

## DISPLACEMENT, DISRUPTION, AND RESISTANCE IN DIANE GLANCY'S *PUSHING THE BEAR: A NOVEL OF TRAIL OF TEARS*

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**Abstract:**

*The removal of the Cherokee Indians has been one of the massive genocide in the Native American history. The concrete actions of the settlers against them during the trail have disrupted the components of their culture and tradition, posing a threat to the survival of the community. Under this horrendous circumstance, the Cherokees have continued to embrace their religion and practices at the time of their removal, proposing their opposition towards the White settlers. Glancy's *Pushing the Bear: A Novel of Trail of Tears* offers an insight on the Cherokee displacement, detailing on the beliefs, complexities and violence faced by them. This paper aims to identify the shared responsibilities taken up by the trailers in order to preserve their customs, exhibiting their persistence and defiance towards the Western culture. By bearing the memory of the cultural past throughout the trail, the Cherokees are rebuilding their heritage in the reservation lands.*

**Keywords:** *Cherokee Removal, Cultural Resistance, Survival, Trail of Tears.*

Native American writings aim to reflect the colonial discourse of the indigenous people and draws out the social, cultural and political concerns that has transformed their ordinary lives. It is crucial to understand the colonial discourse so as to break the stereotype imposed by the colonizers on the natives. To begin with the creation of the earth, the world was one large entity before the civilization divided it into smaller entities for existence where "...men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities to say nothing of historical entities such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'orient' and 'occident' are man made" (*Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* 23). The monotonous development of the geographical and cultural entities of both sides takes a turning point when the East invades to "Orientalize" the West. "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony..." (Edward Said 23).

In the case of the First Nations of the Americas, the West gained authority and power and imposed the Western ideologies giving rise to socio-cultural, political crisis. The Native American literature, as a canon of literature, produce this serious accounts of their history, culture, landscape, social and economic conflicts. Their texts bear witnesses of the indigenous people seeking space, position and identity in the Western World. The "...native culture under colonialism (is) inert, stultified, lethargic, rigid, uncreative, with the natives reduced to despising their indigenous modes of existence assertions for which much countervailing evidence can be adduced" (qtd. in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory* 101).

The Cherokees have involuntarily treaded the rugged path due to the forced removal that had cost thousands of lives of the indigenous people. This is a significant period in the history of the Native Americans because the natives, apart from the greatest fluctuating moments where their minds oscillated between the native spirit and the western religion. The commotion stirred up their emotion and they searched for solutions through their tribal belief for their survival. The history represents the natives who

were determined in holding onto their cultural identity in the colonial period as a significant accomplishment.

There is of course abundant evidence of native disaffection and dissent under colonial rule, of contestation and struggle against diverse forms of institutional and ideological domination. Inscriptions and signs of resistance are discernible in official archives and informal texts, and can be located in narrativised instances of insurrection and organised political opposition. (*Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* 85)

The opposition was mutual among the natives of various tribes against their victimization. This underlying mutuality comes from their shared consciousness of the colonial experience that has shaped the individual's mind and carried their memory and trauma down the lane into the present. The Native American writings thus reflect the traumatic events, the colonial relationship, the social differences, the individual and cultural resistance and the survival of the native communities. The term resistance was first applied in the Palestinian literature by Ghassan Kanafani that generally implies how resistance literature is "...concerned with documenting the existence and material conditions of production of Palestinian literature under Israeli occupation" (Barbara Harlow 2). Similarly, the Native American writings discuss the typical conditions of the natives during the colonial rule under the Western occupation. The distinction between the colonists and the colonizers "...presupposes furthermore an 'occupying power' which has either exiled or subjugated, ..., a given population and has in addition significantly intervened in literary and cultural development of the people it has dispossessed and whose land it has occupied" (Barbara Harlow 2).

