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## THE INSCRIPTION OF THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST IN NAVAJO TRIBAL PARKS

59TH CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
AT THE FIRST SESSION,  
BEGUN AND HELD AT THE CITY OF WASHINGTON  
ON MONDAY, THE FOURTH DAY OF DECEMBER  
ONE THOUSAND, NINE HUNDRED AND FIVE.  
AN ACT  
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES  
Simon Ortiz, “A Designated Park” 1992

The history of the creation of National Parks in America was inaugurated by president Ulysses S. Grant who signed on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1872 the act “designating over two million acres of northwestern Wyoming as Yellowstone National Park” (Nash 2014, 108) by which the territory could not be inhabited and became a public space for enjoyment and recreation. The fundamental purpose of national parks is “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of same in such manner [...] as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (“The National Park Service Organic Act of 1916”).<sup>1</sup> This act brought about a tremendous change for the tribal nations that had settled within the park or its surroundings and were getting sustenance from there: previous occupancy and uses of the protected wilderness were unacknowledged and disregarded except for their archeological value. Besides the well-known fact of the Indian attachment to the land and their belief in the sacredness of the land of their ancestors, Native Americans have also suffered the consequences of a different legal relationship to the land; their rights of property were regularly ignored and the confinement in reservations after the establishment of immigrant people in their lands meant an easy way to control the spread of their population and to contain them in constricted spaces, since land mobility in these terms is limited. Environmental Justice activists have been largely cooperating with indigenous peoples to help them understand the implications of the changes produced in legislation and how to overcome them, suffering the minimum material damage and loss possible. They have battled opposition from groups of ecologists who agreed to eliminate the human element from the wilderness. According to Joni Adamson, “because many environmental justice activists associate mainstream environmentalism with the preservation and protection of the ‘wild’ areas defined as spaces where people are not and *should not* be in large numbers, they are often reluctant to call themselves ‘environmentalists’ at all” (2001, 70). However, while most tribal councils rejected the establishment of national parks within their reservation land, some of them still found compensation for sharing it with the tourists and the park rangers from the National Park Service. For example, the Winimuches seemed the forgotten tribe in Mesa Verde Park so, they agreed to the establishment of an archeological site, protecting ruins that had been found in the area and allowing visitors on a regular basis. As a consequence of the agreement, the tribal park, Mancos Canyon Park, was approved and it started to provide employment and a sense of pride to the Winimuches.

Unfortunately, the results of the law protecting natural spaces have not always produced an improvement in the life of indigenous peoples; in fact, for over a century, the policies of the National Park Service have been answering to the question: ‘who cares about one more dead Indian?’ reinforcing the stereotypical depiction of the natives such as the notorious statement “a good Indian is a dead Indian.” These explicit racist manifestations have been brought to attention by environmental justice activists, groups which, especially in the US, focus on eliminating environmental racism, since it has been proven that in this country, unlike the

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.nps.gov/grba/learn/management/organic-act-of-1916.htm>. Last visited March 20, 2017.



rest of the world, discrimination is truly based on race. Most park visitors are middle aged, middle class Americans who enjoy their leisure time in an area they have learnt to use as a commodity, while Natives are isolated from the land they once owned and now live in poverty, as a result, in some cases, of having traded vast extensions of land and having been left with the worst territories as their reservation land. Together with the establishment of uranium mining sites, they suffered especially the trade of land where oil deposits or coal reserves are supposed to lay. “The crown jewels of Yosemite, Yellowstone, Mt. Rainier, Crater Lake, Mesa Verde, Olympic, Grand Canyon, Glacier and Rocky Mountain had been Indian country in 1850” (Keller and Turek 1998, 19).

Most of these sites and monuments within national parks have preserved areas with enormous archeological value: structures formerly inhabited by indigenous tribes which had to be abandoned by force. Thus, Native Americans have been treated within those parks as museum pieces, as remains and ruins from a violent past in which the wilderness was conquered and tamed as a result of numerous uneven battles. Although different policies have been established and negotiations have been reached during the last decades, natives still feel today that their traditional life has been destroyed, as Simon Ortiz discusses in the poems I will address later. Ortiz is an Acoma Pueblo writer from Albuquerque, New Mexico, who experienced firsthand the abuses committed to the land as well as the alienation of the native people while he was working in a uranium mine. He is also one of the most widely read Native American poets.

