

A Postcolonial- Ecocritical Perspective on Modern American Literature

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Introduction: Ecocritical Concerns

This paper compares *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been* for two reasons. The first is that the bloody imperialist missions in *Blood Meridian* and the violent mountaintop removal of the Appalachia in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* expose an ongoing, inherent process of political violence and cultural militarism in America. This inherent process of political violence and cultural militarism is upheld and sustained by fetish identity patterns and hierarchies that not only produce angry, repressed and guilty individuals and communities, but also establish violence as an acceptable everyday discourse of interaction within the American society. The paper specifically focuses on the systematic, politically-oriented interplay between the concepts of security, economy and development to control natural resources and to justify forms of sexual violence and child abuse as represented in the two selected novels. It relates Americans' spatial violence against their neighbors in *Blood Meridian* and their silence over the American state's violence against the Appalachian community in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* as reflecting a collective, complicit consent of practices of discrimination and aggression that undermine democratic principles. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said says:

Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing contest between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native. (59)

In the above-mentioned quotation, Said reflects on postcolonial cultures and literature from an ecological point of view. Said draws attention to the crucial role of geographical and cultural violence in establishing and maintaining imperialist ideologies and patriarchal power relations within modern Western and Eastern contexts. For Said, imperialism develops from being an act of violent territorial invasion of a foreign land to a chronic state of cultural and political struggle over resources, spaces and power. During this struggle, the dialectic of the self versus the other spins out. In this regard, Said emphasizes that authoritarian as well as democratic administrations worldwide are still affected by imperialism in their use, yet at different degrees, of colonial, deep-rooted hierarchical divisions to impose their authority over the natives or the periphery or the other through endorsing "selfish and narrow interests-patriotism, chauvinism, ethnic, religious, and racial hatreds"(21-22). Different forms of ecological, economic, social and human violence are, then, intertwined, organized, and systematic ideologies of subjugation, rather than as deviant acts by individuals. Imperialism is not only about white and native, or centre and periphery, but rather about hierarchal governmentality and narrow identity patterns.

This paper argues that processes of ecological violence of deforestation and pollution and aspects of human violence such as sexual violence and child abuse in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been* show that humans are not separate from their ecological surroundings. Rather, spatial violence in the two novels informs of fissures and discrepancies within the American social, cultural and democratic systems that tolerate obvious injustices and abuses. For example, the kid and many American fighters in *Blood Meridian* being engaged in extremely violent wars justify their callous disregard of the lives of their enemies and of their own colleagues to defend access to labour, land and to demonstrate masculinity. Yet, American fighters, being linguistically, culturally and socially inferior to Judge Holden and other leaders, become "silent mob of spectators" who if they want to express an opinion, they either "mutter obscenities" or "shake their heads silently"(McCarthy 78). Repressed and silenced American

fighters exercise their violence over others and over women fearing a threat to their masculinity and loss of power. Likewise, the violent, industrial transformation and destruction of the landscape in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* disturbs the familial and social relationships of the repressed and marginalized Yellowroot's residents. For instance, while women like Lace and her daughter Bant work to support themselves and their family, men are unemployed or do unsuitable jobs like house cleaning. Consequently, the whole family members are resentful and angry and project on their anger on each other. This paper argues that the socio-cultural and political contexts in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as this Weather Has Been* produce isolated and angry white Americans who live in virtual worlds and who take out their anger on others and on themselves.

The second reason for comparing *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as this Weather Has Been* is that they share an innovative view of environmental consciousness as a form of psychological and mental exoneration and self-forgiveness. In this sense, the ability of some characters like the kid in *Blood Meridian* and Bant and Lace in *Strange as This Weather* to form new perceptions and connection with land and space destabilizes their fetish identity filiations and helps them to overcome their feelings of oppression and subjugation. Many ecological critics and thinkers agree that the history of the relationships between human beings on the one side and the spaces and places they inhabit on the other tell of processes of identity oppression, change and regeneration that contribute to either the committal or the survival of colonial and discriminatory histories and their resistances. For instance, Noel Sturgeon argues that "an environmentalist politics is a useful location for interrogating the construction of an identity politics since it is not a political location solely located around a human body constructed by axes of naturalized hierarchies of value, as in racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism"(18). Sturgeon asserts that hierarchical politics, exploitive economic structures and separate identity constructs are universal, interdependent forces of repression and discrimination on gender, sexual, class and ethnic levels. Likewise, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, like Said and Sturgeon, argue that landscape is "a participant in the (imperial) historical process rather than a bystander to human experience"(9). Postcolonial-ecocritical readings of the selected two novels, then, open new spaces for examining effects of imperialism on the colonizers', and the colonized's, landscapes, personalities and power relations.

