

Narratives of Resistance: A Critical Exploration of Colonial Legacies and Ecological Violence in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy and Anne Pancake

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Introduction: The Ecocritical Discourse

This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of Cormac McCarthy's 1985 historical fiction *Blood Meridian; or, The Evening Redness in the West* and Ann Pancake's 2007 novel *Strange as This Weather Has Been*. The primary objective of this comparative analysis is twofold. Firstly, it aims to explore the recurrent themes of violent imperialist endeavours in *Blood Meridian* and the destructive practice of mountaintop removal mining activity in the Appalachian region of the United States, as depicted in Pancake's novel. Through this exploration, these narra-

tives jointly illuminate an enduring and intrinsic process of political violence and cultural militarism deeply embedded in the American context. This inherent process is perpetuated through the lens of fetishised identity constructs and hierarchical social systems, which not only engender individuals and communities marked by anger, repression, and guilt but also normalise violence as an acceptable mode of discourse within American society. As Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* presciently observes:

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. (Said 1993, 47)

As could be discerned from the above quoted text, Edward Said examines postcolonial cultures and literature from an ecological perspective. He underscores the significant role played by geographical and cultural violence in the establishment and perpetuation of imperialist ideologies and patriarchal power dynamics in both Western and Eastern contemporary contexts. Said's perspective posits that imperialism evolves from being a forceful territorial invasion of foreign lands into an enduring condition characterised by a continuous cultural and political struggle for control over resources, spaces, and

authority. In this ongoing struggle, a dialectic of self vs. other takes shape. Said emphasises that both authoritarian and democratic regimes worldwide are impacted by imperialism to varying degrees, utilising deeply ingrained hierarchical divisions to assert their dominance over indigenous populations or peripheral regions, often by endorsing narrow interests such as “patriotism, chauvinism, and fostering ethnic, religious, and racial divisions” (Said 1993, 22).

This perspective highlights that diverse forms of ecological, economic, social, and human violence are not isolated, sporadic acts by individuals but rather interconnected, organised, and systematic ideologies of subjugation. Imperialism is not merely about distinctions between white and native or the centre and periphery, but primarily revolves around the governance of hierarchies and the enforcement of limited identity constructs.

This paper contends that the ecological violence, encompassing deforestation and pollution, and human violence, including sexual violence and child abuse, depicted in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, illustrates the interconnectivity of humanity with its ecological environment. Rather than existing in isolation from their surroundings, humans are embedded in a complex web of relationships. Spatial violence, as portrayed in these novels, serves as a mirror to the fractures and disparities within American social, cultural,

and democratic systems, which, in turn, tolerate glaring injustices and abuses.

For instance, in *Blood Meridian*, characters like the kid and various American combatants are deeply involved in brutal conflicts, using these as a justification for their callous disregard for the lives of both their adversaries and comrades. This behaviour is driven by a desire to assert dominance in terms of labour, land, and a display of masculinity. Paradoxically, despite their participation in these violent conflicts, American fighters, who are linguistically, culturally, and socially marginalised compared to figures like Judge Holden and other leaders, are relegated to the role of “silent mob of spectators.” When they do attempt to voice an opinion, it is often expressed through “muttered obscenities” or “silent headshakes” (McCarthy 1985, 78). These suppressed and silenced American fighters channel their pent-up aggression towards others and women out of fear that their masculinity and authority are under threat.

Similarly, in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, the violent, industrial transformation and degradation of the landscape disrupts the familial and social dynamics among the marginalised residents of Yellowroot. Women like Lace and her daughter Bant are compelled to work in order to support themselves and their families, while men often find themselves unemployed or relegated to menial tasks like house cleaning. Consequently, family

members become resentful and embittered, projecting their anger onto one another. This paper, thus, posits that the socio-cultural and political contexts in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been* produce a milieu where isolated and disgruntled white Americans live in virtual worlds, directing their frustrations towards others and themselves.