Ortiz decisively uses storytelling techniques and addresses the reader in his attempt to make visible the injustices committed against his people which led to the disappearance of traditional tribal life as it was once known. It wasn't until 1924, when the Congress approved the Indian Citizenship Act, that the history of the West of the US underwent one of its greatest shifts by beginning to consider the indigenous inhabitants as legal citizens, as human beings worth of belonging there. Up until then, with few exceptions, indigenous peoples had been denied their legal rights as human beings and excluded even from the processes of naturalization open to foreigners. Their unusual status promoted the disregard of their placement, of their traditional settlements and contributed to situate them in a complicated position to defend their territories from the abuses that they would eventually suffer: from the beginning, they were contemplated as another element of nature to be exploited by the white Western colonizer. In this sense, the problematic issue of national parks mainly deals with the dispossession of the land, with the continuous offenses suffered by the indigenous inhabitants, and the lack of restoration from the side of the government applying laws which still exclude them and forbid them from returning home.

There has been a history of confrontation between environmentalists dealing with the consideration of wild life as being composed only of wild animals without human presence. Natives, thus, interfere in such wild life, and controversies have appeared regarding the rights of the Natives to, for example, hunt and fish within national parks as well as perform other activities that used to take place there as part of traditional tribal life. Unfortunately, only a few studies and publications link the history and description of national parks in America with the historical development and destruction of tribal life. For example, Keller and Turek in *American Indians & National Parks* (1998) demonstrate the interconnectedness of reservations and the creation of national parks, especially in relation to the Navajo nation, and study the effects of the laws imposed and applied on these protected spaces with their development along the years. Although interactions between non indigenous park rangers and natives seemed friendly and they cooperated during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more recently an extended complaint has been dealing with the fact that park rangers and superintendents are commonly oblivious to Native history and special regulations that must be applied, something that very often provokes conflicts and misunderstandings in which the natives always lose.

The intersection of the natural element and the human element in these protected spaces has rarely been considered an object of study from the perspective of environmental racism, with the exception of Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism: the Middle Place*. This is connected with an extended lack of consideration of these environments as dwellings and repositories of culture outside tribal understanding and it is also somehow related to Buell's definition of space and place: “up to a point, world history is a history of space becoming place. In the beginning, earth was space without form. Then, through inhabitation, places were created. But modern history has also reversed this process” (2005, 63-64). Buell provides the example of Native Americans losing space and place when they were



confined in reservations: “federally defined spaces, more like internment camps, than decent substitutes for the pre-settlement home place or range,” and in the same chapter devoted to place-attachment, Buell adds that environmental justice “has taken a special interest in narratives of representative endangered communities” (68). Thus, the study of the loss of place attachment for Native Americans matters for environmental justice activists because it meant adaptation to the configuration in allotments to create new settlements and establish dwellings anew, a process through which many lives were lost and many families destroyed.

