Writing “Mother Earth”: Red Power Newspapers, Environmental Justice, and Simon J. Ortiz’s Poetry

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Protecting tribal lands and their natural resources has been of paramount importance to the survival of indigenous peoples in the Americas since contact. Colonial encroachments on their land, flora, and fauna are deadly threats to and assaults on culture, dignity, and identity. As Jace Weaver (Cherokee) observes, “Environmental destruction is simply one manifestation of the colonialism and racism that have marked Indian/White relations since the arrival of Columbus in 1492” (“Introduction” 3). The “manifestation” of land-focused colonialism affected the interdependent relationship between the people and their land, endangering an indigenous worldview that generally concerns peaceful and just coexistence, a vision that has developed within the land where the people define and recognize themselves. During the dislocation and establishment of reservations in the late nineteenth century and relocation in the 1950s and 1960s, many American Indians were “robbed of... a numinous landscape where every mountain and lake held meaning” (12).

In the following years, the Red Power Movement’s concerns and political agenda focused on the control of indigenous lands, water, and resources at both tribal and pan-Indian levels. Activists and writers appealed to the issue by highlighting the destructive connection between capitalist corporations and the US government. “We Hold the Rock!” (1970), an article in the first issue of Alcatraz Newsletter explaining the Occupation of Alcatraz by the Indians of All Tribes (IAT), exemplifies the stance: “[The US government] has systematically stolen our lands, destroyed once beautiful and natural landscape, killed-off the creatures of nature, polluted air and water, ripped open the very bowels of our earth in senseless greed” (1). IAT’s summary of US colonialism not only speaks for all Native Americans as a community but also calls for local histories, recalling Frantz Fanon’s observation that in decolonizing struggle, “the search for truth in local situations is the responsibility of the community” (139). “Colonialism in America” (1970) in The Warpath, published by the United
Native Americans (UNA), reveals how and why “local situations” matter to the community:

In 1871-1876 U.S. business interests subsidized the buying of hides of buffalo in order to destroy the food supply of the Indian people. The U.S. Army destroyed by burning thousands of acres of grassland in the North Central states near the Canadian border, to discourage the natural movement of buffalo. . . . This genocide by destroying the food supply continues until today with the threat to Indian fishing. . . . We cannot know the history of the struggle against oppression in our own states, if we do not know the fight that went on in each part of this land. . . . We must learn about the struggle against the Army representing the interests of the railroad companies, against the drive of the cotton growers to acquire more land, against capitalism and its drive to accumulate capital through robbing the Indians’ land and natural resources. (17)

The article underscores specific local situations with references to “buffalo” and “fish” that were important food resources for many tribes of the Great Plains and the Pacific Northwest. The longstanding resistance to colonial encroachment on tribal lands that culminated in the late nineteenth century serves as a legacy of contemporary “struggle,” and food resources have become a crucial part of indigenous ecological discourses since then.

The Indian fishing rights struggle in the 1960s was catalytic, encouraging “the fight” to continue “in each part of” (17) the United States. The National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) staged fishing rights protests along the Pacific Northwest coast as an attempt to recover and maintain indigenous traditional ways of living that were to be protected by treaties. The Salish people of Puget Sound, for example, depended on fishing in the Columbia River while Euro-Americans in the region used the river for sporting, leisure, or monetary benefits. The fishing rights were not only about “the salmon and steelhead trout,” the people’s primary source of food, but also about an indigenous worldview: “[T]he fish also kept their world in balance; there was a spiritual, even symbiotic connection between the two” (Shreve 121). Protests over fishing rights delivered an imperative environmental message about colonial threats to indigenous lands and resources essential to the cultural, economic, and spiritual survival and sustenance of indigenous peoples.

Red Power activists and writers in the 1970s and 1980s fostered awareness of such environmental issues while resisting federal laws and regulations. They became more explicit about articulating new, modern contexts for indigenous beliefs in “coexistence,” “balance,” and “harmony” with nature. A series of federal enactments in the early to mid-1970s, which turned out to be rather ineffective, much like the precedent treaties in the nineteenth century, triggered those developments.1 Despite the enactments, corporate encroachments on tribal communities and lands continued in the following years, especially in the US
Southwest. During that time, NIYC highlighted in various articles in ABC: Americans Before Columbus how ongoing corporate encroachments endangered tribal lands and people. Michael A. Reilley’s article “Orme Dam Would Destroy Culture” (1981), for instance, asserts that a dam project in Yavapai land would lead to the demise of the entire small tribe and its culture based on the land (7). Ellen Leitzer’s “Ski Resort Threatens American Indian Traditions” (1981) similarly argues that the imminent building of a ski resort at San Francisco Peaks in Flagstaff, Arizona, would damage the “sacred” mountain and its harmonious relationship with adjacent tribal peoples (8).