The second objective for comparing *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been* lies in their shared innovative perspective on environmental consciousness as a means of achieving psychological and emotional liberation and self-forgiveness. Within this context, certain characters, such as the kid in *Blood Meridian*, and Bant and Lace in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, exhibit the capacity to cultivate fresh perceptions and connections with their environment, thereby disrupting their fixed fetishised identity affiliations. This transformation assists them in transcending their experiences of oppression and subjugation.

Many ecological scholars and thinkers concur that the history of human interactions with the spaces and places they inhabit unfolds as a narrative of identity suppression, transformation, and rejuvenation. This narrative can either perpetuate or challenge colonial and discriminatory histories, along with their corresponding resistances. For instance, Noël Sturgeon (1997) argues that “an environmentalist politics serves as a fertile ground

for scrutinizing the construction of identity politics because it transcends the confines of human identity shaped by normalized hierarchies of value, as observed in racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism” (18). Sturgeon maintains that hierarchical political structures, exploitative economic systems, and distinct identity constructs operate as interconnected forces of oppression and discrimination across gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. Similarly, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley (2011), following in the footsteps of Said and Sturgeon, contend that the landscape is not a passive backdrop but an active participant in the historical processes, including imperialism. It is an integral component rather than a passive observer of human experiences (9). Postcolonial-ecocritical readings of both the selected novels, therefore, provide a novel vantage point for examining the impact of imperialism on the landscapes, identities, and power dynamics of both the colonisers and the colonised.

The (Post)Colonised American Landscape

Traditionally, the historical narrative of America’s Westward expansion has predominantly centred on the progress of civilisation and human development, often overlooking the role of the natural world. However, the unique characteristics of American nature have played a pivotal role in shaping the nation’s history, both at regional and national levels. Cormac McCarthy’s literary

works echo this perspective, offering a revisionist commentary that interweaves human history with the natural world, thereby illustrating the intricate nature-culture relationship (Buell 1995, 7).

McCarthy's interpretation of history and the evolution of American civilisation diverges from the conventional national myth of a triumphant process of claiming a promised land. Instead, his revisionist perspective tells a different story, one of conquest and devastation. While Southern novels hint at the historical context of their region, the most intricate portrayal of history can be found in *Blood Meridian*, a novel situated in the heart of the westward expansion. As Luce has observed, the novel's landscape imagery serves to disrupt the established ethos of the American West:

McCarthy's landscapes are not the renderings of the pastoral or picturesque or even the sublime west distributed to curious nineteenth-century Americans in the cultural centers back east. Rather, they tend to deconstruct and deromanticize the mid-nineteenth-century west and the imperialism that claimed, tamed and absorbed it as part of America. (Luce 2017)

Likewise, Ann Pancake's novel deals with another American region that is not only ecologically vulnerable but also ravaged by the neo-liberal capitalist aspirations. The Appalachian Mountains, older than the Himalayas, boast

diverse ecosystems that span from temperate to arctic climatic zones. However, on a daily basis, they face deforestation and the explosive removal of layers of mountains to extract coal seams. The displaced soil, known as 'overburden,' is deposited into the valleys, leading to pollution, floods, and the creation of barren lands. Amidst these environmental concerns, mountaintop-removal mining poses a substantial threat to the people residing in the region. These issues are intrinsically linked to the lives of the mountaineers, and it is within this context that Ann Pancake sets her novel. While the ecological damage is evident in the flattened skylines and disrupted ecosystems, Pancake's book vividly places the individuals at the heart of this messy narrative.

Colonisation, Xenophobia and Systemic Ecological Violence

In *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), Judith Butler advances the notion that power is not merely a force of opposition but, rather significantly, a fundamental element upon which our existence depends. It is also a force that resides within us, constituting and preserving our self-identities. As Butler puts it, what may initially seem like external power, exerted upon individuals and compelling them into subservience, ultimately takes on a psychological dimension that shapes the subject's self-conceptualisation.