One of the most emblematic sites of resistance featured in Western films and symbolic of the gold rush, Monument Valley, has become a legend, a metaphor of nature opposing the human being. Movies such as *Stagecoach* by John Ford provided work and money for the Navajo tribes while the scenes were filmed there but the success obtained by Ford’s movies also brought along a multiplicity of tourists who produced a hard environmental impact on the area. As a direct consequence, it has been transformed into one of the most extensively studied parks, receiving multiple scholars who have approached the site to study and do research on its history and historical meaning, while the impact on the environment and the human element on some other protected spaces seems to have sunk into oblivion. This is the case of the two National Parks where Simon Ortiz chooses to situate his poems and address the confrontation between native peoples and the government in the case of the preservation of wild life. Canyon the Chelly National Monument serves as the perfect location for the homonymous poem “Canyon de Chelly,” which vindicates a concept that has already been mentioned: an expression of place-attachment, a ritual of passing to the next generation the ancient knowledge, the history inscribed in the surrounding environment. The official website from the National Parks Service explains that this is a National Park situated in Chinle, Arizona where the Pueblo Indians, before they were massacred, used to practice agriculture.<sup>2</sup> It also specifies that it is managed in partnership with the Navajo or Diné nation, the last tribe to settle in that land before its declaration as a national park. In fact, the place keeps vestiges of a history of settlements from different native tribes which has currently come to an end because of the transformation of the area into a space for leisure, with the consequent invasion of tourists. This specific landmark witnessed the interactions between the Spaniards and the natives who, among other signs, left pictograms illustrating and recording the history of the confrontations between them. Precisely, these records and echoes of the past acquire a central role in Simon Ortiz’s homonymous poem. The poet, as a father and as an indigenous inhabitant of the area, explores the meaning of the place for his family, for his ancestors, and for all the tribes that used to live there. At the same time, he suffers the conflict associated with having his roots severed and having been deterritorialized, while also articulating a lament for the disappearance of cultivated fields and inhabited spots. There is an idea of a mutual embrace between the native and nature, the flora and the fauna surrounding him, as well as “a perception of the natural world as home, a place where humans manipulate the element of nature in order to survive” (Adamson 2001, 87). The poem evokes a conversation between father and son, as the former instructs the latter on the knowledge of the land and its products, explaining in detail how it provides nourishment for the human beings and the nonhuman species. He names the most important trees and fruits of the area, all of them full of symbolical and metaphorical meaning in the poem. Ortiz describes the trees, bushes, and berries with a perfect knowledge because, like himself, they have belonged to that environment from the beginning of times as well as to his people. The medicinal, culinary, and ritual properties of the juniper berries and cones appear implicitly in the poem to heal the bodies and the broken minds of the natives. The reader learns about them from the special treatment and care father and son give to a root when they find it: “My son touches the root carefully,/aware of its ancient quality./He lays his soft, small fingers on it/and looks at me for information” (Ortiz 1992, 235). Agriculture has been an indigenous tradition in this land for centuries, since long before the Europeans arrived and established their new systems of exploitation. Ortiz explains how they are the land and belong to nature with the symbolism of the root which is metaphorical of their long history in the place and their own permanence in the site. His deep feeling of uprootedness, being dramatically severed from the links with the earth, with the place that once was his homeland, impregnates the words of the poem. “The poem affirms the intimate and necessary

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See [http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/American\\_Latino\\_Heritage/Canyon\\_de\\_Chelly\\_National\\_Monument.html](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/American_Latino_Heritage/Canyon_de_Chelly_National_Monument.html). Last visited March 9, 2017.



connection to land and place. This poem's specific location, in Navajo country, confirms that for Ortiz, such connection needn't be limited to one's origin place" (Riley Fast 1999, 87-88). His son reveres the products, the root, the origins the traditions. "Taste of stone," taste of endurance, of strong people who "for nearly 5,000 years, [...] have used the towering sandstone walls of Canyon de Chelly as a place for campsites, shelters, and permanent dwellings" (National Park Service, Canyon de Chelly National Monument).<sup>3</sup> Verses such as "The stone carved to fit/the shape of yourself" carry especial symbolism since it was their ancestors that carved the petroglyphs on the rocks; the child is their direct inheritor and the stone is for him as a descendant of the ancient inhabitants of the park, while no such bound exists for those American middle class visitors who disregard the history, ancestry, and tradition of the tribes once settled there. Paula Gunn Allen addresses the extinction of tribal life in *Off the Reservation*. She actually mentions feeling the impact that a short story, "The San Francisco Indians" by Ortiz, caused on her, as well as the ending of *House Made of Dawn*: "I can imagine a world without Indians. It is a world that has surrounded me most of my life. I only just now recognized it –a world that will have records – pictures, foods, artifacts, heritages of Indians, all transformed into something unrecognizable to an Indian" (1999, 39). Allen's statement reinforces the idea that Ortiz's literature, both poetry and narrative, portrays the struggle for survival and resistance of the tribal peoples, their taking along their language and culture as a response to the process of assimilation they have been undergoing through the centuries of colonization. In fact, the Navajos opposed the creation of Canyon de Chelly National Monument and the government had to face a movement of resistance that sadly did not succeed as it did in Snake Town and Cibola, where the Zuni and Pima blocked the process of park creation. The construction of the West as a reality and as a mythical space would never have been possible without the natural element, without an environmental frame, but also without the surrendering of the indigenous tribes that helped shape that environment.