The writers recreate their tribe's history and demonstrate the past events to address the issue of cultural and spiritual genocide due to the disposition and the disruption of the natives that has disconnected them from their land. "For Native people, any notion of home' within the domestic sphere was largely and intentionally disrupted by the colonialist process" (Ines Hernandez-Avila 492). This process called the "Trail of Tears" was officially carried out when the Indian Removal Act was passed in the year 1830. The forced removal included five tribes namely Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Seminole. They suffered violence at a large scale and the forced removal led to the near annihilation of the indigenous people. Among these, the Cherokee removal was known to be the cruelest. Their displacement began in the year 1838 from Georgia to the Indian Territory which is now called as Oklahoma. The trail reveals the violence, grieves, deaths faced by the natives along the way. They were forced to abandon the home and land where they had shared their memories of their family and their ancestors. "The displacement, removal from traditional lands, relocation in reserves or missions and consequent familial, social and cultural fracturing of indigenous peoples has become the major cause of indigenous pathology" (*Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 87).

The Native American writers exhibit their land's stories by re-creating the events of the past, putting the tribes in the former position in order to capture the tragic moments and to infer the human experience. Diane Glancy's *Pushing the Bear* takes the readers back in time to the Cherokee's removal from 1838 to 1839. This novel recounts not only the injustice and the injury faced by the Cherokees but also their strength to survive against the imposed violence by the imperialists. Resistance is considered as a weapon of both defense and offense for the Cherokees during their trail against the "occupying power" (qtd. in *Resistance Literature* 2). The Trail of Tears thus delineates the Native American's relationship with the colonizers. The colonial relationship "between societies, each of which had its own distinctive social institutions and its own internal social differences, its own culture and subcultures" (Barbara Harlow 5). Their distinction is the beginning of the social and cultural conflicts. However this conflict led to the utmost crisis where the natives were tormented by the settlers.

In *Pushing the Bear*, the natives are displaced from their native land due to the European encroachment. This displacement has detached them from their motherland. "Knowing one's 'place' within

'the land story' is part of being at home in Indian Country or on Indian land, and this knowledge forms the essence of the land narrative framework" (*Native Women and Land: Narratives of Disposition and Resurgence* 25). Glancy, through this novel, describes the Cherokee tribe's physical and spiritual resistance as they march towards the Indian Territory. They were unprepared for what came after the European invasion. The Cherokees were one of the tribes to sign the treaty to move into the territory and the common people became the victims. In the novel, Knobowtee says that, ". . . the leaders in Georgia, signed the treaty that took our land away" (3). Signing the treaties did not favor them and the natives were unable to claim what is theirs. "The trail remains a part of the conscious and subconscious memories formed and preserved across multiple generations" (People and Place 8). The Land holds the memories of the past and has a unique relationship with its people. As Maritole, in the novel, says that the settlers ". . . couldn't remove us" and they were land (4) and their roots "entwined" (4). Glancy includes the Cherokee land story of corn where "a woman named Selu had been murdered by her sons where her blood fell, the corn grew" (4). During the trail, Maritole is reminded of her land and their Corn Mother who provided them with corn whereas now the "cornstalks waved their arms trying to hold (them). Their voices were the long tassels reaching the air" (4) and the Cherokee's "spirit clung to them" (4). To the Cherokees the land is their identity. The creation of the land gave birth to its people and to abandon the land meant abandoning their tribal identity. "One of the most detrimental aspects of relocation is the spatial dichotomy between rez and off-rez that begins to develop at this time as a marker of 'Indian' identity and as a barrier between community members" (Mishuana Goeman 297).

In the novel, the characters yearn for their past life, and are constantly reminded of the land and their practices. Maritole longs "to hold the air and the sound of the land" (4). The memory enables them to re-build and restore the community and identity in the new territory. This recollection of the past informs that the natives are reluctant towards the transformation that the settlers are trying to establish. The memory gave them the strength to continue their march. The Cherokees, through their voluntary thinking, carry the culture, tradition, and memory to the new land for its continual existence, as Maritole says "The old land won't leave us, . . . We carry it within us to wherever we're going" (87). The trail has driven them to the extreme conditions where "some of the men wanted to fight" (18) but the women were afraid that the men "would be killed" (18). Maritole as one of the many voices of the Cherokees, says, "I felt anger at the soldiers. I felt anger at the people in my cabin. They were using my plates and bowls. Sleeping under my quilts! I cursed them. There was something dark and terrible in the white man" (58). The novel includes the real-life characters who were against the removal. Tanner recalls how Chief White Path and Fly Smith "had led a rebellion against the white man's culture. But the two men were now in the line of the removal" and John Ross was the leader of the Cherokee" (75).