Taking cue from the above-mentioned ecocritical arguments concerning the complicated relationship between nature, history and ecological and human violence, this paper is divided into three parts. The first part discusses restrictive identity patterns in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as this Weather Has Been* in relation to hierarchical economic and political structures in the two novels. The second part examines discourses of femininity and masculinity in the two novels with a specific focus on the concepts of sexuality and sacrifice. The last part of this paper examines the development of ecological awareness in the two novels as empowering characters' identity development.

Hierarchical Structures, Militarized Cultures and Violent Identity Patterns

In *The Physic Life of Power*, Judith Butler argues that "power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are"(Butler 2). Accordingly, Butler continues, "power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity"(3). In this sense, "subjection signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject" and aims at producing and maintaining "social categorizations that establish the vulnerability of the subject to language [and] both psychic and historical change"(21). Butler analyzes the specific mechanisms of how the subject is many times formed in submission as a way of securely accessing the benefits of identifying with power. Butler's argument is valid for an analysis of the power relations and identity discourses in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as this Weather Has Been*. In the two novels, economic subjugation, militarized practices and collective indifference, silence and complicit

consent over the excessive use of different forms of ecological and human violence are dominant and revealing.

To begin with, American colonizers in *Blood Meridian*, as safeguards of spreading civilization and scientific development from 1849 to 1850, launch systematic, bloody wars on their neighbors including niggers, Mexicans, Indians, Spanish, Apaches and others, all of whom are described as "robbers," "a race of degenerates" and "barbarians"(33). Expectedly, American military invasions in *Blood Meridian* encourage "ethnotyping, that is to say, the stereotypical representation of people categorized according to a series of xenotypes, cast in bronze for all time. [...] The ethnotype reinforces a desirable self-identity in opposition to neighbouring entities, regarded as irrevocably other (a pejorative ethnotype)" (*Geocriticism* 144). Imperialism is a theory and a practice. Here, Judge Holden's power as a leader and as a spreader of western civilization is sustained by his linguistic superiority over his submissive followers. Judge Holden declares that "words are things. Their authority transcends [the Speaker's] ignorance of their meaning"(85). He uses his linguistic ability and knowledge to impress and convince the kid and other American fighters to participate in his imperialist project. He says that "God made this world, but he didn't make it to suit everybody"(19). Since god discriminates between people, Judge Holden asserts that "War is god. It's the testing of one's will and the will of another"(248-9). Judge Holden establishes a secular order, with the workings of God or religion suspended, declaring an order of hierarchy, of exclusion, of identity conflicts and of a monolithic white power. As winners, Judge Holden, promises Americans wealth, jobs and power: "we will be the ones who will divide the spoils. There will be a section of land for everyman in my company. A land rich in minerals, in gold and silver"(35). Americans regard themselves as superior to their uncivilized and inferior neighbors who need to be disciplined and managed.

Americans' need for money and massive military budgets to fulfill their civilizing missions in *Blood Meridian* further validates xenophobic, hierarchical attitudes towards nature and established social orders. Judge Holden "speaks in stones and trees" and claims knowledge in "ecology", "teleology", "paleontology", and "science"(46, 106 & 105). However, this scientific development is corrupted, economized and politicized. During the fights, "huts," "abodes and whole villages are abandoned" and ecological orders are disturbed with fighters "blackening the cottonwoods with their fires and driving forth the sleeping birds, the flames lighting up the wretched towns"(46). Rivers and lakes are contaminated with "blood and dead bodies"(134). Polluting and deforesting others' lands and natural resources deem American victory as pyrrhic. American militarism in *Blood Meridian*, according to Gareth Cornwell, is a cornerstone of the oppression of the vulnerable, particularly women and the destruction of the nonhuman world. Cornwell argues that "the entire thrust of the novel is to unseat the anthropomorphic perspective that privileges humanity over the rest of nature"(533). I agree with Cornwell that spatial and environmental brutality of the colonizers in *Blood Meridian* meant to expose a deep-seated, problematic attitude towards women, nature and animals as subordinate and mere possessions. Yet, processes of pollution and deforestation in *Blood Meridian* can also be seen as calculated methods of erasing and concealing the colonized's history and the colonizers' crimes. Spaces, landscape and places always tell of history, achievements, values and memories of their inhabitants. Americans in *Blood Meridian* try to wipe away traces of their violation when they destroy the cultural heritage of other nations leaving behind "ruined villages, buildings and old churches" and when they "collect and search for the bones"(300) of their victims.