In this context, the term “subjection” denotes the dual process of individuals becoming subordinated by power and simultaneously becoming subjects themselves. Its purpose is to establish and perpetuate social categories that render individuals vulnerable to linguistic, psychological, and historical changes. According to Butler, the mechanisms by which individuals are often shaped by submission serve as a means to securely access the advantages of aligning with power. Butler’s argument proves to be highly relevant when analysing the power dynamics and identity discourses presented in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been*. Within these two novels, themes of militarised practices, economic subjugation, and a collective atmosphere of silence, indifference, and complicit consent concerning various forms of ecological and human violence emerge as dominant and revealing features.

In *Blood Meridian*’s narrative, American colonists, from 1849 to 1850, waged systematic, brutal wars against their neighbours, the Native Americans, Mexicans, Indians, Spanish, Apaches, and others, labelling them all as “robbers,” “a race of degenerates,” and “barbarians” (McCarthy 1985, 33). They did this in the name of protecting civilisation and scientific advancement. As would be expected, American military incursions in *Blood Meridian* promote “ethnotyping,” or the clichéd portrayal of individuals classified based on a set of xenotypes that are immortalised in bronze. In contrast to nearby entities

that are seen as inherently different (a derogatory ethnotype), the ethnotype strengthens a desired self-identity (Westphal 2007, 144). Imperialism is both a concept and praxis. In this context, Judge Holden's authority, both as a leader and as a promoter of Western culture, is maintained through his linguistic dominance over his compliant followers. According to Judge Holden, "Words are things. Their authority transcends [the Speaker's] ignorance of their meaning" (McCarthy 1985, 85).

He leverages his linguistic prowess and expertise to awe and persuade the kid and fellow American combatants to engage in his imperialistic endeavour. He declares that "God made this world, but he didn't make it to suit everybody" (19). On the basis of his contorted logic of God's inherent discrimination, he states that "War is God. It's the testing of one's will and the will of another" (248). Interestingly, Judge Holden institutes a secular framework wherein divine or religious influences are set aside. Within this framework, he proclaims a structured hierarchy marked by exclusion, identity clashes, and the dominance of a singular white authority. As a leader, Judge Holden pledges to secure wealth, employment, and authority for the combatant white Americans: "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). Consequently, the white Americans perceive themselves as superior to their less civilised neighbours, a euphemism for the

Native Americans, whom they believe require discipline and control.

The need for money and substantial military budgets among Americans in *Blood Meridian* serves to further legitimise xenophobic and hierarchical perspectives toward both the natural world and established societal structures. Judge Holden, for example, lays claim to knowledge in fields such as “ecology,” “teleology,” “palaeontology,” and “science” while he “speaks in stones and trees” (105-6). However, this scientific knowledge is tainted by corruption, economic interests, and political motivations. Throughout the conflicts in the novel, settlements are abandoned, ecological orders are disrupted, and the very landscape is marred by fires, with huts, abodes, and entire villages left in ruins. The violence unleashed during these battles pollutes rivers and lakes, staining them with “blood and dead bodies,” resulting in the despoilment of others’ lands and natural resources. This victory by American colonisers in *Blood Meridian* is therefore rendered pyrrhic. As Gareth Cornwell (2015) has aptly noted, American militarism in the novel stands as a foundational element of the oppression of the vulnerable, particularly women, and contributes to the devastation of the nonhuman world. He observes that “the entire thrust of the novel is to unseat the anthropomorphic perspective that privileges humanity over the rest of nature” (533).

I concur with Cornwell's argument, emphasizing that the spatial and environmental brutality exhibited by the colonisers in *Blood Meridian* underscores a deeply ingrained problematic attitude that relegates women, nature, and animals to subservient and object-like roles. However, it is crucial to recognise that the acts of pollution and deforestation in *Blood Meridian* can also be viewed as calculated methods aimed at obliterating and concealing the history of the colonised and the crimes of the colonisers. Spaces, landscapes, and places inherently bear witness to the history, achievements, values, and memories of their inhabitants. In this context, the Americans in *Blood Meridian* attempt to erase the traces of their transgressions by demolishing the cultural heritage of others (Native Americans), leaving behind "ruined villages, buildings, and old churches," (300) and engaging in the grim task of collecting and searching for the bones of their victims.