The clash between the indigenous and the soldiers never ceased throughout the trail. In the novel, when the soldiers arrested the Tsali's family, his sons "wanted to fight" (76) because the soldiers poked Tsali's wife with bayonet and they "wouldn't let the soldiers treat their wives that way" (76). The Cherokees realizes that "the time of great warrior was gone, and now it was the common man's time to act" (76).

The novel displays the physical violence caused by the soldiers during the trail that has led to armed resistance. The armed resistance has cost the lives of many Native Americans. When "Tsali's wife died from the soldier's harsh treatment. . . Tsali decided to take revenge. He told his sons they would attack the soldiers" (77). Tsali, Tahlee, Soquah, Chahee and Tectlunchee ". . . made war whoops. They jumped into the path and killed the white soldier that had taunted Agiya" (77). This shows how the ordinary life of the Cherokees is devastated after to white man's intervention. The Cherokees were haunted by the mere presence of the soldiers during the trail and the sudden displacement had caused disruption and confusion among the natives where they "huddled together shivering and afraid" (79). Since the removal came without warning, the Cherokees were forced to leave without their belongings. In the novel, Maritole says, "I had to wash the baby's clothes. I was going to take the corn to the mill. A basket of apples and peaches

from our trees waited by the wagon” (3) and is constantly reminded of the chores that is left undone. The natives were thrown into the state of fear and bewilderment. “Children had been separated from their parents by accident. Wives could not find their husbands” (11). They became helpless and there were “cries of agony from the people” (54). The Cherokees confronted various situations such as starvation, lack of clothes and shelter and they were prone to the diseases that were spreading widely during the trail. Both children and the elders became victims to “pneumonia” (81). The novel exemplifies the actual deaths of the natives due to the epidemics during the removal. Maritole's mother and her baby die of pneumonia. “The smallpox epidemics had so many died. Even the animals dragging the wagons collapsed” (126). “It was easy to die” (81) for the Cherokees that staggering all the way to the Indian Territory. The deaths of the fellow members had disheartened the native people and had instilled fear into the hearts. The characters in the novel are found in dilemma and are found sorting out the reason for undergoing this tragic path.

“As earthborn people, they have a sense of place that has been deepened throughout the thousands of years they have lived on and with this land. Their spiritual earth roots have resulted in a kinship. . . . It is a scared relationship that is characterized by prayerful love and deep religious reverence for holy ground” (*Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance* 194). This kinship is disconnected due to their removal from the motherland. During the trail, the Cherokees display a sense of spiritual alienation due to the relocation. Glancy, “a professed Christian and enrolled member of the Cherokee tribe, was the first novelist to consider in detail the implications of interfaith struggles which took place as her ethnic ancestors trudged westward from North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee, suffering great hardship and disillusionment after losing their homelands” (Federick Hale 196). In the novel, the native conjurers and the Christian missionaries are placed side by side, playing a vital role in the lives of the Cherokees during their trail. The conjurer is considered as both healer and a guide, who try to restore the native spirit of the trailers. For example, Knobowtee “wanted to ask the Conjurer to make [him] warm” (148) and ease the pain. The conjurers, throughout the trail, attempt to reassure the Cherokees and work “their magic against the storm” (79).