The concerns in ABC’s articles over tribal environments can be understood in relation to a definition of Red Power that Lehman Brightman (Cherokee), the president of UNA, proposed in The Warpath. Stressing the need for militancy, Brightman calls for “any step, to take any action to RESTORE once and for all times the NATURAL WAYS OF THE PEOPLE,” which suggests a radical restoration of indigenous perspectives. He also expresses the idea in both literal and metaphorical ways by evoking the indigenous cosmos through a prayer ceremony that empowers indigenous peoples: “If this is to be militant, then I ask my father, the Sun and my mother, the earth, that they will grant me the life and strength to be the most militant of all” (11).

As the newspapers demonstrate, Red Power environmental perspectives such as “balance” and “harmony” converge in the concept of “Mother Earth.” The contested idea was developed as both mythical belief and rhetorical metaphor in representing indigenous land. For many indigenous peoples, all land is sacred “Mother Earth”; as Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) notes, “the ancient Pueblo people called the earth the Mother Creator of all things in this world” (27). In a political development of this belief, Red Power activists maintained that Euro-Americans and the government had no right to trade lands, as the NIYC poignantly asserts: “The land is our spiritual mother whom we can no easier sell than our own physical mother. NIYC will resist, to the death if necessary, anymore of our mother being sold into slavery” (“National” 3). This statement is supported by a photo from the newspaper, which features an open road that connects the sky and the land, while the caption rhetorically comments, “Mother Earth and Father Sky: The courts decide who owns them” (4; see fig. 1).

Notably, the Red Power struggle was both literal and poetic, and its increasing pan-indigenous discourse attempted to apply the rhetoric of “Mother Earth” to hemispheric situations. For example, in the latter part of “We Hold the Rock!” IAT on Alcatraz calls for the solidarity of all indigenous peoples in the Americas: “Indians of All Tribes greet our brothers and sisters... upon our Earth Mother.... [and] represent many tribes of the United States as well as Canada, Alaska, and Central and South America.... We are Indians! Our Earth Mother awaits our voices” (1). Here, “Mother Earth” combined with the third
person pronoun “we” represents all Natives from different regions as a single family. This rhetoric attests to Red Power activists’ growing awareness of the situation of all indigenous peoples whose lands and cultures were endangered by colonial encroachments.

The early poetry of Simon J. Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo) engages in close conversations with these contexts of the Red Power Movement. The representations of indigenous land in his poetry share and develop the movement’s environmental concerns about and resistance to capitalist-driven colonial impositions. In his 1981 MELUS essay, “Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism,” Ortiz affirms poetic resistance to US colonialism in American Indian literature by acknowledging that “Indian writers [have] a responsibility to advocate for their people’s...control of land and natural resources; and to look also at...the needless and wasteful exploitation of land and people” (12). Indeed, his insistence on this “responsibility” corresponds to his role as an activist-writer. Working with NIYC as the editor of ABC during the peak of the Red Power Movement, Ortiz well understood the legacy and implication of the local, national, and international struggles of indigenous peoples. Rooted in indigenous belief, Ortiz’s awareness of environmental concerns and ethics and relevant aesthetics developed over the span of his involvement with the movement and are reflected in his poems that ABC initially printed or reprinted and in other poems that he wrote and printed later in his career. ABC’s strategic printings of Ortiz’s poems on relevant themes helped further dramatize Red

Power rhetoric of indigenous peoples’ connections with the environment. The metaphors and traditional perspectives in his writing reference indigenous places, both specific and general, ultimately speaking for “Mother Earth.” By representing this contested idea, Ortiz demonstrates a poetic resistance with a warrior stance that embodies and promotes Red Power in indigenous literary forms engaging ceremonial expressions.

“My Grandfathers Used to Use This Place”: Being a New Warrior, Resisting Capitalism, and Protecting Indigenous Land

As evidenced in the fishing rights struggle, Red Power activists and writers, as modern “warriors,” attempted to establish middle ground between actual battles and legal fights by engaging various lawsuits and physical protest actions over indigenous lands and resources. As a new form of resistance, the struggle with federal laws and treaties has developed since the turn of the twentieth century. Donald L. Fixico (Shawnee and Muscogee Creek) explains the transformation in *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources* (2011):

> The days of sending warriors against the U.S. Army have faded into history, and Indian leaders have adopted new tactics as the battleground has shifted. A long history of exploitation has rudely taught today’s sophisticated leaders to depend on the law, for they now understand that trust relations with the United States are their best weapons to use in defending their rights and resources in the federal courts.