Susan Kollin (2001) is of the view that *Blood Meridian* characterises "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" (562). Kollin views the colonial landscape as a battleground where violent conflicts take place, leading to the establishment and propagation of specific types of domination over both humans and nature, along with the creation of hierarchical systems, which McCarthy pres-

ents in his work as “the lack of fully developed female characters in his Westerns and its obsession with Anglo-American masculinity” (Kollin, 2001, 569). Indeed, the aggressive and militarised structure depicted in *Blood Meridian* imparts masculine traits to culture, the economy, and social behaviour. During periods of warfare and heightened displays of physical violence, women find themselves with limited opportunities to participate meaningfully.

James Der Derian in *The Value of Security* (1998) argues that in the contemporary times “out of fear, for gain, or in the pursuit of glory, states will go to war because they can” (30). Der Derian's discussion centres on the security rhetoric put forth by George Bush in 1992, which asserts that “the enemy is unpredictability. The enemy is instability.” This rhetoric paved the way for the American war in Iraq, considered as “the enemy other that helped to redefine the Western identity” and “the deterritorialization of the state and the disintegration of a bipolar order” (Der Derian 41). The Iraq war exposed a realm of virtual adversaries and stimuli, prepping the terrain for demographic and territorial violence, while affording governments and administrations unrestricted authority in determining the extent and reasons for employing force. However, the concept of virtual demonisation and the punishment of difference extend to the national level.

This is particularly evident in the context of the Appalachian region portrayed in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, often labelled as an “internal colony” (Anglin 1993, 285) and a “culture of poverty” (Billings 2016, 57). Appalachians are frequently depicted in American media as “backward, unintelligent, fatalistic, and complacent people who are complicit in their own subjugation. Simultaneously, these ‘submissive’ mountaineers are perceived as among the most ruthless and violent individuals in the United States” (Fisher 1993, 1). As they are stereotyped as different and unpredictable, Appalachian residents are perceived as a potential threat to the unity and progressive image of the American nation. Consequently, there is a push to civilize them, and their landscape, much like the colonised territory in *Blood Meridian*, is remodelled to conform to modern developmental standards.

Operating under the guise of developing the underdeveloped Appalachian Mountain region, American authorities grant mining companies permission to transform the area. As described in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, they resort to drastic measures such as “blasting 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). This drive for progress and industrialisation necessitates a reshaping of the landscape and the abandonment of the history and ecology of the region, which was once teeming with “strange animals and plants, giant ferns and ancient trees, trapped down

there for 250 million years, captured, crushed, and hard-squeezed into-power” (Pancake, 312). The residents of Yellowroot endure the consequences of this industrial transformation. They breathe in “cancer-causing dust” (83), and their previously lush land deteriorates into a desolate landscape filled with “dead damp leaves,” “dead branches,” “dead trees,” “full-sized dead fish,” and “bulldozed and slaughtered trees, hundreds of them” (352). In *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, the monopolised industry of coal economy mirrors the colonial endeavour depicted in *Blood Meridian*. It exacerbates poverty levels, unemployment, and restricts opportunities for existence outside of specific economic structures, subjecting individuals to what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983) term “schizophrenic capitalism” (33).

Schizophrenic capitalism perpetuates hierarchical divisions, segregating those in positions of power and socio-political authority, characterised as “the paranoid despotic signs,” from other economic actors designated as “the sign-figure of the schizo as a unit of decoded flux” (Deleuze and Guattari, 260). For instance, foreign workers in Yellowroot experience a lack of meaningful human interaction with the local residents, as their daily lives revolve around basic activities like eating, showering, and sleeping (Pancake, 79). They work without forging cultural or social ties to the places they inhabit. Upon relocating to Raleigh for work, Lace’s family becomes immersed in a foreign space as part of their integration

into the free market. However, this new environment proves to be rife with racism and hierarchical divisions. Lace articulates this by stating, “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” (Pancake, 195). This harsh treatment leads Lace to discontinue her university education, unable to tolerate the demeaning attitudes toward Appalachians.

