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Made to Move, Made of this Place: *Into America*, Mobility, and the Eco-Logics of Settler Colonialism

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines how mobility, settler colonial structures of invasion, and invasive environmental practices produce a settler colonial eco-logic of mobility, which the documentary *Into America: The Ancestor's Land* (2012) by Nadine Zacharias and Angelo Baca (Navajo/Hopi) both displays and disrupts. The film documents the expulsion of Helen Yellowman, Angelo's grandmother, and her family from their land in the 1950s in connection to environmental pollution and disregard of Navajo traditions. Furthermore, it places this case within a history of discursive and physical removals of Indigenous peoples that follow a settler colonial logic of elimination. Indigenous removal in turn is shown to be predicated on a dominant version of settler mobility centered on invading, acquiring, exploiting land—and abandoning it in pursuit of new land. The film's own journey eastward, counter to the settlers' westward invasion, uncovers the history of removal, recovers relationships to the land and environment rooted in Indigenous thought and practices, and thus troubles what Mishuana Goeman terms a "settler grammar of place." It does so specifically by using the visual grammar of film to reframe conventional signifiers of mobility as specifically Indigenous: the road movie genre, the car, the road, and the map. To this end, the film uses a map that recasts U.S. regions as Indigenous national territories defined by distinct natural environments, suggesting a responsibility to the land based in Indigenous sovereignty. As it challenges unmarked settler formations and their destructive environmental practices, *Into America* indicates alternative kinds of mobility on the land that interrupt settler colonial eco-logics, and it highlights the interlocking aspects of environmental politics and decolonization within Indigenous movements that possess a transnationally unsettling force.

Introduction

In the documentary *Into America: The Ancestor's Land* (2012) by German filmmaker Nadine Zacharias in cooperation with Angelo Baca (Navajo/Hopi),[1] Angelo accompanies his grandmother Helen Yellowman, a Navajo elder who re-

[1] Officially, Zacharias is credited as director and producer, while Angelo Baca and Helen Yellowman are listed as consultants. This is partly due to institutional reasons, since the film figured as Zacharias' graduation film from the *Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg*. However, the collaborative nature of the film's production and its subsequent promotion at various film festivals on both sides of the Atlantic by Zacharias and Baca respectively, warrant a discussion of the film as a Native/non-Native collaboration on equal terms. This essay treats the film as such. Still, it should not go unnoted that this collaboration, also due to the specific institutional framework that could only credit Zacharias as director/producer, also caused tensions and difficulties among the people involved, especially after the film was finished. For a more thorough discussion of some of these issues and their implications for Native/non-Native collaborations analyzed from an anthropological perspective, see Angelo Baca's "Useful Methodologies" (2011).

fuses to speak English, from Seattle to the family homeland in the Navajo nation in Montezuma Creek, Utah, which is now part of the Aneth Oil field. Helen has lost the land to an adopted son whose claim for ownership disregards the Navajo matrilineal tradition of land inheritance and privileges instead a settler model of patriarchal lineage and individual property. The intrusive practices of the oil company[2] have reinforced this model as the contracts with the new, male owner legitimized the operation of oil drilling that has been causing severe pollution since the 1950s. The forced removal of Helen and the Yellowman family has coincided with the land's environmental degradation to the extent that it can hardly provide sustenance anymore for traditional Navajo lifeways such as livestock farming: the water is polluted and the vegetation diminished. In Helen Yellowman's words: "It killed off our livestock, it poisoned our fresh water, it made people sick."[3]

While both adopting and commenting on genre conventions of the road movie, the film traces the road trip of grandmother and grandson from the Northwest Coast back to the Southwest. Furthermore, it contextualizes the family's removal from their land within histories of large-scale resource extraction on Indigenous lands in the mid-twentieth century, as well as within more wide-spanning histories of removal integral to U.S. settler colonial structures of invasion. In this constellation, issues of mobility, settler colonial domination, and environmental exploitation and degradation strongly resonate with each other. This essay seeks to explore the connections between these issues as it argues that the nexus between mobility, settler colonial invasion, and ecological disruption unfolds a specific settler colonial eco-logic of mobility, which the film both displays and disrupts in its assumed totality.

I. Moving On: Settler Colonial Mobility, Indigenous Removal, and Ecological Disruption

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon talks of an "American tradition of moving on" (243). He draws attention to how mobility figures as a central aspect in the American project: it signifies progress and national expansion as well as the 'life on the road'—the ability to relocate and to move on—as an expression of freedom and privilege. In his reading of essayist Scott Russell Sanders, however, Nixon also points to the harmful potential of white settler America defining itself through mobility. He argues that white settlers' movements were a primary cause for the "scars of displacement in American history" that further inflicted "ecological, spiritual, and communal damage" (243). Clearly, with regard to the histories and structures of U.S. settler colonialism,

[2] The film does not specify which one, but Shell, Humble Oil, and Texas Company operated in the area in the 1950s.

[3] For a comprehensive account of the history of the Aneth oil field, including the intra-tribal tensions it caused and the lack of proper compensation for the inhabitants of the land affected, see McPherson and Wolff. Their essay also shows that while Helen Yellowman's expulsion from the land in connection to the oil companies' operation was specific to her family history, the drilling severely affected many people living in the area, causing many to move away.

movement cannot be thought of apart from removal. As settlers create their claim on the land to which they have "come to stay" precisely through technologies of mobility, they exert power and privilege by moving in and moving on just as much as through staying in and of itself (Wolfe 388). Likewise, a settler-nation state such as the United States produces Indigenous peoples as a population of "Indians" that are "to be made to move," as Jodi Byrd puts it in *Transit of Empire* (xv). As such, their presence and activities on the land prior to settlers' arrival are cast as inferior and ultimately politically illegitimate.