From the beginning, the history of the interactions among the Navajo nation, the tribe that manages the park in agreement with the National Park System, the Spanish troops that attempted to dominate the area, and the indigenous population was not a peaceful one, but a long and continuous confrontation. According to the website of the National Park Service and Keller and Turek (1998), by the late 1700s lengthy warfare erupted among the Navajo, other regional American Indians, and the Spanish colonists of the Rio Grande Valley.

A particularly violent battle took place in January of 1805. Lt. Antonio Narbona, a Creole lieutenant, traveled to Canyon de Chelly with Spanish troops and local guides. Narbona was sent to retaliate against the Navajo for their attacks on Cebolletta. At the time, Cebolletta functioned as a Spanish military post at the base of Mount Taylor, a place considered sacred by the Navajo. The Spanish fought a day-long battle with the Navajo who sought protection in a rock shelter in Canyon del Muerto (another canyon located within the Canyon de Chelly National Monument). By the end of the day, Narbona reported killing and capturing numerous Navajos. The shelter where this battle occurred is referred to today as Massacre Cave and it serves as a site of commemoration. Massacre Cave can be viewed at the "Massacre Cave Overlook" on the North Rim Drive of the park. (U.S. Department of Interior - National Park Service, "Canyon de Chelly National Monument")

The other setting selected by Ortiz to situate his poem "A Designated National Park" is Montezuma Castle National Monument in Arizona. Despite its arid climate, water runs in small streams producing an impacting contrast between the typical desert plants and a lush green landscape inhabited by numerous animal species. The monument combines its cultural relevance with the environmental importance that resides not only in the variety of vegetal species that grow there but also in the geological relevance provided by the possibility to contemplate the Earth's geological eras. The history of its creation is described as follows in the official governmental website:

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<sup>3</sup>See

[http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/American\\_Latino\\_Heritage/Canyon\\_de\\_Chelly\\_National\\_Monument.html](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/American_Latino_Heritage/Canyon_de_Chelly_National_Monument.html)  
. Last visited March 9, 2017.





On December 8, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt celebrated the passage of the Antiquities Act by declaring four sites of historic and cultural significance as our nation's first National Monuments. Among these was Montezuma Castle, which the President identified as a place "of the greatest ethnological value and scientific interest." Although very few original artifacts remained in the structure due to intensive looting of the site, Roosevelt's decision assured the continued protection of one of the best preserved prehistoric cliff dwellings in North America. Montezuma Castle National Monument quickly became a destination for America's first car-bound tourists. In 1933, "Castle A," a 45-50 room, pueblo ruin was excavated, uncovering a wealth of artifacts and greatly enhanced our understanding of the Sinagua people who inhabited this riparian "oasis" along Beaver Creek for over 400 years. Early visitors to the monument were allowed access to the structure by climbing a series of ladders up the side of the limestone cliffs. However, due to extensive damage to this valuable cultural landmark, public access of the ruins was discontinued in 1951. Now, approximately 350,000 people a year gaze through the windows of the past during a visit to Montezuma Castle. Even 600 years after their departure, the legacy of the Sinagua people continues to inspire the imaginations of this and future generations. (U.S. Department of Interior - National Park Service, "Montezuma Castle")<sup>4</sup>

Ecocritical studies have brought together the disciplines of history, anthropology, and sociology among others in the social sciences and the humanities to create awareness towards the semiotics of nature, the meaning of the inhabitants of the American wilderness. Lawrence Buell explains that some of the most persuasive environmental writing rests on the belief that a true sense of place cannot be built on superficial contact with one place or another but that it requires a deep, contemplative familiarity with the flora and fauna, geologies, and histories of human occupancy in specific places (2005, 261-264).