The inhabitants of Yellowroot do not hold an antagonistic stance against science, technology, industrialisation, or integration into American culture, nor do they harbour romantic or idealised notions about nature. They are, in essence, realists. A case in point is Lace, who echoes the sentiments of many in Yellowroot when she emphasises, “I was not against coal mines: 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” (Pancake, 301). Lace is advocating for a balanced socioeconomic approach that safeguards the rights of her indigenous community and their environment, recognising that “killing the trees ... for certain meant the death of Yellowroot” (300).

When the residents of Yellowroot attempt peaceful dissent against their deteriorating circumstances, min-

ing companies respond with repression, even mobilising their workers to counter-protest or speak at permit hearings against the residents, labelling them as “Lyon Strips,” effectively turning them into what appears to be a brainwashed, oppositional force (Pancake, 302). Likewise, politicians prove ineffectual in representing the interests of Yellowroot’s residents, who quickly understand the disloyalties of West Virginia politicians (275). The fact that peaceful dissent in Appalachia is met with traditional colonial tactics like intimidation, imprisonment, and threats of harm underscores a pervasive preoccupation with security in the United States. It appears that a significant portion of Americans tolerates violence against dissent and even sanctions elements of collective punishment and internal exclusion. Much like the situation in Iraq, Appalachians find themselves entangled in anti-terrorism laws and accusations. As Larry Wilson, the president of Yellow Creek Concerned Citizens (YCCC), points out, Appalachian people are conditioned to remain silent and repressed, as acts of protest are viewed as “acts of individual sabotage or terrorism” (as quoted in Fisher 73). This campaign of terrorising and silencing the Appalachian community is a deliberate strategy aimed at creating passive, dependent individuals, particularly men, whose inability to take action and effect change undermines their capacity for self-expression.

The prevailing culture of security in the United States reintroduces individuals marked by anger, guilt, and a pro-

ensity for violence. These individuals cope with these negative emotions through self-absorption, dependency, and an overall sense of indifference. Consequently, despite the dire circumstances facing Yellowroot, which clearly warrant a reasonable degree of political and social attention in contemporary democratic America, the majority of the population appears to consciously turn a blind eye. Lace's observation that "Nothing on TV, nothing in books, nothing in magazines looked much like our place or much like us" reflects the internalised feelings of inferiority, fear, and anger harboured by Appalachian people (Pancake, 82). These sentiments hinder their unity as a resistant group and grassroots movement. In contrast to *Blood Meridian*, where the kid and American fighters externalise their anger and violence towards others, the people of Appalachia tend to direct their oppression inward. Within families like Lace and her husband's, they live as adversaries, and their children absorb negative emotions that not only perpetuate their victimisation and isolation but also disrupt their normal patterns of identity.

Bant, for instance, lacks familial love and understanding, and she disrespects her passive and helpless father, projecting her anger and frustration onto her mother, holding her responsible for her choice of spouse: "You're the one married him, how could you not see how he is?" (Pancake, 82). Despite her discontent, Bant is unable to alter the course of her own life. She fails to complete her education and is unsuccessful in finding the right partner

to love. Her brother, Dane, experiences a sense of isolation and guilt stemming from his physical fragility and occupation as a cleaner.

The Anthropocentric Discourse of Gendered Subjugation

Although the historical contexts in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and *Blood Meridian* significantly differ, their discussions of masculinity and femininity exhibit transhistorical characteristics. In both works, men and women are ensnared and offered up as sexualised commodities within militarised and violent socio-economic frameworks. Jacques Derrida and Carol Adams delve into the intricate interconnections and consequences of the abuse of animals and women on one hand and the military, economic, and political dominion inherent in Western cultures and systems on the other. Derrida, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, posits that “the full transcendence to the human requires the sacrifice of the animal and the animalistic,” which, in turn, facilitates a symbolic system that permits the “non-criminal putting to death,” not only of animals but also of humans by designating them as animal-like (Derrida, 39). Derrida introduces the concept of “carno-phallogocentrism” to unveil the systematic legitimisation and justification of (colonial) violence, mass slaughters, and wars within Western democratic societies. This extends the concept of “the West’s phallic” to encompass the notion of “sacrifice in killing animals and in dehumanizing the other” (1).

