical to Indigenous ideas of belonging *with*.

This difference between Tayo and Hayduke’s relationship to the same landscape of the American Southwest is best articulated by Betonie, the old Navajo medicine man in *Ceremony* to whom Tayo turns for help when Western medicine and more traditional Indigenous healing ceremonies have failed. Living in a hogan outside Gallup on Route 66, Betonie is able to “keep track” of the Navajo people who sleep in alleys “next to the river and

the dump,” where they remain “until Ceremonial time” (Silko 108) when the white residents of Gallup show them off to the automobile tourists who have ventured down 66 and expect to see familiar mass-media stereotypes such as DeCorti’s Crying Indian. What the colonial zoning practices of segregating white residents from the Indigenous population (and the town’s litter) do not account for, according to Betonie, is that the Navajo and the other Pueblo peoples “know these hills, and [...] are comfortable here” (108). Betonie’s use of the word “comfortable” is striking to Tayo, as if the medicine man had given “special meaning” to the English term—“not the comfort of big houses or rich food or even clean streets, but the comfort of belonging with the land [...]” (108). It is this notion of people belonging *with* the land (as opposed to land as something that belongs *to* people) that distinguishes Tayo’s Indigenous Laguna bond with the landscape from Hayduke’s inherently colonial understanding: land as a space in which one (as inhabitant) shares collective responsibility versus a space where one has the right (as owner) to do whatever one wants. In this context, when Betonie claims that the Indigenous inhabitants “know these hills” (108), his words reflect Coulthard and Vine Deloria’s point that knowing land in this manner enables it to be understood as a field of “relationships of things to each other” (Vine Delora qtd in Coulthard 61). Such a recognition demonstrates Betonie practicing the literature of landed resistance, as he “details a responsibility to and knowledge of land that allows him to move across settler-imposed boundaries” (Keeler 5) in order to keep track of his fellow Navajo people. It is knowing and partnering with land, understanding “place as a way of knowing,” that Coulthard claims grounded Indigenous “critiques of colonialism and capitalism in the 1970s” (Coulthard 61), and Silko’s 1977-text stands testament to that.

Even though Betonie’s view is that white people “only fool themselves when they think [the land] is theirs,” and that the “deeds and paper don’t mean anything” (118), these beliefs do not prevent others, such as Tayo, from feeling the loss and subsequent destruction

of land. “Every day,” Tayo says, “they had to look at the land [they lost], from horizon to horizon, and every day the loss was with them” (157). While for Hayduke, drinking and driving are equally about celebrating the beauty of the land and freeing oneself from a sense of responsibility for it, Tayo notes that many Indigenous people try “to sink the loss [of the land] in booze” (157), which may contribute to the more tragic tone in Silko’s passage about a former US soldier drunkenly driving through and littering on a public road through federal land—having served as a defender of “the land [he] had already lost” (157). The empty beer can that Tayo tosses out of the car window contains very different messages than those Hayduke throws out, as Hayduke feels able to litter for political reasons, he himself having never had to worry about being equated with litter. Abbey describes “Navajoland” as essentially a roadside litter heap: “the beer cans and pop bottles, the squashed aluminum and broken glass, the plastic six-pack carriers and forgotten wine jugs of Navajoland USA” (Abbey 274). In situating Betonie next to the Gallup dump in *Ceremony*, Silko draws attention to the similarities between how white culture views both Indians and litter: dirty, disposable, and something they would rather forget existed.

Living among “the wrecked cars” (108), “Coke bottles” (110), and other refuse of the colonial settlement, the Navajo Betonie has a different understanding of litter and what should be regarded as dirty. Often asked why he lives in such close proximity to the “filthy town” of Gallup, Betonie responds by insisting that “this hogan was here first. Built long before the white people ever came. It is the town down there which is out of place. Not this old medicine man” (109). His language here echoes Mary Douglas’s famous definition of dirt as “matter out of place” (Douglas 36), implying that, because the colonial town is explicitly not where it ought to be, it is the town itself that is dirty, not the Indigenous population forced to live among its refuse. Abbey makes a similar case regarding a roadside town in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*: “Glen Canyon City (NO DUMPING) rots and rusts at the side of the road like

a burned-out Volkswagen [...]” (31). Recalling the wrecked cars that occupy the dump below Gallup in *Ceremony*, Abbey, too, employs automotive imagery to emphasize the blotch this city leaves on the landscape, refocusing attention back on the cars and commercial infrastructure rather than simply on the litter they produce as sources of pollution. As Trumpeter notes, there is considerable irony behind Abbey’s inclusion of the phrase “NO DUMPING” given his description of the town “as essentially a big piece of litter” (22). What both of these passages from Silko and Abbey imply is that, while settler culture is good at separating what supposedly does and does not belong within it—keeping the dirty away from the clean—it is the settlers who will always be the ones out of place.