Susan Kollin argues that *Blood Meridian* represents "western landscape that is supposed to be a test of character, bringing out the best in the hero and the worst in the villain, is emptied of its sacred qualities, becoming instead a fully defiled, profaned space"(Kollin 562). Kollin regards colonial landscape as violently contested and overturned to spread certain forms of human and natural subjugations and hierarchies that Cormac reflected in "the lack of fully developed female characters in his Westerns and its obsession with Anglo-American masculinity"(569). I agree with Kollin that the violent,

militarized order in *Blood Meridian* masculinize culture, economy and social conduct. Women do not have a decent role to play during times of war and excessive exposure of physical brutality. Yet, I argue further that McCarthy aims at refuting an important concept in American literature which is "American exceptionalism" that depicts the frontier region as somehow standing apart from the rest of the United States as a unique development (Limerick 700). Border wars in *Blood Meridian* establish American militarism not as self-defense strategies at times of war and chaos, but as planned national and identity ideologies of duty, solidarity and economic growth as well. The kid and many American fighters in the novel are deprived, uneducated and feel weak and vulnerable as individuals abandoned by their families and their nation. Their solidarity and integration within the colonial project make them feel worthy and secure together and mold their sense of home belonging, filiation and affiliations.

Nonetheless, participation in American border wars in *Blood Meridian* is deterministic. As time passes, American fighters, like the kid, realize the futility of their fights. However, they maintain their violence until the end out of "the pursuit of some continuance than the verification of a principle, a validation of sequence and causality"(300). They do not have a choice to stay outside the military order within which agents and leaders are not equal. Judge Holden's promises of wealth are conditioned by silence and obedience that uphold white identity as hierarchical, individualistic and militarized. Consequently, the kid and deprived white fighters, like the barbarians, are inferior and subjugated. For example, the kid is categorized "with others of his kind,"who, despite being essential participants in the American imperialist project, are humiliated as "the dignity was gone out of them"(131 & 6). Although Americans are ranked, rewarded and treated unequally, disobeying military orders and hierarchies denote punitive punishment. Thus, if any agent, like the kid, detaches himself from his fellow fighters, he will be immediately enemized and punished.

In *The Value of Security*, James Der Derian explains how in today's world, "out of fear, for gain, or in the pursuit of glory, states will go to war because they can"(30). Der Derian refers specifically to George Bush's security propaganda in 1992 that "the enemy is unpredictability. The enemy is instability" that paves the way for American war in Iraq that is seen as "the enemy other that helped to redefine the Western identity" and "the deterritorialization of the state and the disintegration of a bipolar order" (41). Iraqi war exposes a world of virtual enemies and stimulations that prepare for demographic and territorial violence and gives absolute authority to governments and administrations to make decisions concerning the level and reasons of using violence. Yet, virtual enemization and punishment of difference runs on the national level as well. This is clearly reflected in the case of the Appalachian area in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* that is seen as an "internal colony" (Anglin 285) and a "culture of poverty"(Billings 57). Appalachians are generally described in American media "as backward, unintelligent, fatalistic and quiescent people who are complicit in their own oppression. But, at the same time, these 'submissive' mountaineers are seen as among the most vicious and violent people in the United States"(Fisher 1). Stereotyped as different and unpredictable, Appalachian people become a potential threat to the solidarity and progressive image of the American nation. They need to be civilized and their landscape, like the colonized in *Blood Meridian*, is transformed to meet modern and development criteria.