Joni Adamson affirms that for American Indian peoples,

the fight for sacred places and traditional homelands is not simply about preserving valued environmental qualities in specific locations or gaining deep experiential knowledge of nature. For them, unique geologic gestures within their homelands are often alive with the mythic, historic, and sacred meaning of their cultures; these places are expressive of a particular way of life, and when threatened, they become symbols of the threat to distinctive cultural identities. (Adamson 2001, 71)

As I have already stated, Simon Ortiz gives his point of view on the function of National parks and its meaning for tribal peoples in the two formerly mentioned poems "Canyon the Chelly" and "A Designated National Park." These two poems also reflect the drama suffered by Ortiz himself in his childhood when he was forced to undergo a process of assimilation as he narrates in the introduction to *The Woven Stone*, a collection of poems and essays compiled from his three earlier published collections, which the poet considers his spiritual autobiography. Among the many claims for the restoration and visibility of tribal culture, he recalls the intention of the government behind sending native children to boarding schools was to "break or sever ties to culture, family and tribe. To change indigenous peoples into Americans. It was a severe and traumatic form of brainwashing, literally to destroy the heritage and identity of native people" (1992, 8). His way of approaching national valleys represents the conflictive view about the rights of the Native Americans to profit from landscape and nature as part of the natural environment of reservation life and the governmental regulations that aim to preserve the space as an enclosure for wild life and the conservation of certain species. The legal discourse gets confronted with the attempt of tradition to establish a cultural dialogue, to enter a dialogic dimension of nature and the human beings, which finds a barrier within the park regulations. Joni Adamson explains that Ortiz's literature "[...] is a literature that rests its hope in organized community resistance to social and environmental injustices" (2001, 69). Ortiz reveals the problematic issue of private property, the question of belonging, of establishing a payment to enter a public place; how Sinagua culture in particular and tribal culture at large has been reduced to a mere collection of ancient remains from the people that once inhabited the place. He complains that it costs him money to go

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.nps.gov/moca/historyculture/index.htm>. Last visited March 9, 2017.



home, to return to the land of his ancestors: “this morning,/I have to buy a permit to get back home” and regrets the transformation of a sacred spot into a tourist resort, into a frivolous scene. He suffers and experiences the pain inflicted from the contemplation of the desecration of these pieces of land where human remains had been buried: “Pressing the button, I find/painted sticks and cloth fragments/in a child's hand, /her eyelashes still intact./Girl, my daughter, my mother,/softly asleep./They have unearthed you.” The recreation of traditional tribal life enclosed within booths or a box, showing anthropological findings, causes a feeling of despair and anger in the poet. Sign posts announce the anthropological findings and in Ortiz’s poem, block capital letters bleed and cry for justice exposing the vulnerability of the old people, of the land and of language. The sign posts written in English violate the peace and the balance of the sacred place reminding the readers that the park belongs to the US government and it has been taken from the Sinagua Indians for the leisure and enjoyment of every other American citizen.

He argues that Natives have been deprived of and separated from their original spaces and rejects the static recreation in a museum of how life originally was: the transformation of tradition into an object of contemplation. Both nature and the peoples that inhabited the space have currently become tourist attractions. Alyson Byerly in “The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System” discusses the implications of the term “outdoor museums” that Robert Sterling Yard introduced to describe national parks. According to Byerly, this term “embodies a conception of conservation that treats the national park’s contents as art objects to be valued for their appearance and preserved in their existing state” (1996, 59). Ortiz’s reaction to this objectification of the Indian past is of impotence against the legislation that regulates the park and attempts to “maintain the aesthetic illusion of wilderness” (Byerly 1996, 59) eliminating the possibility for new development. The verse “they have unearthed you” brings devastation, surrender, and the helplessness of the native peoples at the sight of human remains which have been unburied to be exposed and contemplated by visitors without reverence. This fact of the dispossession of the land and the park and museum as contested spaces is discussed in *The Heart as a Drum: Continuance and Resistance in American Indian Poetry* by Robin Riley Fast. This collection of essays contains a chapter entitled “That’s the Place Indians Talk About,” in which Riley discusses the idea of “sense of place” in Native American poetry including this poem by Ortiz. Riley claims that his poetry talks about the control of the land and its resources, which at large is one of the main concerns of environmental justice. Western ideas of possession of the land contrast strongly with the concept of reverence to the place they call home of Natives. According to Riley (5), “A Designated National Park” by Ortiz deals with the question of establishing boundaries and divisions and binary oppositions which get unsolved and result from a disproportionate disadvantage suffered by tribal communities. Keller thinks that writers often refer to national parks and Indian reservations as islands: parks are called islands under siege or islands of hope; within this approach, reservations appear as islands of poverty and islands of despair. The physical landscape turns metaphorical as a frontier, as a contested space, that clearly separates the native from the non-native. These boundaries serve to establish a clear distinction between us and them, avoiding the “middle place” evoked by this poetry and claimed by Joni Adamson: a site of encounter for culture and nature, an emotional location in which multiple tensions take place. One of these tensions has to do with the continuous problematic disappearance of the Indian throughout the history of colonization of the United States; with how the figure of the Native American and everything represented by it must be eliminated not only from the description of the landscape but also from the entire picture of the modern world. The defense of tribal sovereignty and reservation lands clashes with the process of acceptance of cosmopolitanism. Joni Adamson explains that