In alignment with Derrida's postulations, Carol Adams (1990) delves into the "sexual politics of meat" entrenched in Western culture, where masculinity remains deeply entwined with various material, ideological, and symbolic elements. This involves notions that men require meat, possess an entitlement to it, and that meat consumption is a male-associated activity linked with virility (Adams, 4). According to Adams, Western masculinity perpetuates the idea that "the woman is animalized, while the animal is sexualized" (4). Derrida's and Adams' arguments are directly applicable to the American imperialist and capitalist discourses in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, respectively. Sexuality in both novels serves as an indicator of conforming to specific, invariably hierarchical gender roles within society, signifying a structured process of identity consolidation in the United States.

In *Blood Meridian*, a multifaceted dynamic unfolds regarding the treatment of native animals upon the arrival of the Americans. American fighters engage in hunting not only for sustenance but also as a means of exercising their dominance over the environment. They shoot various animals, including "goats," "fowls," "deer," as well as "cats, dogs, and sick horses," often resorting to brutal tactics such as "beating the screaming horses into submission," leading to the silent demise of these animals (McCarthy, 137 & 165). While the violence against animals may appear random, it underscores a systematic disregard for ecological equilibrium and the rights of

animals, a stance that doesn't align with the American assertion of civilising the indigenous peoples. Consequently, the maltreatment of animals in *Blood Meridian* introduces new social, cultural, and political norms, inherently hierarchical in nature.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin shed light on the distinction between the relationship of indigenous peoples and their prey, which was not inherently hierarchical, in contrast to the English perspective. The English believed that hunting symbolised the divinely sanctioned ascendancy of humanity over the animal kingdom (Huggan and Tiffin 2006, 58). The adoption of English colonial practices, especially anti-animal ones, by victorious white Americans in *Blood Meridian* reveals deeper identity issues. These Americans celebrate their virility and racial domination by indulging in the consumption of meat and engaging in sexual practices. Following their meals, which include a variety of meats, they partake in acts of conquest, such as rape and sexual dominance over the local girls (McCarthy, 152).

This animalisation and sacrifice of women provide American fighters with a source of self-esteem and meaning in life, derived from their sexual and military supremacy over others. The war-related sexual violence and the widespread public acts of sexual aggression in *Blood Meridian* not only illustrate the gendered aspect of warfare, as sexual assaults are employed as political in-

struments to intimidate and degrade women and their male protectors, but also serve to establish American white power and superiority as beyond reproach and immune to repercussions.

The absence of genuine and natural male-female relationships in *Blood Meridian* serves to underscore sexual violence as an inherent facet of the social fabric and ethnic violence as an inherent element of the political landscape within the novel. American characters do not engage in familial or romantic associations, lacking mothers, wives, girlfriends, sisters, or daughters. Instead, American men inhabit a dehumanised and unfeeling environment, where space and time merely serve as a backdrop for competing militarised expressions of masculinity. These environmental changes overtly mirror and expose imbalances of power.

Consequently, the recurring scenes of American fighters consuming meat and subsequently asserting their sexual dominance over women lay bare the intrinsically disgraceful nature of the imperialist economy and politics depicted in the novel. Women are deprived of their traditional, honourable wartime roles such as cooking, nursing, or doing laundry. Instead, both white and colonised 'indigenous' women are relegated to roles as "pimps" and "whores of every age and size" (McCarthy, 145). Moreover, white male fighters do not require the services of nurses, as they are dehumanised, sexual-

ised, and subject to sacrifice as well. Both Judge Holden and other leaders, like Glanton, exhibit no compassion or regard for their white subordinates. Injured fighters are either “finished off” or left behind to perish as their leaders ride away (McCarthy, 152). This notion of sacrifice and vulnerability thus extends to both the colonised and the colonisers, affecting both females and males.