Recalling Patrick Wolfe's claim that in a settler colonial project "invasion is a structure, not an event" and that it follows a "logic of elimination" (388), the seemingly constitutive event of Helen Yellowman's removal from her land in the 1950s might then be best understood as the manifestation of an *ongoing* logic of elimination in its dialectics between mobility and removal. It resonates, as the film makes clear, with previous histories of dispossession and forced migrations of the Navajo through settler colonial forces. The instance of Helen's loss furthermore shows how the history and present of removal never concerns only the people or only the land, but more specifically how the people inhabiting the land are able to relate to it and shape these relations through traditions and lifeways that help to signify forms of Indigenous sociality, community, and ecology. These were and in many cases continue to be delegitimized or erased from official political and legal discourse in the dominant settler society, so that physical and discursive removal regularly intersect and condition each other. These cases indicate a recoding of mobility in settler colonial contexts that exceeds ideas such as travel and migration. Settler versions of mobility instead become coterminous with modernity and the legitimate exercise of sovereignty, to which other practices are subjugated as premodern nomadism or archaic rootedness. As Georgine Clarsen puts it: "Foundational to settler colonialism are both the potential and actual capacities of settlers to roam as autonomous sovereign subjects around the world and across the territories they claim as their own—and conversely to circumscribe and control the mobilities of Indigenous peoples, to immobilize the former sovereign owners of those territories" ("Settler-Colonial Mobilities" 42). What is at the heart of a settler colonial mobility intimately tied to removal and displacement, then, is what Mishuana Goeman has called a form of "colonial spatial violence" (*Mapping Our Nations* 11). Such violence is based on, expresses, and "continue[s] to produce colonial logics" (37) on various levels, including what I regard as settler colonial eco-logics.

Recently, scholars have begun to pay attention to the specifically ecological dimension of settler colonialism, which both adds to and exceeds theorizations of settler colonial geopolitics and the image the "ecological Indian" (see Kerch). In this light, Lindsey Schneider has proposed to link settler colonial studies more strongly to environmental humanities, since "specific manifestations of settler colonialism not only cause profound ecological disruptions, but in fact discursively and ecologically shape the land itself" (150).[4] These "manifestations," I want to

[4] Similarly, Gardner Seawright (2014) asks to make explicit "Settler Traditions of Place," including the ways they relate to land and environment.

emphasize, are by no means isolated instances but help to render transparent an underlying set of logics through which settler colonial projects produce ecological disruption. I understand settler eco-logics then as the regularly unmarked and naturalized logics of exploitation, extraction, and profit maximization operative in settler-nation states. Through these, the capitalist principles inherent to settler states such as the United States render Indigenous lands inherently available to their market-defined needs. Simultaneously, once the so-called "natural resources" are exhausted and turned into profit, the same lands are marked as disposable, which facilitates the creation of what Brynne Voyles calls "wastelanding" (1). The great density of landfills on or near reservations, or the production of waste from uranium mining on, for instance, the Navajo reservation testifies to this mechanism, as does the environmental degradation of land through large-scale operations of oil drilling, as the film captures. Such practices rest on, and reinforce, a normative perception of non-human environments as objects to be owned, utilized, and discarded, in strong opposition to alternative normativities, widespread in many Indigenous societies, of viewing non-human environments in terms of mutual relationality. The "ecological legacies of settler colonialism" produced by these practices and norms continue to be persistent and effective today as the operative eco-logics of capitalist settler nation-states such as the United States (Taylor et al. 132).

What these patterns of moving in, extracting, and moving on attest to is how such a shaping of the land is crucially and closely connected to a specific perception and idea of mobility tied to a model of capitalist modernity. However, while settler colonialism has been recently theorized as a project of mobility (see Clarsen) as well as analyzed for its environmentally destructive effects, the link between these two aspects has not been strongly emphasized so far. I want to suggest that doing so can significantly add to both of these scholarly discourses, both with respect to a more robust settler colonial analytic as well as in regard to considering how the frameworks of mobility and ecocriticism can be productively combined for other fields of inquiry. I want to outline a settler colonial eco-logic of mobility that rests on four mutually constitutive assumptions: First, land is assumed to be property and thus desired and claimed as such, while Indigenous peoples inhabiting it are imagined alternatively as nomadic or passively static, and their claims to land resting on other, non-proprietary principles are therefore dismissed. This assumption is combined, secondly, with the fantasy that there is always more and richer land for settlers to move to, beyond the land already claimed. As a result, the desire for more land, and a progressively more wide-ranging mobility, shape and invade Indigenous territories in the form of construction of roads, rail tracks, and other ecologically disruptive infrastructures. Thirdly, the imagination of another place, not yet "discovered," creates the illusion that any piece of land can be left behind once it has been imagined as "property" and profitably used. Thus, the exploitation of a land's resources until it is made practically uninhabitable does not trouble this settler logic but instead even affirms it, since the option of moving on is always already inherent to it. And fourthly and finally, since moving on promises further accumulation of land as property, the abandonment of land after its acquisition and exploitation even signals a particular form of settler

power, privilege, and wealth, which makes ongoing settler mobility compatible with, and even complementary to, the claim to stay on Indigenous lands and erase any Indigenous presence from it.

