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MULTIDIRECTIONAL ECO-MEMORY: WHALE HUNTING, HUMAN SUFFERING AND  
VIETNAMESE WAR IN LINDA HOGAN'S *PEOPLE OF THE WHALE*

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ABSTRACT

Michael Rothberg's (2009) "multidirectional memory" provides a counterargument to competing conceptions of memory, which focus on erasing memories of other atrocities. This research paper examines how the cultural eco-memory of tribes' triggers memory and empathy towards the victims of war and animals at the verge of extinction in the novel *People of the Whale* by Linda Hogan.

**Keywords:** Memory, genocide, animals and native American culture

Why do some events in history become so popular? Why some stories are not known to the world? Michael Rothberg's (2009) "multidirectional memory," provides a counterargument to competing conceptions of memory, in which, for example, commemorating the Holocaust is viewed as erasing memories of other atrocities such as slavery or racism. Likewise, the world has also witnessed the genocides of Native Americans which has failed to occupy the pages of history as Holocaust does.

The reason for its over-projection was to cover the colonial exploits on humans and animals. The effects of colonialism continued even after the countries gained independence from their colonizers. There was a prominent presence of colonial imperialism before and after the American Independence which was meted out towards the Blacks, Native Americans and animals. The imperialism was seen across its borders, in the Vietnamese war. Many photographs and reports keep resurfacing about the army exploits in Vietnam and on its population.

Multidirectional eco-memory, connects the human and nonhuman animal histories of injury, suffering, and vulnerability in an extended multispecies frame of memory. Here, "eco-memory" contains but differs from the memory of place, which is often linked to the anthropocentric notion of collective identity.

As an alternative, eco-memory is based on a profound recollection of a habitat, which is conceptualised as an ecological assemblage in which all elements, both human and nonhuman, are mobile, connected, and dynamic. Eco-memory is not bound to the typical local or national landscapes of one's own or a group's memories; rather, it is consistent with an indigenous understanding of "country." When critiquing eco-memory, critics must consider how events, acts, and processes affect the many components of the assemblage. This multispecies perspective must encompass the oceans and the creatures that live there. Multidirectional eco-

memory links memories of the suffering, killing, and endangerment of animal populations in complicated, nuanced relation to memories of the violence against and dispossession of specific human communities. It entails not just considering ecological vulnerability in terms of human or nonhuman animals, but also in terms of their connections.

Through the reading of Linda Hogan's 2008 book *People of the Whale*, demonstrates the effectiveness of multidirectional eco-memory. The book provides a wide-ranging "multidirectional" alternative to environmental activists' memories of the whale's impending extinction, which sometimes overlook the ways in which whaling also aided in the eviction of indigenous peoples and the devastation of their homeland.

"Royal ships once anchored there; those who kept journals said the houses were made of pearls. No one sees these now except as a memory made of words" (*People of the Whale*, 9). The lines show that there was a place, there was a time when everything was in abundance. There was so much abundance that, things which are used to make jewellery were used to build houses. This shows how the colonial rule looted the Native American land. It also gives the present picture of the land. It says its in the memory but not even in the memory of the people but the memory of the words.

The desolate Native American village on the Pacific coast, where the Native Americans reside, is the setting for *People of the Whale*. The book empowers a local indigenous memory to speak to a national and international audience by drawing on archives, archaeological locations, and oral storytelling customs. The novel expands the idea of place offshore to include islands, the sea, and its inhabitants. This idea of place originated from an indigenous understanding of "country." The time covered by *People of the Whale* is after colonization, that is after the arrival of British settlers in America, their claim to the land, and the establishment of their settlement and also Vietnam war. Hogan, who is a Chicksaw Native American, states that the book "This book has been a long time in the creation and I could go on about all the people and whales.." (*People of the Whale*, 303).

Linda Hogan beautifully portrayed the interaction between people and nonhuman animals, drawing attention to the current state of affairs in which Native Americans are losing their traditional practises and reverence for nonhuman creatures. The narrative is focused on Thomas Witka Just, the main character.