The natives were under the direct influence of the Western religion. In the beginning the White Man “excused his presence here by saying that he had been guided by the will of his God; and in saying so absolved himself of all responsibility for his appearance in a land occupied by other men” (qtd. in *Native Voice: American Indian Identity and Resistance* 194). According to the White Men, “the religious practices of colonized peoples were often denigrated as mere superstition or openly attacked as heathenism, and so used to justify the so-called 'civilizing mission' of the colonizer” (*Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 226). Numerous Cherokees have voluntarily converted at the period of relocation due to the loss of faith in the native religion.

In the novel, Reverend Bushyhead, a Cherokee converted to Christianity, was chosen to be “the conductor of a detachment” (24). He acts as a representative of the Western religion and has a major impact on the Cherokees. Since they are surrounded by mayhem, it is natural for the natives to rely on any religion that would deliver them out of the misery. “Notwithstanding the widespread belief in the abiding presence of ancestral spirits, moreover, relentless suffering causes various characters question their efficacy or beneficence” (Federick Hale 202-203). Bushyhead attempts to persuade them to follow the Western religion by saying that they “aren't spared by the harvest of our hands but by the blood of Jesus” (25-25). They were made to believe that “it was because they worshipped the earth instead of God” (56) they had to undergo such hardships in their life. The constant effort of the missionaries in improvising and converting the natives into Christian displays an act of refinement of the natives since they are considered as “Greasy Indians” (43). Throughout the trail there were “prayers and hymns of the Cherokee Christians” (86). According to Reverend Evan Jones, “in the midst of much anxiety and urgent haste in the preparations for removal, it is a matter for sincere and humble gratitude that the gospel is making advances altogether unprecedented in the Christian history of the Cherokees. The pressure of their political troubles appears to

be overruled to the spiritual advantage of the people” (35). The novel portrays the mixed group of Cherokees, “the believers and those who worshipped in the old way. They called to the sun and moon. They called to the wolf, the blue jay, the mulberry” (86). The natives who believed in old ways have refused to adopt the Western religion saying, “we don't need no holy noses” (130) and have continued to pray to the Great Spirit for endurance.

Though the characters are blended with both Christianity and the native religion like they slipped “between both worlds” (128), Glancy shows how the native religion is deeply rooted in the Cherokees despite the influence. The novel is infused with the native songs sung by the trailers during the march. The “healing song” (138) gave them the strength to continue the trail. The natives through their singing showed their resistance towards the dominant religion. “At first the soldiers tried to stop the singing” (129) but the native “kept on” (129) singing in the native language. Knobowtee attempts to provoke the soldiers by giving others the sign to “sing” (129). Glancy also brings out the significance of the native language. The novel is incorporated with Cherokee alphabets and words and thus Glancy preserves the language of the Cherokee people. In the novel, Maritole states, “Our language is one with itself. It makes a song” (116). The language gave the Cherokee the “power” (137) to withstand this disorder of relocation. Maritole “felt the old power as [her] words came from [her] mouth. Though “the white men concluded that the Cherokee language wasn't fit to be spoken” (137), they sustained their language through singing.

Since the physical resistance caused death and disaster, the Cherokees have resisted spiritually by holding on to their native spirit. They realize that the forbearance during the trail would pave way for their continual existence. The song and stories of the tribe “fueled” (144) their walk. Withstanding the long walks, fatigue, violence, climatic conditions and the epidemics, the Cherokee community surpasses the genocide. Despite their rigidity and the deprivation, the natives have been undoubtedly persistent to get rid of the obligations imposed by the colonizers. “For American Indian communities, it amounts to a loss of culture and erosion of the system of values that has gives indigenous traditions the strength to resist the full power of colonization” (*Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance* 231). Since the forced removal have uprooted the Native Americans from their land and culture, they have increasingly concerned with their fragmented self and are enhancing their spirituality through the cultural memory and continuing their religious practices. The novel thus exemplifies the history of the Cherokee Nation, their cultural and spiritual disconnection during the trail and emphasizes on the tribe's individual efforts to restore their identity. Confronting various battles that has challenged them physically and mentally, the natives have continued to retain their inborn spirit to re-establish their tribe.

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