Under the pretext of developing the primitive area of the Appalachian mountains, American authorities give green lights to mining companies to change the place: "they blasted the top off the mountain to get the coal, they had no place to put the mountain's body except dump it in the head of the hollow"(Pancake 20). The urgency of advancement and industrialization entails redrawing and sacrificing the history of that "once-live stuff, strange animals and plants, giant ferns and ancient trees, trapped down there for 250 million years, captured, crushed, and hard-squeezed into-power"(312). Yellowroot people breathe "cancer-causing dust,"(83) while their green land deteriorate with "dead damp leaves", "dead branches", "dead trees", "full-sized dead fish" and "bulldozed and slaughtered trees, hundreds of them"(352). The single-industry coal economy in Yellowroot in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, like the colonial project in *Blood Meridian*, accelerates levels of poverty and unemployment and limits

possibilities of existence outside specific economic structures that subjugate them to what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call "schizophrenic capitalism" (33). Schizophrenic capitalism reproduces hierarchal categories, separating those of power or socio-political representatives, described as "the paranoid despotic signs" from other economic agents defined as "the sign-figure of the schizo as a unit of decoded flux" (260). For example, foreign workers in Yellowroot lack any human contact with the natives as "they couldn't do much but eat, shower, and sleep" (79). People work without forming any cultural or social connections with the places they inhabit. When Lace's family moves to Raleigh to work, they turn into "encoded schizos" that inhabit a foreign space as a part of their integration within the free market. However, the new place is racist and hierarchical. Lace reveals that: "the way people looked at us, regardless of how much money they had. Somehow people knew we were different from them, even before we opened our mouths [...] It took me back to Morgantown again, the way the out-of-state students saw us, the way some professors did" (195). Lace has to terminate her university education as she could not stand the degraded outlook towards Appalachians.

Yellowroot's residents are neither against science, technology, industrialism, or integration within American culture, nor have a romantic, dreamy attitude towards nature. Rather, they are realists. For example, Lace, like the majority of Yellowroot people, emphasizes that: "I was not against coalmines: My dad and granddad and husband were all miners. I just believe they can do it a better way, a way that would actually give us more jobs and not ruin everything we have" (301). Lace asks for a balanced economic-social attitude that protects the rights of her indigenous group and her landscape as "killing the trees ... for certain meant the death of Yellowroot" (300). When Yellowroot's residents try to peacefully object to their deteriorating condition, mining companies repress them by paying "their workers to counter protest or to speak at the permit hearings against [residents] Lyon Strips they called them, like they were in some kind of brainwashed zombie army" (302). Likewise, politicians fail Yellowroot's inhabitants who "learn very young where a West Virginia politician's loyalties lay" (275). The fact that peaceful dissent in Appalachia is targeted by traditional colonial methods, such as intimidation, imprisonment, and death threats shows an endemic concern with security in America. The majority of Americans seems to tolerate violence against dissent and to approve aspects of collective punishment and internal exclusion. Like in Iraq, Appalachians face anti-terrorism laws and accusations. Larry Wilson, the president of Yellow Creek Concerned Citizens (YCCC), explains how Appalachian people learn to be silent and repressed, since acts of objection are seen as "acts of individual sabotage or terrorism" (qt. in Fisher 73). Terrorizing and silencing the Appalachian community are intentional methods of creating passive, dependent individuals, particularly men, whose inability to act and effect change inhibits their subjectivity.

The security-oriented culture in America reintroduces angry, guilty and violent characters that accommodate these negative feelings through self-centeredness, dependency and indifference. Accordingly, although the tragic situation of Yellowroot deserves a reasonable degree of political and social attention and support in contemporary democratic America, the majority of Americans seem to intentionally ignore it. Lace states that "Nothing on TV, nothing in books, nothing in magazines looked much like our place or much like us. [...] Growing up here, you get the message very early on that your place is more backwards than anywhere in America that does not come only from outside" (82). Lace refers to Appalachian people's internalized feelings of inferiority, fear and anger that inhibit their solidarity as a resistant group and grassroots. Unlike in *Blood Meridian* where the kid and American fighters project their anger and violence on the others, Appalachian people oppress each other. Lace and her husband live like enemies and their four children indulge in negative thoughts that not only further victimize and isolate them, but also disturb their normal identity patterns. Bant lacks familial love and understanding. She disrespects her passive, helpless father and projects her anger and frustration on her mother, blaming her that: "you're the one married him, how could you not see how he is?" (82). However, Bant is incapable of changing her own life. She does not complete her education and fails to find the right man to love. Bant's brother Dane is isolated and feel guilty for his weak body and his jobs as a cleaner. In

the second part, this paper discusses effects of processes of militarization and identity patterns on men-women relationships in the two novels that incapacitate their freedom on the individual and national levels.