As a result, Indigenous peoples have not only been violently displaced from their lands, but also are contiuously forced to navigate a continuing erosion of their constitutive lifeways. In addition, they are regularly exposed to the consequences of environmental degradation within the confines of the land to which they have been displaced. The continuing encroachments on Native lands to environmentally damaging effect figure as a continuing attack on Native peoples: "As Indian lands are assaulted, so are Indian peoples. [...] Environmental destruction is simply one manifestation of the colonialism and racism that have marked Indian/White relations since the arrival of Columbus in 1492" (Weaver, "Introduction" 3). The settler eco-logic of mobility not only causes what Nixon calls "ecological, spiritual, and communal damage" through practices of displacement (243), but it also amplifies this injustice by turning what officially register as Indigenous territories into sites for extraction and disposal.[5] A more sustained focus on these questions of mobility and environmental justice in the context of perpetually unequal settler-Indigenous relations—a focus which Nixon points to, but which neither his study nor related publications on environmental justice have fully pursued—might thus serve as an important means of "advancing comparative approaches to settler colonialism, land rights, [and] environmental racism," as Nixon himself suggests (262). If a specific ideal of settler mobility has contributed to ecological degradation as well as to Indigenous removal, the question is how mobility and environmental damage might be better or more fully understood when their combination is regarded as a fundamental part of the specific settler colonial project of the United States, as the documentary *Into America* demonstrates. What insights can thus be gained by asking how ecologically invasive practices and mobilities function together as continuations and ongoing implementations of settler colonial structures of invasion?

The shaping of the land and the environment through settler colonial structures of invasion helps to create a set of regulations for how to understand and articulate place within a settler colonial regime that Goeman has called "a settler-colonial grammar of place" ("Disrupting" 235). However, as Goeman also points out, this "system of rules [...] is not without lapses, critiques, and disavowals," and an intervention in the "settler grammar" can function to disrupt any "sense of a complete U.S. or Canadian conquest" (237). Taking Goeman's work as a starting point, I want to show how such an intervention can also function to disrupt conceptually settler logics of invasion, acquisition, exploitation, and subsequent abandonment, in their assumed totality. In particular, I argue that *Into America* disrupts a "settler grammar of place," foremostly by employing the narrative, generic, and visual grammar of film. By doing so, the documentary suggests a filmic

[5] Works on environmental justice and Indigenous peoples amply demonstrate this. See, for instance, Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocritism* (2001) and Jace Weaver's edited collection *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice* (1996).

perspective on the land that does not emphasize the act of "moving on" after using the land as an economic resource to maximize profit. Instead, the film puts forth a specific form of mobility in which ways of "moving on the land" make manifest socially and culturally meaningful relationships to the land and its inhabitants. Through such a use of mobility the film ultimately suggests a responsibility to a specific natural environment rooted in Indigenous sovereignty—a sovereignty that denaturalizes settler colonial logics and links movement to unsettlement.

II. Moving on the Land: Settler Eco-Logics, Indigenous Mobility, and Mapping Sovereignty in *Into America*

Mobility is shown and functions in a number of ways in the documentary *Into America: The Ancestors' Land*. First and foremost, the narrative of the film is centered on and structured by the long-distance car journey of Helen Yellowman and her grandson Angelo Baca from Seattle to their family homeland on the Navajo reservation in Utah. In terms of genre, the film thus works within the tradition of the road movie, emphasizing movement across the land as a way to "drive" the plot and linking the destination of the road trip to the conclusion of the narrative, while turning the road, the car, and the landscape passed through into the actual setting of the film. At the beginning of the film, a first caption states the distance from Seattle to the family homeland as 1344 miles, and subsequent captions locate and define every place on the journey with a shrinking number of miles through its remaining distance to the end point. On the one hand, this visual trope reorganizes the space covered by the progress of the movie, the narrative, and the journey itself as territory across which one needs to move—and needs to move so much further—in order to reach the goal. On the other hand, the focus on the number of miles one still needs to cover to reach the destination—rather than on the distance that has been covered so far—signals an important deviation from the widespread convention in road movies to configure the road trip as a journey into the unknown, to a fresh start, or without a clear destination in mind, instead of as a journey home.

Moreover, the employment of classical features of the road movie in order to narrate the journey of a young Native and his elder, in this case his grandmother, to their ancestral homelands recalls William W. Bevis' analysis of the 'homing in' plots in Native American novels from McNickle to Welch. In his often-cited essay, Bevis argues that prominent Native American writers value a reconnection to one's home expressed through plots of "coming home, staying put, contracting" as "a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good" (582). Home functions as a site for communal, social, and tribal reintegration. Bevis contrasts these 'homing in' plots to the classical Anglo-American "'leaving' plots," in which leaving home is a prerequisite for the individual to establish his or her place in the greater society away from home. The American tradition of "moving on" which Nixon identifies is for Bevis articulated in the "mobile plot" of classic American fictions (582). Bevis, however, unlike Nixon, does not consider displacement in connection to these two paradigms he identifies and amply illustrates. While acknowl-

edging "the white tradition ... of colonial expansion" (581) as influential for the "white 'wandering' plots" (594), Bevis curiously does not explicitly connect the desire to return home in Native American fiction to the history and politics of having been displaced, dispossessed of one's homelands, or removed from them. Seen from the perspective of Indigenous removal, though, Native American narratives about moving back toward home might appear particularly significant as signaling a reclaiming of land, home, and place. The protagonist of such a narrative does not only come back to "a past where one has been before" (582) and in which one can be reintegrated through respect of "tribal authority" (590). The protagonist returns so as to re-seize Indigenous lands as a home from which "cultural regeneration" can be initiated and an active Indigenous community can be (re-)established in the present (Teuton 36).