(177)

Fixico’s insightful commentary indicates how “American Indian Wars” continued through the warrior stance that Red Power activists adopted for every aspect of their actions and protests, and which many Native writers similarly engaged for their poetic resistance.

Much of Ortiz’s early writing powerfully enacts the militant and legal struggle of the Red Power era by contesting the use of federally designated lands such as national parks and monuments, which originally belonged to indigenous peoples. His poems, in particular, point to the colonialism of the federal regulations that are imposed on tribal peoples’ continued use of these traditional lands. Ortiz’s poetic resistance is based on his understanding of how the advent of the Mericano (Americans in Acoma Keres), especially since the 1848 Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty between the United States and Mexico, accelerated the destruction of tribal lands and natural resources in the US Southwest as the federal government and courts enforced laws and treaties that were alien to Natives and applied them in self-serving, surreptitious ways that facilitated corporate encroachments in the region. Ortiz strongly condemns American actions: “[T]he Aacqumeh hanoh (Acoma People) had never seen thieves like the Mericano before . . . who
stole unto the land, claiming it” (Woven 347). Red Power journalism’s critique of the treachery of federal regulations on “the land” provides specific illustrations of Ortiz’s remark. For example, “Indian Land Fight,” an editorial by the UNA in *Warpath* in 1970, highlights that the “federal, public domain land” is “systematically ravaged—by giant corporations, who sign unbreakable 99 year leases with the federal government for this purpose.” The editorial states that “the environmental blight” in those areas is “largely a product of this corporate stronghold on the land” and that “The Indians’ struggle to regain some of this land is a significant blow against this monopoly domination of natural resources” (17).

Such critique of the pact between the federal government and corporate enterprise in terms of “monopoly domination of natural resources” is dramatic in “Grand Canyon Christmas Eve 1969,” a free-verse poem that was printed in Ortiz’s *Naked in the Wind* (1971), his first published poetry chapbook, and reprinted in *A Good Journey* (1977). This poem’s biting humor and rebellious diction sets the tone for the writing that Ortiz subsequently published in *ABC*, speaking for and appealing to indigenous environmental rights in the 1970s and 1980s. Biographically, “Grand Canyon Christmas Eve 1969” reflects a real-life event that occurred during the Occupation of Alcatraz Island by the IAT, which began on 20 November 1969; as the Occupation gained national and international attention by the year’s end, Ortiz hoped that he might participate, so he traveled from Albuquerque with his family, his little son Raho and his wife, Agnes (Diné), driving along I-40. Because of the difficulty of the long trip during the winter, they had to stop near the Grand Canyon (Ortiz, Personal). Then, as described in the opening to the poem, Ortiz, Agnes, and Raho stayed at a camping area in Kaibab National Forest in the Canyon.

The poem’s speaker describes how he feels the wonders of nature as he finds himself in the “rhythms and melodies” (Ortiz, “Grand” 2) of all creatures around him in the forest made by the Colorado River. He sings of the life surrounding him, using an upbeat tone:

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time and wind and birds
and lizards, coyote, the whole earth
spirit of all those things,
breathing the earth up
wow! (6-10)
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He then expands his communication with nature:

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o the stars
o the moon
o the earth
the trees the ground
we have come to pay respect
to you, my mother earth,
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who makes all things
bless me
we are humble
bless my son
make him strong
bless my wife

bless me who prays
awestruck (18-29, 33-34)

The speaker’s diction expressing his emotion demonstrates traditional indigenous belief in “Mother Earth,” and his humble attitude paying respect and praying to the sanctified earth is understood as a ceremonial act. “Indian poetry,” Maurice Kenny (Mohawk) asserts, “has always been basically a ceremony of thanks to the Great Spirit, to Mother Earth” (13). The speaker thus restores the sense of a sacred site, the Grand Canyon, within an indigenous ceremony.