Playing out Masculinity and Femininity: Psychology of Subjugation

Although the historical contexts in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and *Blood Meridian* are quite different, their discourses of masculinity and femininity are similarly transhistorical in the sense that men and women are stabilized and sacrificed as sexualized products of militarized and violent economies and cultures. Jacques Derrida and Carol Adams trace the different connections and ramifications between animal and women abuse on the one side and military, economic and political domination of western cultures and systems on the other. Derrida argues that "the full transcendence to the human requires the sacrifice of the animal and the animalistic, which in turn makes possible a symbolic economy in which we can engage in a 'non-criminal putting to death', not only of animals but of humans as well as by marking them as animal"(Derrida 39). Derrida introduces the concept of "carno-phallogocentrism" to uncover the systematic decriminalization and justification of (colonial) violence, mass killings and wars within western democratic societies that extends the concept of "'West's phallic'" to refer to concept of "sacrifice in killing the animals and in animalizing the other"(1). Like Derrida, Adams discusses "the sexual politics of meat" within Western culture that is still submerged into "masculinity along multiple material, ideological, and symbolic lines: *men need meat*, have the right to meat, and that meat eating is a male activity associated with virility"(Adams 4). For Adams, western masculinity validates the idea that "the woman animalized; the animal sexualized"(4). Derrida's and Adams' arguments are applicable to the American imperialist and capitalist discourses in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, respectively. Sexuality in the two novels is an indicative of fulfilling certain, always hierarchical gender roles in the society, and signifies an orderly process of identity stabilization in America.

On the one side, in *Blood Meridian*, native animals are hunted to extinction soon after Americans arrive. American fighters not only shoot "fowls," "goats" and "deers" to eat, but also they shoot "cats," "dogs," "sick horses" and frequently "beat the screaming horses into submission", with the result that "animals dropping silently"(137& 165). Although Americans' violence against animals seems random, it shows a systematic disregard of natural equilibrium and animal rights that does not well accord with American claim of civilizing the barbarians. Animal abuse in *Blood Meridian*, then, sets new, unavoidably hierarchical social, cultural and political norms. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin explain how "although not quite a relationship of equals, the connection between Indians and prey was not essentially hierarchical. But notions of domination and subordination were central to the English, who believed that the act of hunting epitomized the divinely sanctioned ascendancy of humankind over animal"(Huggan and Tiffin 58). American's adoption of English anti-animal colonial practices, though, exposes deeper identity problems. Victorious white Americans in *Blood Meridian* celebrate their virility and racial domination through eating meat and practicing their sexuality. After eating "a tandem run of dishes, fish and fowl and beef and wild meats of the countryside and a roast shoat [...] Americans in plenty commandeering meal and meat or indulge in a latent taste for rape among the sloe-eyed girls of that country"(152). Animalizing and sacrificing women, American fighters get their self-esteem and value in life from their sexual and military domination over the others. The war-related rape and the epidemic public sexual violence in *Blood Meridian* not only show the gendered side of war since sexual assaults are political tools to intimidate and humiliate women and their male guardians, but also establish American white power and superiority as unaccountable and immune to punishment.