He is troubled by his memories of the Vietnam War because they trigger images of mass murder, the eradication of life, and environmental catastrophe. Thomas resides alone in the same grey hut on the cliffs where his grandfather Witka had lived, isolated from his family and friends. He is reminded of his childhood ambitions of becoming a well-known whale hunter like Witka by his grandfather's memories. But as a result of his fighting experience, he is now a lost soul and his life has taken a different turn. Although he is making an effort to forget the brutality and mayhem he saw during the war, his past and remorse over the deaths of others are always with him. His wife Ruth awaited his arrival home each day, but he never did. The fact that he unexpectedly showed up on a day of whale hunting makes them all think he is still alive. In 1988, there was a story going through the neighbourhood that a whale was going to be killed. Ruth disagrees with the whale hunt since it only serves money interests, like the older generations do. She told the reporters that the primary purpose of whale hunting is to make money. She disagrees with the council, which consists of a few of Thomas's former military comrades. They got in touch with a number of businessmen that dealt in whale flesh. Ruth's awareness of the catastrophic circumstances surrounding the whale-business demonstrates her ecological sense and knowledge of the environment. She made an effort to alert the media to the fact that there are less whales in the area and that it is not appropriate for hunting. The majority of the tribe said nothing to Ruth and her mother. Thomas intended to join the mission and go back to his old, conventional way of life when he heard about the whale hunt. In the same manner as in the past, whales are still hunted while people sing and beg them to give themselves to those in need of food.

"Look at how we're surfing," they used to sing. Please feel sorry for us. Our population is quite modest. —We're starving.|| (*Hogan, People of the Whale*, 21) Here, there is a close, mutual link between humans and nonhumans. Tribal people used to go hunting for necessities to feed their villages. However, under the guise of whale hunting, people are now making money from this revered tradition.

"There is evil in the world. It takes the shape of humans. Who want something small. Who want distinguish themselves. Who want power to make decisions. Who think they want to hange things. Who want their own ends. It took the shape of the invaders. It took the shape of the whalers". (*People of the Whale*, 288). The novel tries to highlight how the colonial rule lead to the mass killings of whales.

Deborah Bird Rose highlights the problem of accountability by examining the connection between the murder of people and the murder of animals, and consequently the connection between the extinction of species and human genocide. She notes that Heidegger has given philosophers a resounding affirmation of the notion that an animal's death is a "mere death" and that an animal's life is a "mere life" (Rose 22). She acknowledges that humans have been animalized to make them easier to kill, but she contends that the essential boundary is not between humans and animals in general but rather between beings that may be "killed with impunity" and those whose deaths require an explanation. We must acknowledge that our modifications to the planet are kinds of "slow violence" (Nixon) that have terrible consequences for both people and nonhuman animals in order to stop the ongoing extinction crisis.

Literary and narrative imagination may be more effective at communicating the interconnections between the pasts and futures of humans and animals than overused comparisons between extinction and genocide. *People of the Whale*, not only expresses the persistence and resiliency of both indigenous and whale populations, but also calls attention to the slow violence that colonial whaling, settlement inflicted on both and also how it has changed the Native American's mindset towards whales. The new generation don't have the spiritual connection as the older generations.

Linda Hogan not just shows how whales are killed. She goes further and depicts how the Vietnamese people were exploited during war. The exploitation of women and children in the war is again remembered by Thomas during the whale killings. This shows the similarities between human and non-human victims of war, colonization and violence. Trough this Linda Hogan tries to portray the pain and torture human and non-human's went through, which is almost the same as the violent Holocaust history,

The book conveys a rich indigenous eco-memory of "country" as a multispecies habitat, fusing recollections of the vulnerability and survival of both humans and animals into a unified frame. The book invites readers to draw connections between social justice and environmental justice, human suffering and animal suffering, dispossession and extinction by illustrating "the more-than-human and multispecies world, while at the same time identifying the hierarchical processes that led certain humans to be reduced to 'nature' (or other species)" (DeLoughrey et al. 11, 11). Multidirectional eco-memory expands cultural memory studies beyond the human and emphasises the development of a multispecies approach to ethical questions of suffering and injury as essential for the environmental humanities by articulating the mutually entwined histories of human and animal precarity.

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