In *Into America*'s "mobile plot," such a "homing in" paradigm is approached through the histories of dispossession and dislocation caused by settler colonial invasion and invasive environmental practices. As briefly mentioned above, due to competing claims that disregard Native traditions, and in conjunction with oil companies' policies of environmental exploitation, the protagonists' homeland is not legally 'home' anymore and cannot be returned to. Helen Yellowman's family was expelled from the land by the family of her adopted son Fred Johnson, who claimed title to it through inheritance. However, in Navajo tradition only women are entitled to land which would have made Helen the rightful heiress, an issue about which she is still in legal dispute with the family. Johnson's claim was confirmed in the 1950s when the oil company signed a contract with him for continued extraction and thus acknowledged him as the owner of the place. Such an instance signals how settler structures of invasion converge with policies of ecological disruption as they uproot and reorganize concepts of gender, place, and land that are based in Indigenous thought. Together, both dynamics underwrite a "settler grammar of place" and create "geographical knowledge regimes" that are at the same time ecological knowledge regimes which preclude the legitimacy of any Indigenous knowledge (Goeman, *Mapping* 30).[6]

The consequences of the traditional family land's environmental degradation make a return of Helen and her family even more complicated, even if the land were successfully reclaimed in court. In the unfolding narrative of the film, it becomes clear that while Angelo is taking his grandmother home from Seattle, where Helen has visited family, she cannot stay home at the place where the film and the journey ends. And it is clear from the outset that Angelo is not returning home to this land either. At the end of the journey, on the family homeland in Montezuma Creek, Utah, he states that it "may be that we don't really have the opportunity anymore to stay in just one place, but it would be nice to return." However, the place we do see him return to in a visual and narrative circle is the

[6] See also Voyles' essay "Intimate Cartographies: Navajo Ecological Citizenship, Soil Conservation, and Lifestock Reduction," in which she makes a related argument for the correlation of U.S. environmental politics and regulation of Indigenous lives in examining how "federal conservation policies were attempts at rationalizing not only Navajo soil and stockherding, but also Navajo family life and gender politics" (51).

Pacific Northwest, where he is shown running near Seattle close to the ocean at the beginning and end of the film. In addition, we are told via voice-over narration that he is a graduate student of anthropology at the University of Washington, engaged in making the Indigenous presence in and around Seattle more visible. The journey the film is concerned with, then, is not undertaken for the young Native to follow the lead of his elder and be reintegrated in the tribal community at home, as Bevis has analyzed for other Native narratives investigating the relations between leaving and returning home. Instead, the film asks through the portrayal of the journey what it means for the Yellowman family to be dispossessed from their *Ancestor's Land*, as the subtitle of the film reads, and how such a twentieth-century removal resonates with a larger history of Indigenous displacements according to a settler colonial "logic of elimination." In this context, one might read *Into America*, in Bevis' terms, as pessimistically displaying a failure to return home, emphasizing the impossibility of such a homecoming after a history of displacement. As a result it seems that the settler colonial eco-logic of mobility—moving in, extracting, moving on—has forced an unwanted mobility on the Yellowman family, not only through the initial removal, but also due to further dispossessions, intra-familial and intra-tribal conflicts, and the dispersal of a family community over a vast territory.

Such a reading, however, which judges the film's perspective of failure and success merely in terms of Bevis' paradigm of failing or succeeding to return home, does not take into account the emphasis the film puts on the journey itself, and thus disregards what the film achieves through its "mobile plot" and the aspects of mobility it highlights. Instead of making the car trip just a necessary prerequisite for returning home, the film's focus on the journey foregrounds forms of Indigenous resilience, community, and relations to place and the environment that disrupt the dominant settler colonial eco-logics. Native traditions of understanding place, land, environment, family, and gender become articulated on the road, while the film is moving on and through the western part of the present-day United States.

First of all, it must be noted that Angelo's and Helen's journey from Seattle to Navajo country not only reverses the westward direction of settler invasion, but that the film also uncovers the long history of repeated dispossessions most prominently associated with the era of removal and the so-called "Indian wars" of the nineteenth century—legal and military operations that followed the settler colonial logic of attempting to eliminate the Native in order to make space for the settler (see Wolfe 2006). Interestingly, the film explores these instances of the Navajo's displacement through a narrative and aesthetics of mobility. In particular, it refers to the U.S. policy of "scorched earth," as Angelo puts it, in order to have the Navajo surrender, as well as to the removal of the Navajo from their land and their internment at Fort Summer in the 1860s before their relocation to their reservation. It also remembers the removal of children to boarding schools as part of the assimilation policy and a form of cultural genocide, and, most recently, the seizure of Navajo lands for Uranium mining and oil extraction. The film addresses these overlapping histories of dispossession through various narrative techniques that include family conversations at stops along the journey,

a visit to the Tamastslikt Cultural Institute, and Angelo Baca's voice-over narration as the protagonists drive eastward; in other words, it addresses them on the move. Similarly, the film makes observations about the policies and imaginaries of removal as Angelo and Helen are passing through small towns. Their comments on the Washington town of Toppenish, WA, whose motto is "Where the West Still Lives," are particularly instructive, as they center Indigenous perspectives and experiences which are habitually erased from the official and popularized local history. A series of murals in the town center displays collective settler memory in a way that links rights to the land with the "proper" relation exhibited to it in specific practices. On a number of murals, settlers are depicted in a flurry of activities that all contribute to nation-building, except for, as Baca puts it, "that guy in the corner," the token "lazy Indian," who is "doing nothing." In the politics of these images, certain practices—constructing homes and settlements, creating infrastructure, maintaining large-scale agriculture—are productive in the way they relate to the land and shape the environment, thus conveying a right to the land that is earned by working on and with it, a representational reiteration of Jeffersonian agrarianism as well as John Locke's "proper cultivation" of the land. At the same time, this settler fantasy evacuates Native forms of land tenure by representing Indigenous peoples as having done nothing with the land except to dwell on it and occupy it. Consequently, this fantasy erases any active Native presence and work on the land and replaces it with passive inertness and resignation, so that the "Indian doing nothing" is already pushed to the corner, and thus rightfully "made to move," making way for settlement. Jace Weaver comments on such a perspective on Native peoples leaving the land untouched and its implied justification of colonization as follows: "Natives become nothing more than stewards of the land, preserving the land intact and holding it in escrow from the foundation of the world for the colonizers who would come later" ("Introduction" 4). Accordingly, Native peoples had served their function and, when the colonizers did come, were taken out of the picture or relegated to the margins.