The disappearance of respectable, natural male-female relationships in *Blood Meridian* further reveal sexual violence as a constitutive aspect of social life and ethnic violence as a constitutive aspect of political life in the novel. Americans neither have families nor female companions as mothers, wives, girlfriends, sisters or daughters. Rather, American men live in a dehumanized and callous order with

space and time becoming mere backdrops for competing militarized masculinities. Changes in the ecosystem conspicuously reproduce and disclose unequal power relations. Hence, the frequent scenes of American fighters eat meat and then exercise their sexual domination over women uncover the inherently shameful aspect of the imperialist economy and politics in the novel. Women do not even do traditional war-related respectable jobs like cooking, nursing or laundry. Rather, the only roles that white women, as well as colonized women can do are "pimps," and "whores of every age and size"(3; 38; 145; 167; 169& 267). Additionally, white male fighters do not need nurses since they are animalized, sexualized and sacrificed as well. Judge Holden and other leaders like Glanton show no mercy or respect to their white followers. Rather, injured fighters are "finished off" or their leaders "leave them behind to die and ride away"(152). The concepts of sacrifice and vulnerability, then, affect both the colonized and the colonizers and the female and the male.

Moreover, taking sexual abuse from the world of adults to the world of childhood in *Blood Meridian* further refuses American literary idealization of the concepts of innocence and childhood. Children occupy a great percentage of Judge Holden's corrupt thinking that he advises fathers that "children should be put in a pit with wild dogs and they should be made to run naked in the desert"(129). Children, including the kid, are involved in organized processes of adult crimes and killings through which they not only perceive female inferiority and male (sexual) superiority as the established social norms in the society, but also their engagement in pathological practices of advantage and savagery uphold their complicit beneficiary commitment to their authority. The judge's unrestrained use of children in his corrupt order and his sexual abuse of "the Mexican Boy", "the Indian girl", "the imbecile" and "the kid"(165, 41, 281 & 285) deconstructs the very notion of democracy and civilizing missions he initiates. Vereen Bell and Edwin Arnold see the judge's implied sexual abuses of children within a moralistic perspective. While Bell describes the judge as "a murder of innocents" and as exemplifying "nihilism"(134), Arnold sees him as "clearly satanic" and "supernatural leader" and "both are creatures of fire and both exemplify a kind of terrible justice and retribution"(62). For Bell and Arnold, the judge implies a moral dilemma. Patrick Shaw takes a different perspective and sees the judge's sexual violations as a "seduction into public homoeroticism,"to"offend their masculine sensibilities"(118). For Shaw, Judge Holden's sexual violations of the kid condemn"the intense andocentric code" of his time (111).

I agree with Bell, Arnold and Shaw that the judge's sexual domination over children exposes an order of nihilism, repression and vulnerability. However, I argue further that the pedophilic practices of the judge, who is the prevalent model of power and knowledge in the novel, can be seen as exposing a calculated American policy of identity adulteration. To begin with, the judge's pedophilic attitudes denote an unethical order of disinhibition, absolute authority and sexualized violence. He is not deterred from his moral crimes by normal social or legal prohibitions. The judge affirms that"considerations of equity and rectitude and moral right as rendered void"(250). In this sense, child sexual abuse "bisects the line of normal development, disrupts the natural timing of the biological clock and turns the Oedipus complex upside down" and sexual abuse is expected "to be repeated by representatives of society's authority"(Campbell 32). Child abuse is symbolic of state domination over beneficiary individuals. It utilizes "a country filled with violent children orphaned by war"(274) to produce easily-controlled identities struck by feelings of guilt, self-blame, fear, low self-esteem and unstable moral perceptions and economic dependency. As the kid shows signs of real independence, he is othered, disciplined and controlled. A dominant way to punish the others in *Blood Meridian* is to animalize and sexualize as them. The judge's sexual domination over the kid, then, is an economic punishment. The violated kid becomes a figure whose performative identity is disturbed and distorted, and who therefore cannot be incorporated within the masculinist-economic order of the judge.

Unlike the masculinist, colonial economy in *Blood Meridian*, the capitalist system in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* is male-less and desexualized. Rather, in *Yellowroot*, women are important agents of development and production, but they are still inferiorized. Impoverished and deprived, Lacey