In contrast to the masculine and colonial economic system depicted in *Blood Meridian*, the capitalist framework in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* lacks a strong male presence and is notably desexualised. Instead, in Yellowroot, women play crucial roles as agents of development and productivity, even though they remain marginalised and subordinated. Lace, much like many other Appalachian women in the story, transitions from a traditional role as a housewife to that of a working woman at Dairy Queen. Here, we witness “big women and little kids working silent and serious on hot dogs and sundaes,” emphasising their dedication to their work (Pancake, 5). Lace and her fellow Appalachian women work tirelessly, often likened to “humped animals.” Lace is critical of her husband Jimmy, who is unemployed and in a state of despondency, leading her to remark, “Jimmy sat at home paralyzed, like a girl” (Pancake, 138). In this way, Lace effectively emasculates Jimmy, turning him into a burden and even an adversary.

As women like Lace provide the primary support for their families while men remain at home, Ann Pancake

challenges the conventional stereotype that “men know men have access to the truth, not women,” revealing the sexual dynamics within the capitalist structure as rooted in necessity and urgency (10). Lace articulates 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 underscore the constriction of space and time in Yellowroot, which becomes a disconcerting and confining arena for internal and external trials, responsibilities, and transformations, encompassing “a complete exchange of gender identity of which erotic behaviour was but one small part” (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988, 266). Lace’s daughter Bant, much like her mother, is dissatisfied with her job, which involves “painting scab walls” (51). Similarly, her 12-year-old son, Dane, expresses his discontent with his role as a caretaker and house cleaner at Mrs. Taylor’s, where he is assigned tasks like cleaning the kitchen and bathroom (46). Due to his job and his physical fragility, Dane is perceived as “even more girl than girl” (44).

The phenomenon of men becoming more effeminate and women adopting more masculine characteristics in Yellowroot highlights more profound ecological and socio-economic issues in contemporary America. Within the novel, human and cultural spaces are diminishing

and losing their vitality. The characters are disoriented, leading to disruptions in their life choices and their familial and communal relationships. For instance, Dane expresses his irritation, disappointment, and confusion regarding his father's passivity, stating that it "irritated and disappointed and confused him" (82). Dane's uncertainty about his gender roles and sexuality pushes him to retreat into his dimly lit room, reminiscing about his grandmother, who was more accepting of his softer qualities compared to others like Corey, Jimmy Make, Lace, and Bant who exhibit varying degrees of intolerance, denial, or indifference toward his perceived lack of traditional virility (112). Despite his age, Dane is keenly aware of his deviation from the typical masculine norms in his Appalachian culture, yet he struggles to articulate his feelings and resorts to being a good listener (44).

Gillian Rose's (1996) concept of "Masculine Dwelling" underscores how the distinction between authentic and inauthentic spaces is constructed in gendered terms. Material real spaces are seen as the product of masculinist power, and their materiality is closely linked to their particular form of masculinity. On the other hand, non-real spaces are also perceived as an effect of masculinist power, with their lack of reality serving as a sign of feminisation (Rose 1996, 58-9). Dane's ever-shifting and uncertain real spaces result in a displacement of his relationship with his culture and the natural environment. He grapples with the tension between his masculine imaginative spaces and his subjugating realities.

Similarly, Bant, described as “born with the age in her” (140), along with the Yellowroot landscape, is deprived of normal physical, emotional, and mental growth. Instead, Bant and her surrounding ecological system endure distressing changes and experiences that prematurely age them, leaving them devoid of a tangible existence beyond the narratives established by authority figures. In this context, aging ceases to represent the accumulation of physical, psychological, and social experiences or the acquisition of wisdom and knowledge over time. Rather, it signifies the suspension of time’s progress and development, embodying an abnormal physical and psychological phenomenon that suggests an enduring adherence to restrictive discourses. This form of aging is indicative of linguistic, cultural, and ecological deterioration.