In opposition to these always-incomplete efforts at elimination, the film stages the journey as a form of recovery, literally moving against the direction of invasion. In an essay on Indigenous film as ecocinema, Jennifer A. Machiorlatti argues that "[c]ontemporary Aboriginal storytelling in video and film has become vital to the recuperation and regeneration of personal and communal identity, language, and cultural practice, and responsibility to/with the ecosphere" (63). Similarly, *Into America*'s Native/Non-Native collaboration of a German and a Navajo/Hopi filmmaker seeks to perform such a work of "cultural recovery" that is transported by the journey to Navajo country (62). "Recovery" takes on various meanings in this context. For one, the protagonists' journey towards their family homeland suggests the potential of a movement that seeks to recover histories that are largely erased from colonial settler memory and retrace forced migrations across land that has been restructured according to a settler geography and ecology of colonial domination. Accordingly, their movement is not based on submitting to the colonial pressure to "be made to move" but rather challenges that pressure by moving back (Byrd xv). Secondly, the film works to recover specific relationships to the land and environments rooted in Indigenous traditions and thought.

It transports these relationships by framing aspects of mobility as specifically Indigenous: central images of (settler) mobility conventionally employed to signify Anglo-American expansion, the restructuring of place, and the privilege to move on are crucially indigenized. And thirdly, the prototypical filmic genre celebrating mobility, the road movie, is itself indigenized. To this end, the film reimagines the car as a space of intergenerational Indigenous community and storytelling, the landscape through which it passes as a tapestry of Indigenous national territories and environments, the road as a line connecting these territories, and the map of the territory covered by the film's narrative as a visualization of Indigenous sovereignty based on connection and responsibility to specific environments. The film furthermore transports such a sense of sovereignty through Helen's stories she tells in Navajo in the car, so that all levels of Indigenous mobility come together in moments that powerfully combine forms of oral and visual storytelling.

Notably, the film portrays the car predominantly as a site of Indigenous mobility and intergenerational community.[7] As Angelo and Helen, Navajo/Hopi graduate student and Navajo elder, move across the land to Montezuma Creek and speak Navajo with each other, the car becomes a space for Navajo storytelling and expressions of Navajo religion. The film uses the intimate and communal space of the car to explore the familiarity of grandson and grandmother, specific modes of communication between young Navajo and elder, as well as their shared strong ties to the land via the concept of storytelling. The mutual responsibilities between a young adult Native and an elder are addressed as Angelo alludes to his responsibility as grandson to make his grandmother open up and tell stories, transmit oral histories. With her, however, this effort resembles "pulling teeth." At another moment he acknowledges that she has the position of the elder to tell him when the time has come that he is allowed to tell these stories himself. Indeed, the film highlights how storytelling is significant for upholding strong and intimate relations to the land—especially in the way storytelling is embedded in, and promotes, a sense of Indigenous mobility as remaining committed to place. In Helen's first moment of storytelling on the road, she relates how from early on she has become "a witness to all these things happening," thus creating herself as an intergenerational node that links past, present, and future in her responsibility to give account of this witnessing and pass it on. These links she creates in her stories extend from her family to the land, including the Navajo as well as other Indigenous people in an ever-expanding reciprocal connection of responsibility. When Helen stresses that her grandmother proclaimed that this land "is ours" and that they "will not be separated from the land," she forges a strong historical and generational continuity of kinship relations, from her own grandmother via herself to her grandson, that have exhibited ties to the land. Additionally, this connection also signifies Indigenous claims to the land as durable since they derive

[7] At the same time, it should not go unmentioned that there is also an unmistakable sense of irony in that Angelo and his grandmother undertake the journey in a car, due to the lack of any other choice given U.S. infrastructure and its reliance on non-renewable energy: they are burning the fossil fuel whose extraction has destroyed their homeland and which became the point of interest for companies ultimately leading to their dispossession of the land.

from long-standing and intimate relations to it which are maintained through the specific lifeways co-constitutive of Native peoples and their respective environments.[8] When she goes on to mention "then they moved on" and "we will follow the sheep, wherever grandma said," the contrast between not being "separated from the land" and "moving on" might be seen as a contradiction. However, such an assertion can also be taken to signal a movement across a specific place that is governed by the needs of its inhabitants—rather than by the interest to translate its resources into financial profits—thus suggesting that the people engaged in such a movement remain responsible to each place they arrive at.

Such a mode of moving *on* the land and in accordance *with* the environment upholds a connection to place that, in Helen's account, is lost when ground is foremost viewed as alienable property, as in the case of a capitalist settler society, prompting her question: "Who is the white man to claim this land?" What in settler accounts works to legitimize the claims on the land through its "discovery" and proper cultivation becomes in Helen's storytelling ground to dismiss settler claims as illegitimate, since their "recent" arrival cannot compare to the long-standing Indigenous landholding through multiple generations. Furthermore, their emphasis on ownership, and their arrogance in thinking they are "bigger than nature," fail to take into account the manifold dimensions of being connected to the land and all forms of life through extended kinship networks that are vital to constituting Indigenous societies and polities. Such ignorance foretells harm to the land as well as to the white settlers themselves. In a Navajo prayer that is part of her car-bound storytelling, Helen asserts that white men will suffer from breaking the harmony between the land and its (non)human inhabitants; the prayer acknowledges the "Holy men" who created land, people, and animals, but also asks for protection that "no harm will come to us." Throughout the film, Helen's car stories also make concrete references to tribal and familial history, both of removal and other forms of mobility: she tells of the confinement of the Navajo in Fort Summer, "a concentration camp," and relates the passionate speech of leader Manuelito to "let them go home"; later she narrates a situation in which sheep were taken home from within the fenced-in settler confines as a display of Indigenous agency and resilience in face of ongoing disenfranchisement. The film, then, represents the car as a space in which Indigenous community is threaded in ever-widening circles between generations, within Navajo society, and among people, land, and its other inhabitants. Such a communal sense of moving on with each other is related via story and prayer, enacted in the bond between Helen and Angelo, and also shown in their relation to other family and friends they visit on their way.