like many Appalachian women in the novel, turns from a housewife into a working woman in Dairy Queen as "big women and little kids working silent and serious on hot dogs and sundaes"(5). Working like "humped animals," Lace criticizes her husband Jimmy who is unemployed and depressed: "Jimmy sat at home paralyzed, like a girl"(138). Lace de-masculinized Jimmy who becomes a burden and an enemy. As Lace and other Appalachian women support their families while men stay at home, Pancake challenges the formative stereotypical image of "men know men have access to the truth, not women"(10), and exposes the sexual politics of capitalism as of need and urgency. Lace reveals that "everybody around hers is raised to take it, that's what makes us tough, but especially the girls, the women, are tougher than the men [...] Women are tougher, because they take it from the industry, the government, and the men"(133). Lace's words show the reduction of space and time in Yellowroot into scary and suspending containers of interior and exterior tests, responsibilities and transformations that include "a complete exchange of gender identity of which erotic behavior was but one small part"(D'Emilio and Freedman 266). Lace's daughter Bant, like her mother, does not like her job as "painting scab walls"(51), while her 12-years old son, Dane, does not like his job as a caretaker and a house cleaner at Mrs. Taylor's: "Do the kitchen and the bathroom"(46). Because of his job and his physical fragility, Dane "is even more girl than girl" (44).

The feminization of men and the masculinization of women in Yellowroot reflect deeper ecological and economic-cultural problems in contemporary America. Human and cultural spaces in the novel are reduced and defertilized. Characters are disturbed and their life choices and familial and communal relations are severed. Dane confesses that his father's passivity "irritated and disappointed and confused him"(82), while his uncertainty about his gender roles and sexuality forces him to withdraw into his "dark" room remembering his grandma who "called him Minner, his grandma tendered him. Didn't hate his softness like Corey does, didn't deny it like Jimmy Make does, didn't ignore it like Lace and Bant do"(112). Despite of his age, Dane is aware of his lack of the traditional virile scripts of his Appalachian culture. Yet, he cannot express his feelings: "He is good at listening"(44). In "Masculine Dwelling", Gillian Rose argues that "the distinction between real and non-real space is constructed in terms which are also gendered: material real space as the effect of masculinist power, its very materiality also its particular masculinity; but non-real space is also the effect of masculinist power, its lack of reality the sign of feminization"(58-9). Dane's reversed and instable real spaces displace his relationships to his culture and nature. He is torn between his masculine imaginative spaces and his subjugating realities. Likewise, Bant, described as "born with the age in her"(140), is, like Yellowroot landscape, denied normal physical, emotional and mental growth. Rather, Bant and her surrounding ecological system are overloaded with distressing changes and experiences that force them to age and deny them real presence beyond the texts authority creates about them. Here, aging does not reflect accumulated physical, psychological and social experiences or gained wisdom and knowledge over time. Rather, aging denies and suspends time progress and development. It is an abnormal physical-psychological activity that implies a continuity of restrictive discourses, but signifies linguistic, cultural and ecological dementia.

Discourses of capitalist modernization in Yellowroot create angry, unhappy and guilty characters still informed by hierarchical concepts of masculinity and femininity based on sexual difference. Bant's and Lace's economic power does not pay off for their basic needs of security, stability, mutual communication and a peaceful stay in their homeland of Yellowroot. Quite the opposite, Women's power seems to annihilate men's power and vice versa. Familial unity and love are ruptured while sexuality becomes an exercise of regulating and disciplining women and maintaining the social/cosmological order. Lace's and Jimmy sexual needs are fulfilled out of "urgency. Pressure. Strain. No love, no pleasure"(187) and Bant, in search for male protection, willingly allows the Ohio-boy to abuse her. Because women's sexual agency and erotic autonomy always threaten the heterosexual family as the cornerstone of the nation, Jimmy and Dane in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* can only restore their masculine and sexual power by leaving Yellowroot. In this matrix, then, those who remain in Yellowroot, particularly

women, like the kid in *Blood Meridian* operate outside the boundaries of law and state order, therefore, are to be disciplined and punished as terrorists.