The Dialectics of Spatial-Ecological Consciousness and Self Awareness

In *The Plausible World*, Bertrand Westphal suggests that individuals and communities have the potential to deconstruct the authoritative and militaristic aspects of Western culture by envisioning “a new interpretation of the world as plausible, postmodern possible worlds within a dynamic and evolving environment, while eternal truths remain as abstract concepts” (Westphal 2013, 4). Echoing this argument, Jacque Derrida posits that all concepts are “arbitrary signs or outcomes of differentiation” generated by systems of oppression. Derrida

da argues that to attain true liberation, signs require “a structure that precedes any entity they may represent” (Derrida 2008, 99). Both Westphal and Derrida contend that people can transcend deeply ingrained patriarchal and hierarchical connections and beliefs by constructing alternative worlds that are free from preconceived notions and stereotypes.

The characters of the kid in *Blood Meridian* and Bant in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* can be interpreted as embodying a postmodern and adaptable perception of space. This perspective allows them to break free from the repressive bonds and subjugation imposed by homogenisation and oppression in both novels. In *Blood Meridian*, the kid stands out as the only character who challenges Judge Holden’s imperialist narrative, recognising that “the judge was a man like all men” (McCarthy 1985, 259). Consequently, he rejects the notion of racial superiority, viewing it as empty: “Whatever his antecedents, he was something wholly other than their sum, nor was there a system by which to divide him back into his origins, for he would not go. No old, outdated maps” (270). The kid’s detachment from the American empire and its racially biased socio-political structures not only involves the reconfiguration of his connections as a white American individual and the discipline of his sensual needs and desires but also signifies his act of repentance.

In contrast to the kid, Bant in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* gradually comes to embrace her inseparable ties to her homeland. Following her grandmother's passing, Bant reflects on the significance of her emotional connection to the mountains, wondering, "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" (Pancake 2007, 25). Bant's enduring and dutiful bond with her natural surroundings burdens her with feelings of guilt and anger, directed towards herself, her family, and her community, who fail to meet her expectations.

As Bant begins to comprehend the decisions made by others to relinquish their land and community to the mining company, including her repressed father and brother, she develops a new and forgiving perspective on her land and identity. Bant transitions from seeking what is lost to considering how she can find happiness, security, and freedom. Her ability to unite with her community, as she states, "In times like these, you have to grow big enough inside to hold both the loss and the hope" (357), not only restores the fractured mother-daughter relationship but also rebuilds her Appalachian identity as equal and deserving.

Appalachian people grapple with a significant problem of individualism and apathy, which, in Bant's view, aim to "leave you empty inside" (102). She realises that

coming together with her fellow Yellowroot community members, who share the same feelings of isolation and repression, serves as an act of resistance. Similar to the kid, Bant forges a new connection with nature and place that transcends the symbolic and embodies the genuine conditions of her era and history. Her decision to remain in Yellowroot is based on her desire rather than obligation. Even though the Appalachian region still faces discriminatory practices, Bant boldly asserts that “the machine between us but no fear” (354).

Conclusion

This paper undertakes a postcolonial-ecocritical analysis of the manifestations of ecological and human violence in the novels *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been*. It posits that violence is a deliberate instrument within ongoing processes of cultural, political, and economic militarisation and securitisation in America, shaping American identity as marked by violence, anger, and gender bias, while also rendering American land as exclusionary.

Within the narrative of the two novels, the characters' perceptions of their homeland are manipulated and tainted, resulting in a perception of their subjugation and injustice as inevitable and predetermined. This underscores the inextricable connection between the American legacy of civilising border regions and the

contemporary American practice of applying double standards to the rights of minorities residing within its borders, such as the Appalachians. Nevertheless, the paper contends that certain characters in these novels, notably Bant and the kid, manage to break free from these constrictive and oppressive cultural and economic roles. They achieve this by reframing their self-identity and that of others, transitioning from a mindset of opposition to one of distinct individuality.

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