However, this blissful moment in which the speaker reconnects to the land, established in the speaker’s ceremony and call to freedom, is critically interrupted in the moment when he begins to look around the site to locate more wood for a campfire and encounters a federal policy imposed on him:

No Wood Gathering
Go Around Other Side of
Enclosed Area & Deposit
85¢ For Wood.
This is ridiculous,
you gotta be kidding,
dammit, my grandfathers
used to use this place
with bears and wolves,
even talked with them,
before you did,
and he got his wood here,
so I get firewood anyway,
mumbling, Sue me. (Ortiz, “Grand” 91-104)

The speaker’s spontaneous response may seem humorous and playful, yet this is a serious, rebellious gesture that corresponds to the contemporary struggles of indigenous peoples. As Ortiz’s actual failed trip to Alcatraz contextualizes the poem within the Occupation of Alcatraz Island, the poet emulates the ironic performance and rhetoric of the occupiers on the island when he claims his right to the free use of the natural resources in the Grand Canyon. Like Alcatraz Island, the Kaibab National Forest is a federally designated area where traditional indigenous rights to natural resources have been oppressed, usurped by colonialists, in contrast to previous times when the poet’s ancestors were “free” on the Canyon and other lands. The sarcastic stance against this situation is marked by the
imperative “Sue me,” an effective, although “mumbling,” response that invokes law and mocks the federal court.

Significantly, the speaker’s action is a gesture of unity with the Indians of All Tribes on Alcatraz who enacted similar resistance through their Alcatraz Newsletter. The occupiers argued that sovereignty could not be obtained by negotiation and legal argument alone. For instance, in a long legal statement in the Newsletter, “Is the Occupation of Alcatraz by the Indians of All Tribes Legal?” (1970), the occupiers’ attorney Aubrey Grossman contends that the history of the fraudulent association of the US government and federal court and the one-sided violation of treaties by the federal government caused and legitimized the Occupation:

Even if a treaty was legal, it can be voided by what happened after signing, or fraud discovered later. . . . The Indians have “gone to court” in the only ways they can by occupying the Island. . . . I believe they would like to have a Court review the history of robbery and treaty-breaking and fraud of Government against the Indians (for the sole purpose of getting their land) and then whether it was legal or not legal. (4)

This statement suggests that the insurrectional act of the Occupation responds directly to the self-serving concepts of legal action imposed by federal dispossession of tribal lands and resources. In this regard, the speaker’s claiming the fire wood without paying in the Grand Canyon enacts civil disobedience as resistance to the enforcement of colonialist federal laws. The invocation of “my grandfathers” (Ortiz, “Grand” 97) is a symbolic act of liberation from federal regulations; by evoking this precedent, the speaker unites past and present in justifying his action, as did the occupiers on Alcatraz.

In the final stanza of “Grand Canyon Christmas Eve 1969,” the speaker proposes to sing peacefully in this site. Myth, religion, culture, and nature are all mixed in his employment of Christian belief, through which he expresses a timeless Native sovereignty over the place he has occupied for the night:

i lie down on my earth bed,
here it is possible
to believe legends,
heroes praying on mountains,
to make winter chants,
the child being born coyote
his name to be the Christ,
believing even beyond eternity. (109-16)

Recalling the image of the Native trickster figure “coyote,” mingled with that of the “Christ,” the speaker’s words restore the Grand Canyon as a sacred site of Native culture, nature, and religion. Here, “heroes” references Native ancestors, particularly warriors, who walked around, communicated with, and hunted at the site. When the speaker claims the place as his “earth bed” (in arguing that this
bed is indeed his “home” land), he imagines himself within and “beyond eternity,” in the course of reclaiming and recovering the Grand Canyon as an eternal sovereign land for many Native Americans, including the (Ancient) Pueblo and Navajo, Hopi, and Havasupai peoples.

The united militancy of “heroes,” as warriors in the past and occupiers in the present on a contested land fighting US law and treaties, recalls the fact that Ortiz and many of the activists on Alcatraz were Vietnam War veterans. The image of “heroes” closely relates to Ortiz’s poetic description of contemporary “veterans,” a status to which many Native Americans were entitled because of their participation in various wars, such as World Wars I and II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. New Indian militancy in many Red Power protests stemmed in part from Native veterans’ disillusionment that while they had sacrificed to protect “America,” their land, in the wars, the US government had been exploiting indigenous labor and land. This is evident in ABC’s “No Matter How Small I Am, I’ll Fight All the Way to the End” (1982), which covers the peace talks between Navajos and Hopis, resulting in the designation of “Joint Use Areas” to settle land conflicts that had been caused by forced relocations. In that report, ABC printed the statement of Charles Kelly, a Navajo elder, who had been a code-talker during World War I and II. His words summarize the teaching of many elders: “I understand that I was protecting our people and our land, but today I’m disappointed with the government. Relocation will not solve any problem” (5).