In some ways, the car itself appears to become a vehicle that does not so much move across the country but connects itself to the land via movement. The film

[8] This also recalls the evocation of ancestry as a means to connect Indigenous community, generational continuity, and land as Chadwick Allen argues in *Blood Narrative*: "To rebuild the ancestral house means literally to rebuild the community's ancestor—its significant past—and the community's self—its significant present and possible future, and to do so at the very source of the community's primary material and spiritual resources, its historical land base" (147).

adds to and reinforces such an impression through a key image, which shows the shadow of the car moving on the red Southwest earth of the Navajo nation. As such, the image appears not so much to indicate a contrast between nature and technology but rather shows how the car is integrated in the landscape, becoming a part of the Indigenous national territory, and a further "inhabitant" of the land (see fig. 1).[9]

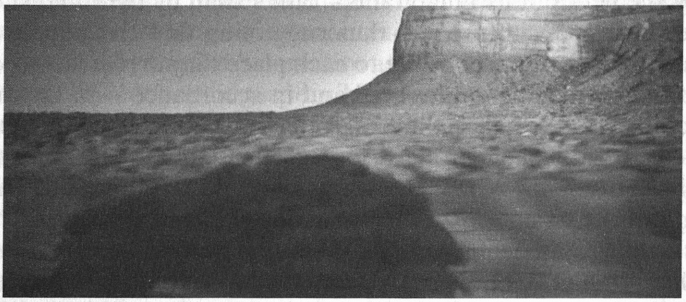

Fig. 1

Such a visual indication of the car's "indigenization" combines with a variety of landscape images as well as impressions of the road that accompany the scenes taking place within the car. While the latter make the documentary feel like a road movie, the former complement and sometimes juxtapose the stories told in the car with scenic photography of landscapes that will be recognized as emblematic of the wide open American West, even among European audiences (not insignificant given the transatlantic nature of the film's production). However, in connection to Helen's "mobile" stories of the relations between Navajo land and people, of "spatial colonial violence" past and present, and of ongoing Indigenous resilience, these images, taken from the perspective of the moving car, no longer signify the historically static and mythical American West. Instead, they portray Indigenous lands in their historical and ongoing dynamic. Such a visually re-narrated portrayal of the American West as being made up of highly dynamic Indigenous lands thus disrupts the "settler grammar of place"; it challenges a settler narrative that claims absolute authority over the land by reinterpreting Indigenous mobility and reclaiming it as an alternative form of being in and moving through the world, both temporally and spatially.

This sense that the film's car journey creates a narrative of belonging and responsibility vis-à-vis an environment reimagined as Indigenous territories is further emphasized through its particular use of mapping. Two maps document the journey's progress and at the same time reverse the circumscription of Indigenous lands within a U.S. settler nation-state matrix. While the film outlines a number of the ways in which settler colonial logics map the North American territory claimed by the United States, it uses these maps to visualize a different geography as well as a different set of logics and normativities underpinning them. Remap-

[9] The film website underscores the significance the filmmakers attribute to this image, as it is part of the movie stills gallery for promotional purposes.

ping North American space in this way, the film challenges the privileged position and the political, economic, and ecological authority of naturalized settler formations and their relationships to place. The usage of the maps in the film signifies what Michelle Raheja has called in another context (and with a slightly different connotation) "visual sovereignty" (1159). The maps in the film visualize through a specific indication of mobility how Indigenous sovereignty is based in land, and how this land, characterized and outlined by specific environmental features, functions as a site for the emergence of a people *as* a people with a legitimate claim to sovereignty over these territories.

The film employs this familiar road movie trope of using a map to trace the protagonists' movement in two variations, each highlighting in its own way the particular work maps perform in cultural and sociopolitical formations.[10] In the first instance, shortly after the beginning of the long-distance drive, a line made of little twigs across a map that shows U.S. state borders (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah) visualizes the journey lying ahead. This map at first appears to be a very familiar sight (see fig. 2). Yet the map also resembles an example of Native American rock art—handprints on sandstone—that is widespread in the Southwest of the present-day United States toward which the protagonists are moving. The film thus literally imprints the presence of Indigenous peoples and their cultural and social expressions prior to settlement on the image of the territory claimed by the United States, which is marked on the same map by the state borders that cut across this otherwise unified image of Indigenous North America. The pressures of U.S. settler colonialism and the presence of Indigeneity are superimposed over one another, and while the film never ignores who is imposing themselves on whom here, this image suggests the presence of North American Indigeneity within, as well as opposed to, the structures of settler colonialism past and present. From such a vantage point, a map that shows a part of the territory the United States claims for itself appears as a much more unstable tapestry of various territories and competing layers than it usually does in its naturalized form manifesting U.S. settler power (see also Rifkin's *Manifesting America*).