Euro American readings of the landscape have assigned ‘nature’ to those mythical places untouched by human culture. At the same time, the human and nonhuman populations considered closest to nature and part of the ‘wilderness’ are deemed Others who are in need of control and domination. The places where they live are defined and interpreted as either valuable national treasures or expendable sacrifice zones. Thus, Euro-American readings of the landscape have literally meant the difference between life and death for entire species or communities (85)



The role of Ortiz, of the poet and the writer at large consists in managing these emotional locations, thus recuperating ancient history, the memory of those tribes that inhabited National Parks before their establishment as such, and in bringing to light all the hidden events that helped shape the wilderness as we know it today. As Roderick Nash explained, “Today dictionaries define wilderness as uncultivated and otherwise undeveloped land. The absence of men and the presence of wild animals is assumed” (2014, 3). They also bring awareness to the fact that the names were once given by the natives, to how border divisions affect reservations in the sense that some of them are left isolated by the new land demarcations, and to the selection of flora and fauna which has been modified in time by hunting and fishing within the space. Nature, argues Byerly, is contemplated as a picturesque commodity and this fact is reflected in the design and management of national parks (1996, 59). In much American nature writing, states Adamson, there is an inherent hope, an abiding faith that writers may be able to aid in the battle over the issue of the destruction or preservation of valued environmental qualities, in particular places (70). Ortiz truly reflects on what he has endured throughout time. “A sense of place, writes Kent Ryden, takes in more than the physical features of the landscape; it takes in the deep and subtle meanings that people assign to those landscapes” (Adamson 2001, 70).

The role of storytelling in the preservation of the land and the people is the core of Ortiz’s poetry as he demonstrates not only in the poems analyzed here but also in the collection *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land* (1980). One of his stories, titled “That’s the Place Indians Talk About,” narrates the story of the spiritual significance of the Ambrosia Lake area, regarded in Acoma oral tradition as the emerging place of the Acoma people and how it enters into identity with the story of Coso Hot Springs, a sacred place of the Shoshonean people. In this poem, the voice of an elder Paiute man telling the story of how his people still draw strength from this place despite the fence built around it by the China Lake Naval Station, combines with the voice of Ortiz’s persona to confirm the ongoing “moving power of the voice” as a creative force of life in which the moving powers of both “the Earth” and “the People” are identified. As it happened in Montezuma Castle, the natives face a physical border, a barrier in the shape of a fence that separates them from one of the most important spiritual places in their tradition and culture. They are forced, therefore, to interact with the fence, so the poem expresses the desperation and impotence of all the voices implied in the absent dialogue between the government, the elders, nature in the shape of the hot springs, and the poet himself. One of the main differences, however, between this poem and the ones set in National Parks, resides in the hope for the recovery of the sacred place, of the dialogue with nature that has been lost with the occupancy by the US Navy.