Focusing on the litany of discarded consumer products—newspapers, shopping bags, drinks bottles, calendars—that adorn Betonie’s home alongside more traditional Navajo medicine paraphernalia, Anna Brígido-Corachán identifies Betonie as one who not only finds practical uses for the byproducts of Western development but also “reinterprets and transforms” (14) those byproducts into something more than they were in white culture. Incorporating these supposedly worthless objects into his healing ceremonies, Betonie makes changes to the traditional rituals to account for the shifts that took place “after the white people came” (Silko 116). For Betonie, all of these objects have “stories alive in them” (116) and changing the narrative around things that have been too-casually discarded is an essential function of Betonie’s medicine for Indigenous survival in modern times, chiefly because these things “are reminiscent of the whole history of Native American communities in their violent relationship with white hegemonic society” (Brígido-Corachán 17). Betonie sees this blending of Indigenous and settler artefacts not as a dilution of the former or a capitulation to the latter, but as a form of growth and development essential to the survival of his people, because “things which don’t shift and grow are dead things” (Silko 116).

Acoma Pueblo writer Simon J. Ortiz is among those to have noted the long history of Indigenous peoples incorporating elements of different cultural practices into their respective cultural identities, gathering in “many forms of the socio-political colonizing force which beset them” and making these forms “meaningful in their own terms” (8). Writing specifically of the influence of Christian rituals on the ceremonies of the Acqumeh people, Ortiz asserts that these rituals originally adopted from the Spanish “are now Indian because of the creative development that the native people applied to them” (8). Ortiz draws on these examples to suggest that contemporary Indigenous literature can be considered another instance of the successful appropriation of an element of the colonizing culture, mentioning *Ceremony* specifically as a crucial text “in the development of a national Indian literature” (11) that uses the form (novel) and language (in this case English) of colonizers to keep creating and reaffirming stories that “Indian people have depended upon in their most critical times” (11). Betonie’s determination to demonstrate that new stories can emerge from external sources stems from his Mexican grandmother (unnamed in the text), who taught him that, in order to survive, they “must have power from everywhere. Even the power [they] can get from the whites” (Silko 139). The idea that “you don’t write off all white people” (Silko 118) and that there are aspects of white culture that, when stripped of their colonial stories, can actually benefit Native communities, is what begins mixed-heritage Tayo’s healing process.

Just as the power of horses was successfully harnessed and subverted when Indigenous peoples acquired them from colonial forces, the horseless carriage (or automobile) represents another successful adoption of a colonial technology, Betonie seems to suggest, when it is separated from colonial land relations and made meaningful in Indigenous terms.^v What Betonie sees of automotive culture is not the “Mobility, speed, power, [and] progress” (P. Deloria 138) that define its appeal in US society, but rather the raw materials, the “mirrors and chrome of the wrecked cars” (Silko 108)—the literal (or *litter*-al) substance rather than

the white story. This, as Brígido-Corachán notes, is what enables Tayo's recovery to begin with the grilled mutton ribs that Betonie cooks "over a grill he had salvaged from the front end of a wrecked car in the dump below" (Brígido-Corachán 18, Silko 116). Betonie looks at the front end of a car, often called a grill, and sees just that: a grill for his mutton ribs. Stripping away the symbolism of automobility and focusing on the material object itself encourages Tayo to stop listening to what white culture says about who he should be as a Laguna Pueblo citizen, and also opens up the possibility of reimagining automobility with Indigenous people in the driving seat—a phenomenon that, despite white expectations, has been a daily occurrence since the outset of American automotive culture.^{vi}

By contrast, Tayo's friend Harley continually turns to automobility and drinking as symbolic of the freedoms enjoyed by Americans such as Hayduke, which ultimately costs him his life. Despite sharing his name with a famous motorbike brand (whose main competitor in the US has historically been Indian Motorcycles), automobility does not grant Harley the sense of happiness and even ecological heroism granted to Hayduke. By inverting the frequent automotive practice of using Indigenous names for cars, Silko demonstrates that, as a token gesture, such as a name does not confer the identity or cultural history associated with it, challenging the notion that white drivers can use cars with Indian names as vehicles to possess Indigenous cultural associations. As Doc Sarvis in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* puts it: "Wearing a headband doesn't make you an Indian" (144).

Despite what appears on the surface to be an overwhelmingly negative representation of cars in *Ceremony*—as symbols and facilitators of government encroachment and environmental damage, fostering a disconnection from the land for Indigenous drivers—Betonie's deeper lesson is that nothing that could potentially aid Indigenous survival should be discounted, echoing the words of Uncle Josiah, which Tayo recalls at the beginning of the novel: nothing "was all good or all bad either; it all depended" (10). For Silko, as a mixed-