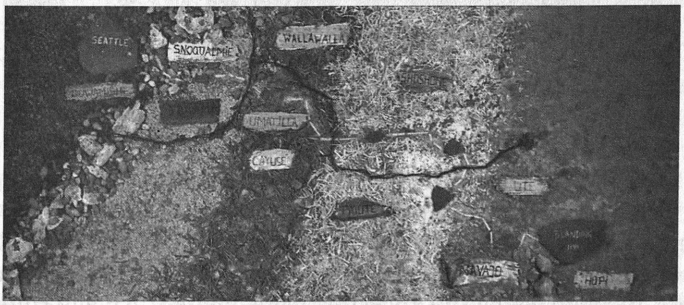

Fig. 2

[10] See Goeman's *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* for a discussion of the significance of mapping in settler-Indigenous relations.

The map becomes more strongly connected to counteracting the effects of "colonial spatial violence" as well as a settler-centered perception of North American environments in its second variation, which first appears about a third of the way through the film and is then shown repeatedly until the end (see fig. 3). The change reflects Angelo's voice-over narration during the map's initial appearance, which describes the journey from Seattle to the Navajo reservation as "moving through lots of countries, [...] a lot of nation territories, lots of different cultures." He goes on: "I don't feel like I'm just going from one State to another in America" and maintains that "those borders have no meaning for me, it's the natural borders, the borders of the aboriginal, Indigenous people that matter to me." Consequently, state borders have completely disappeared on the new map that accompanies his assertion. Instead of resembling a rock painting, the map is made up of several materials that represent the variety of environments (forests, mountains, grasslands, wheat fields, deserts), constituting the regions and the "nation territories" of the Indigenous peoples. The names of the respective Indigenous nations (Snoqualmie, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Cayuse, Shoshone, Ute, Paiute, Navajo, Hopi, etc.) are placed across the map in a way that ties them to distinct environments, and often natural borders such as a river or mountain range delineate the spaces making up the "nation territories." Furthermore, just as Angelo states that the peoples of the areas "all emerged very differently" due to the different plants, natural foods, medicines, and animals of the region on which they "thrived," the names of the different peoples literally emerge out of the specific environment in the map's animation. This visualization of emergence connects their respective identity and status as a people to the notion of being indigenous to a place, of having come from and, as the map suggests, *out of* a specific place.

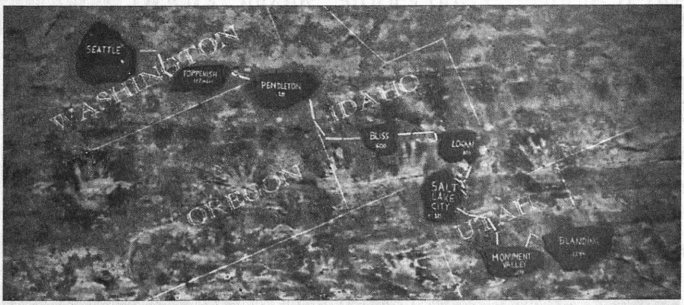

Fig. 3

In this manner, the film's subtitle *The Ancestor's Land* can be read not only as referring to the land that belonged to the ancestors, but also to the land that made the ancestors, through which the ancestors were created. Angelo states at the beginning of the film that the relation of the "Navajo people to the place they believe they are from" is specific in that they are "composed of those elements"; standing on the family homeland towards the end of the film he asserts that "I am made of this place." The land becomes the entity that signals and confirms the historical continuity and community of the Navajo people anew in every generation. On a

visual level, then, the animated map helps to capture a view of the land prominent in Indigenous religions and philosophies as being sacred and animate. The film closely links environmental practices that characterize Indigenous people in their specific lifeways and Indigenous thought that views people as having been made of the land itself. Together they formulate a powerful political claim to the land based in Indigenous land rights and in support of ecological practices that are in accordance with and help to sustain Indigenous ways of being in the world.

When Angelo views the oil drills at work on the site of his family's homeland at the end of the film, the discrepancies between two distinct philosophies and politics of land and their ecological ramifications become clearly manifest. He comments that the relentless vertical mobility of the oil drill pushing into the earth and extracting the oil goes on and on as if it had "no feeling about what it does to this place," an image of "pure machinery." Angelo's comments point to as well as indict the incentive motivating settler eco-logics of working with the land: machines penetrate the earth in order to have the land produce something in reward for the "labor on the land" that is financially profitable in a capitalist system of exchange value, while furthering environmental degradation. Through Angelo's statements, Helen's stories, and the usage of the maps, the film ultimately portrays such a modus operandi as a failure to imaginatively and intellectually grasp the land in the terms of what Dene scholar Glen Coulthard has recently called a "grounded normativity" (60), a normativity that is constituted through viewing land as animate, as a living entity which, at the same time, gives life in a vertical movement of emergence—pointedly reverse to the oil drill's penetration.

Whereas the first rendering of a map has thus pictured an Indigenous presence on a territory that is part of today's United States, and in this way presented a unified image of a Native North America possibly at the expense of the diversity and plurality that make up the various Indigenous nations,[11] the second map makes a more radical statement. It views Indigenous nations as a plurality of political and cultural formations, connected in distinct ways of emergence and interrelation to the natural environments that still make up the geography of the present-day United States. Their claims to these territories thus correspond to North American nature's diversity in ways that the U.S. state borders previously drawn across the map pictured as a rock painting do not. As Angelo's narration pronounces these borders meaningless, they disappear from the map—giving way to a map in which the status prior to non-Indigenous settlement dominates. This settlement is now only present through the names of a few cities, some of them, such as Seattle, of course, appropriated from Indigenous history and politics. The movement from map to map in the film thus counteracts an idea of settler mobility with a visualizing of mobility in recognition of Indigenous sovereignty. Thus reframed, moving on does not signal abandonment, but a moving on from nation to nation on land that in its entirety is recognized as belonging to Indigenous nations (cf. Goeman, *Mapping* 100), and which figures as a site for the emergence of these nations *as* na-