Apart from Ortiz’s poetry, other representations of National Parks such as Canyon de Chelly appear in movies filmed during the 1950s and even in the more contemporary *The Lone Ranger* (2013). Contemporary films have not changed the iconic image of the Indian as a museum piece, as a species in danger of extinction. These films reinforce the representation of the natives discussed above and offer the traditional view of the white man taking possession of the land. The trailer of *The Big Country*, a traditional western film, featuring Gregory Peck and Charlton Heston in the main roles, begins with a description of Canyon de Chelly as “a giant unconquered untamed land, virgin yet violent[...] from the canyon where the Red River flows.” It portrays the isolation of the white man against the environment; the majesty of the cowboy and the indigenous inhabitants being framed by the threatening wilderness and the rocky mountains as well as all the other classical elements of Western movies. The native element in this case is absent or as in *The Lone Ranger* appears caged inside a museum labelled as “Noble Savage in its Natural Habitat.” It is not very fortunate to include an actor such as Johnny Depp in the role of Tonto, the Indian character that accompanies the Lone Ranger in the film and classic comic strips. It can be stated that these films made by whites have a script also written for a white audience and directors purposely represent a distorted image of the Indian: they portray them as an already defeated enemy who is about to surrender to the superiority of the railroad that crosses the Southwest of the US. Tonto stays mummified within the boxes of a museum as a picture of wilderness, as “the static image of wilderness lodged in the collective consciousness” (Byerly 1996, 61). The opening scene reveals the reality of the Native American today: he is preserved as a museum piece surrounded by stuffed wild animals, most of them already extinct as most of the Indian tribes. Tonto is caged within the recreation of a tribal setting and a letter board that reminds the reader of *The Last of the Mohicans*’ by James Fenimore Cooper. The cage is covered with wallpaper reproducing the landscape



surrounding Monument Valley and a tipi stands next to a wrinkled and aged Indian. The audience contemplates the scene and bears as a witness of the conversation between a young kid dressed as The Lone Ranger and the Indian. Tonto acquires a voice, suddenly he is the storyteller, it is through him and his account of the facts that the viewers get to watch and learn about the story of John Reid, Butch Cavendish, and the constant confrontations between the white men in search for wealth and progress while the Natives struggle for permanence and survival in an uneven combat. The image and the voice of the Indian, however, fulfill a different purpose which is precisely to increase the value of the actions performed by the hero, by the Lone Ranger who becomes a 'spirit walker,' someone who comes back from death to deal out justice. Although Disney still reproduces most of the typical stereotypes of indigenous tribes (natives in regalia dancing and getting ready for war, bows and arrows, horseback riding, etc.), and makes use of humor to eliminate excessive drama, the film at least portrays the human being within the landscape, as an essential element in the development of the West of the US. It is well known that as a result of these advances, the tribal people were thrown away from the wilderness, left aside from the natural wonders when silver was discovered. In this sense, the extermination of the Comanches in the film parallels that of the Pueblo Indians and other tribes of Arizona and New Mexico like the ones whose culture and past Ortiz attempts to rescue in his poems.

In sum, National parks represent/embody sites of resistance, contested spaces from where the natives have been isolated by legal agreements and, therefore, they are forced to negotiate their identities and struggle for survival in an environment that attempts to annihilate their past and history of fighting against their white enemies for the permanence and possession of the land. The formation of an identity living in the borderlands, at a crossroad in the cultural middle place between an ancient tribal tradition and governmental rules, has characterized generations of Native Americans who have created and inhabited alternative meaningful cultural places as they are understood by Lawrence Buell's conception of place and place attachment. Poets like Simon Ortiz, who have suffered first hand the trauma of the dispossession of the land and their own uprootedness, use literature, especially poetry, to contest the abuses of the National Park Service and the American government at large, struggling to restore dignity and value to their people. As Riley states, "Simon Ortiz shows us how fundamental place is as a grounding for the individual, and a source of spirit, knowledge, community and language" (1999, 122). He explores the fluid dynamics of identity, bridging nature and culture in his poems which are oriented towards survival: they are a cry to stay alive, to stay strong and demand that the protection and preservation of the environment can be exercised with justice for the human and the nonhuman species alike.





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