heritage Laguna Pueblo, Mexican, and white woman, highways and cars have been spaces of freedom and nostalgia as well as exclusion and danger. Her father, the Laguna photographer Lee Marmon (1925–2021), claimed that his love of photography began when, as a young boy, he sold several pictures he had taken of “a truck wreck near Laguna” (Marmon and Corbett 99) to a local trucking company. Automobility remained significant to his record of Pueblo life, as both a subject and a means of framing the landscape. “I loved to drive that old Model A truck around the reservation,” he wrote, “when I’d see a good landscape, I’d stop and take a few pictures” (Marmon and Corbett 153). This sense that automobility can, in the right circumstances, empower Indigenous individuals may have contributed to Silko’s own testament that she “used to travel the highways of New Mexico and Arizona with a wonderful sensation of absolute freedom [...]” (“America’s Iron Curtain” 131). Despite the government mistreatment of Native Americans, she claims that the Laguna were “proud citizens” and as such grew up “believing the freedom to travel was our inalienable right” (“America’s Iron Curtain” 131). This freedom, however, proved not to be the case, as she recounts an incident, which took place after the publication of *Ceremony*, when she was the victim of a racially motivated traffic stop on a New Mexico state road. Forced to stand at the side of the road (like Iron Eyes Cody) as Border Patrol searched the car without probable cause, she recalls watching as “other vehicles—whose occupants were white—were waved through the checkpoint” (“America’s Iron Curtain” 133). In moments like these the curtain is pulled back on the supposed freedom of the open road, revealing the control and (literal) direction of all road users by the state—as Imre Szeman suggests, “maybe freedom isn’t connected to driving a car with the wind in your hair” (qtd in Obernesser 492).

Like the white car occupants speeding un-harassed through the checkpoint, Abbey himself boasts rather different personal experiences of dealing with the contradictions of automobility. “Unlike more conventional advocates of the burgeoning environmental

movement in the 1970s,” notes Douglas Brinkley, Abbey would roar “through the streets of Tucson in a vintage red Cadillac convertible with a plastic geranium stuck in the hood ornament [...]” (xvi). It is hard to imagine someone like Tayo or Silko getting away with speeding past the authorities, who are trained to identify sights or events that do not match up with their expectations as potentially dangerous (or, following Mary Douglas, as potentially polluting) (Douglas 41). Abbey’s monkeywrenching characters are all too aware of this fact, and exploit it frequently. Knowing that they do not fit the police profile of enemies of the state, the gang are confident that “the Feds” will assume their sabotage is evidence of “an Indian uprising” (Abbey 177). As part of this set up, the Doc proposes a bit of light littering, offering some red herrings in the form of “Tokay bottles” and “Peach brandy bottles” so as to “blame it on the Indians” (177). Whether it challenges individual responsibility for pollution or diverts the attentions of the authorities, the white protagonists of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, who know that the authorities will more than likely associate such waste with others, frame littering, particularly in the form of alcoholic beverages, as a political act. This difference rests at the root of why Hayduke is able to enjoy moments of automotive irresponsibility (drinking, driving, and littering) while Tayo is not: on government-owned spaces such as roads, who belongs where and what belongs to whom trump questions of belonging *with*.

A deeper comprehension of Indigenous relationships with land offers a road to a more nuanced understanding of automobility, land use, and environmental stewardship moving forward. Viewing land not as something to be possessed but as inseparable from its Indigenous human population, as “a system of reciprocal relations and obligations,” remains central to Indigenous anticolonialism, and expands the idea of an Ecological Indian from one who leaves no mark on the nonhuman world to one who lives in relation to nature, technology, and other humans in “nondominating and nonexploitative terms” (Coulthard 13).

Despite ostensibly challenging the expanding “regime of automobility” (Böhm et al. 3) through acts of sabotage, Hayduke’s equation of drinking, driving, and littering with personal freedom is symptomatic of the gang’s broader belief that the land they are protecting belongs to them. These equations of personal freedom to travel and private land ownership are cornerstones of colonial violence, highlighted by the fact that external dangers tend to encroach onto Laguna Pueblo communities in *Ceremony* by automobile. But despite the negative symbolism of the car for Tayo, Silko does not simply reinforce the stereotypes of the Ecological Indian by suggesting that Indigenous people do not or should not drive cars. Betonie helps Tayo see that automobiles, like many other aspects of colonial cultures, can be successfully appropriated and incorporated into Laguna Pueblo society without the symbolic colonial baggage which equates automobility with dominance over and separation from the land, land which, as Silko herself notes, Laguna Pueblo stories “cannot be separated from” (“Language and Literature” 71). Ultimately, this separation from the land in settler logics is unavoidable when it is understood as another commodity that can be bought, sold, or stolen. The fact that Indigenous logics of belonging with land persist even while practicing automobility and despite stereotypes suggests that Indigenous sovereignties supersede even the best-intentioned settler environmentalists.

Positionality Statement: [THE AUTHOR] is a white, male, European scholar writing from outside the United States, without ties to any of the Indigenous peoples whose ideas are discussed in this study.

ⁱ See Trumpeter; McTaggart; Grumbling and Daley. For petromodernity, see LeMenager.

ⁱⁱ See Bernhard; Premoli; Lockhart.

ⁱⁱⁱ See P. Deloria, particularly Chapter 5.

^{iv} See Hill; Obernesser.

^v See Penney.

^{vi} See P. Deloria, particularly Chapter 5; Bowman.

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