[11] One might even argue that the image of the rock painting runs the risk of reiterating a stereotypical, romanticized, and exoticized perception of Indigeneity as being homogenous and solely residing in the past.

tions. Freed from an emphasis on passive stasis or nomadic roaming, both settler fantasies that make Indigenous presence on the land inconsequential, Indigeneity is reimagined both as a dynamic process and as a position of political and cultural belonging. As this position is grounded in a specific environment as well as in a relation to this environment and beyond, the kinship networks of Indigenous sociopolitical communities are extended to the land and its inhabitants, promoting ecologies that disrupt the totality of settler colonial eco-logics on North American lands. Thus they denaturalize settler colonial structures of invasion and question the legitimacy of corresponding ecologically invasive practices on the grounds of Indigenous philosophies and politics of decolonization. Just as the movement of the protagonists, eastward *Into America* reverses the direction of histories of Indigenous removal, so does the filmic remapping of moving through the land sketch a vision of decolonization and unsettlement.

III. Outlook: From Mobility to Indigenous Movements

The film's vision also speaks of its activist impulse. In fact, the film moves toward the call for political action as the final caption speaks out for assistance in obtaining legal support for the Yellowman family in order to bring "this land case back to court." Helen Yellowman herself is also aware of the film's significance in supporting her cause. In two scenes filmed on the family homeland, she orchestrates Angelo's and her own movement to achieve a better effect, almost assuming the role of the director in order to ensure that her case is properly represented. Tellingly, the statement by the legal firm representing the Johnson family quotes one of their members saying, "We can now move on" ("50 Year Land and Grazing Dispute"). The film might be read as a refutation of such a claim: On the one hand, its visual and narrative grammar seeks to un-settle this legal dispute as part of a greater challenge to the legitimacy of organizing spaces according to a binary and hierarchical understanding of "outright ownership" versus mere "occupancy and use" of land ("50 Year"). The legal firm prides itself on having untangled the confusion between these two relations to land. Its statement clearly privileges land as property and as a site for Euro-American house construction, consequently delegitimizing any Indigenous claim to and presence on the land that does not adhere to such a form of land tenure. As the film unsettles the normativities behind such a legal decision, disrupting a "settler grammar of place" and the assumed totality of settler eco-logics, it points to the unfinished matter not only of this land case but also of the settler colonial project as a whole, including how it imposes certain judicial, economical, and environmental relations to land on Indigenous peoples.

On the other hand, the film makes clear that in contrast to the Johnson family, the Yellowman family's interest does not lie in moving on, but rather in moving back to their homeland and reclaiming it as a communal place for the future. Angelo muses: "It is possible to still live here, to make it nice, to create a community again," and further states that it "may be that we don't really have the opportunity anymore to stay in just one place, but it would be nice to return." The aforementioned circular structure of the film, which shows Angelo at beginning

and end in the Pacific Northwest, demonstrates how such a return is impossible at the moment—the moment both of the specific legal situation, and of ongoing U.S. settler colonialism—but this cannot be reduced to a failure of 'homing in,' in Bevis' terms.

Instead, one might look at the film as gesturing outward in the assertion of Indigenous mobility and movements with an activist impulse. While Angelo can only briefly return to his family homeland, the film clearly indicates that his life in Seattle, where he is active in "making Indigenous people more visible," is not that of a young Native being lost in the white world, disconnected from his roots. Instead, his life and work in Seattle offer a realistic and affirmative portrait of urban modern Indigeneity, an example of upholding ties to *The Ancestor's Land* while embracing *and* critically negotiating cosmopolitan mobility and transit. Beyond that, a strong sense of generational continuity to his mother and his grandmother ensures that he is "never really lost," as his mother (who lives in Blanding, Utah) states displaying an Indigenous familial community that thrives despite spatial distance.

Finally, the film itself, born out of an international, Native/non-Native cooperation and having circulated in Europe as well as in North America at various film festivals and other places (including tribal colleges), demonstrates the potential of mobility on scales that at least partly exceed settler nation-state limitations. It functions as a means of promoting activist-oriented forms of representation and cultural expression for the cause of Indigenous rights and environmental justice. This mobility in many cases includes the actors (in more than one sense) of the film, as Angelo Baca, sometimes joined by Helen Yellowman, was present at various showings on the North American side, as was Nadine Zacharias on the European side. It is important to heed Sarah Ray's call of caution regarding an uncritical embrace of a transnationalist environmental justice movement as the ideal way to pursue Indigenous rights ("Environmental Justice"). Yet the film may serve as one example of how to employ mobility on various levels, including the level of its own distribution and promotion, to generate particular perspectives on the land and environment that exceed the limits of the (settler) nation-state. Thinking about the film in this way might further open up paths to consider the potential of linking mobility studies and environmental humanities for efforts in the fields of Indigenous, settler colonial and transnational studies. Mobility and the ability to forge connections across communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, transatlantic as well as transnational, are used in and through the film to make the local visible and visualize it within the discourses of Indigenous sovereignty, land rights, decolonization, and environmental justice.[12] Activating the potential of the local in this manner for an audience in a wider, even if not fully global, arena can thus function as one element of the work the film performs. In seeking to disrupt the dominant settler colonial eco-logic of mobility, it powerfully figures Indigenous peoples not as objects being "made to move" but as actors of a movement with an unsettling force of its own.

[12] Currently, the resistance against the Dakota Acess Pipeline by the Standing Rock Siox and a large number of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous allies testifies to the political potential of connecting these discourses.

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