Ecological-Spatial Awareness and Self-Forgiveness

In *The Plausible World*, Bertrand Westphal argues that individuals and communities can deconstruct securitized and militarized forms of western authority and culture through forming "a new conception of the world as *plausible*, postmodern possible worlds in a fluid and moving environment, the eternal truths remain ideas in the air"(4). Like Westphal, Jacques Derrida proposes that all concepts are "arbitrary signs or effects of difference"(99) produced by systems of oppression. To achieve liberation, Derrida continues, signs need "a structure prior to any entity of which they might be the trace"(99). For Westphal and Derrida, human beings can only overcome their deeply-rooted-patriarchal and hierarchical filiations and beliefs through creating alternative worlds devoid of preconceptions or stereotypes. The kid in *Blood Meridian* and Bant in *Strange as this Weather Has Been* can be seen as developing a postmodern, fluid perception of space that disconnects their suppressive ties and subjugations to forces of homogenization and repression in the two novels. In *Blood Meridian*, the kid is the only character to deconstruct Judge Holden's imperialist parable that "the judge was a man like all men"(259). Consequently, he annihilates his racial superiority as void: "whatever his antecedents, he was something wholly other than their sum, nor was there system by which to divide him back into his origins for he would not go. No old dated maps"(270). The kid's spatial and theoretical dissociation from the American empire and its racist economic-political structures denotes not only the reconstitution of his filiations and affiliations as a white American individual and disciplines his sensual needs and desires, but also marks his repentance.

The kid's dissociation from Judge Holden's order exposes his autocratic discourse of punishment. Judge Holden threatens the kid that "you came forward to take part in a work. But you were a witness against yourself"(307). The main threat the kid presents to the imperialist order is that he tells the truth, holds Judge Holden responsible and is able to forgive himself. The kid confronts Holden that "I aint afraid of you. Told them the truth. That you were the person responsible"(307). This confrontation marks the kid's maturation into manhood: "He did not avoid the company of other men. He worked at different trades. He had a bible that no word of which could he read"(272). Despite the fact that the kid still cannot read, he is able to gain new knowledge and to define those inner ways which lead to the cultural identity he seeks for himself. He regains belief in faith, celebrates human diversity and difference, and adopts morals that provide him with mental strength and psychological integration to escape the strong grip of the judge and his privileged group. Here, manhood is not merely a biological process, but rather is a cultural process of independence and self-control that dictates "natural history which regards neither nature nor man as symbolic"(Phillips 448). For the kid, "men are made of the dust of the earth"(297) and "war becomes dishonored and its nobility called into question"(331). He is a confident, independent individual who joins "honorable men who recognize the sanctity of blood [and] will become excluded from the dance, which is the warrior's right, and thereby will the dance become a false dance and the dancers false dancers"(331).

Unlike the kid, Bant in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* comes to appreciate her indissoluble links with her homeland. After the death of her grandmother, Bant thinks: "was it worse to lose the mountains or the feelings that you had for it? Now that I'd lost this much, I realized that to not care wasn't to save yourself at all. It was only another loss"(25). Bant's restraining, dutiful connection to her nature burdens and inhibits her life with feelings of guilt and anger at herself, her family and her community who fail her expectations. Once Bant is able to understand others' decisions to abandon their land and community to the mining company, including her repressed father and brother, she forms a new, forgiving perception of her land and identity. Bant is no longer looking for what is missed, but she is thinking of what she can do to feel happy, assured and free. As Bant is able to unify with her community: "In times like these, you have to grow big enough inside to hold both the loss and the hope"(357), she not only rebuilds the ruptured mother-daughter bond, but also reconstructs her Appalachian identity as equal

and worthy. A major problem that faces Appalachian people is individualism and indifference that, Bant thinks, aim to "leave you empty inside"(102). She discovers that uniting with her Yellowroot community that is suffering the same senses of isolation and repression is a form of resistance. Bant, like the kid, develops a new relation to nature and place that go beyond the symbolic to stand for the real conditions of her time and history. She stays in Yellowroot not because she has to, but because she wants to. Although Appalachian area still face discriminatory practices, Bant declares that "the machine between us but no fear"(354-5).

Conclusion

This paper attempts a postcolonial-ecocritical reading forms of ecological and human violence in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as this Weather Has been*. It argues that violence is a planned tool of ongoing processes of cultural, political and economic militarism and securitization in America that establish American identity as violent, angry and gendered and American land as excluding. In the two novels, characters' perception of their land is politicized and corrupted so that their subjugation and injustice seem fatalistic and deterministic. In this sense, the American legacy of civilizing border countries is inseparable from contemporary American double-standards towards the rights of the minorities like Appalachians inside its borders. However, the paper maintains that some characters in the two novels, like Bant and the kid, liberate themselves of these restrictive, subjugating cultural-economic positions through seeing themselves and others not as opposites but as discrete.

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