The political presence of the old Native veteran who returns to protect traditional indigenous land and resources as a warrior parallels Ortiz’s crafted political commentary in “The Significance of a Veteran’s Day,” a poem first printed in Naked in the Wind and reprinted in Going for the Rain (1976). In the poem, the speaker states: “I am a veteran of at least 30,000 years” (29), alluding to the long history of indigenous peoples in the Americas. Then he speaks of surviving “foreign disease, missionaries, / canned food, Dick and Jane textbooks, IBM cards, / Western philosophies, General Electric” (45-47). The poet dismisses all of these colonial impositions and capitalist productions when he asserts that their “insignificance” destroys “the roots of pines and mountains” (33) on indigenous lands. This fighting spirit with regard to indigenous land is underscored when the metaphor “veteran,” which signifies a Native who has survived millennia of struggles, effectively combines with allusions to the Occupation of Alcatraz and to the actual celebration of the Veteran’s Day when this poem was written, 11 November 1970, the first Veteran’s Day after the end of the Occupation of Alcatraz.

The poetic resistance that Ortiz achieves in these poems develops the image of “hero” and “veteran” also found in “And the Land is Just as Dry,” printed in ABC in 1970, during the continuing Occupation of Alcatraz when Ortiz had begun working as the editor of the newspaper; he later reprinted the poem in A Good Journey (1977). The poem’s title is taken from a folk song by an activist folksinger
and songwriter Peter La Farge (Narragansett), “The Ballad of Ira Hayes” (1963), which celebrates Ira Hayes (Pima / Akimel O’odham), one of the five “heroes” of the US Marines to raise the US flag in mid-battle on Iwo Jima to reclaim the island from Japanese invaders during World War II. Inspired by the song, Ortiz relates the story of Hayes not as an American war “hero” but as a Native “veteran” (or warrior) who returns to his homeland, as did many other Native American veterans, to the Gila River Indian Communities, where Hayes grew up and attended schools before volunteering for the US Marines.

In “And the Land is Just as Dry,” Pima land stands for many other indigenous lands, and this emphasis on Hayes’s homeland refuses the perspective of colonialism that celebrates Native soldiers and code-talkers as “US” heroes. In dramatizing this aspect, the poem opens with a description of the local landscape halfway between Phoenix and Tucson, a valley where capitalist cities encroach on the stark, dry, humble landscape: “The horizons are still mine / the ragged peaks / the cactus the brush the hard brittle plants” (1-3). Although humble, the image of the landscape is described as sovereign through the repeated first-person possessive “mine” (4). The speaker then claims the landscape as “yours” (4), suggesting “we must be humble with them” (5); here, the series of pronouns links different Native identities, including the listener and the speaker, representing all Native Americans. Hayes’s Pima homeland then appears in the evocation of the river-irrigated fields that are sandwiched between the highway:

the green fields
a few a very few
Interstate highway 10 to Tucson
sacaton, bapchule,
my home is right there
off the road to Tucson
before the junction
on the map it is yellow
and dry, very dry
breathe tough swallow
look for rain and rain (6-16)

Rather than focusing on romanticized individual stories, the poem directs the reader-listener’s attention to a wider picture of Indian Country. The poem prioritizes Hayes’s identity as a Pima from lands along the Gila River where Pima people have lived and farmed for many centuries. Identification with Hayes and other Native Americans is indicated by the fact that his home is “off the road to Tucson,” that is, the I-10 highway that connects Phoenix and Tucson and the two local indigenous towns, “sacaton” and “bapchule.” Poetic resistance arises, however; as opposed to the two capitalized cities, no capitalization is given to the names of the two communities that represent indigenous homelands “on
the map” of the United States. Along with the use of lowercase for the towns, the emphatic expression “off the road” resists the erasure of indigenous homelands from the US map. This resistance restores indigenous spaces but still refuses integration into this larger cosmopolitan zone as the poem rescues Hayes from his iconized image as a generic “US” war hero.

In resisting the US colonial narrative that overshadows contemporary Native American issues, Ortiz interweaves Pima and Acoma traditions by blending a particular environmental concern and language pattern. This occurs when the speaker frequently references “water,” which evokes Native water rights struggles; strengthening this reference is the repetition of “dry, very dry” (14), which describes the general ecological status of Indian “reservations” in the Southwest, including Pima and Acoma. “[R]ain and rain” (16) expresses a wish for the revival of the named communities of “sacaton” and “bapchule,” where water is an all important element. “Rain” is a metaphor for revival in many of Ortiz’s poems, as exemplified in the prologue of Going for the Rain, in which Ortiz performs an old Acoma Pueblo prayer song, “Let us go for the Shiwana,” to summon the Pueblo deity, Shiwana (rainmaker), who the Acoma believe would revive them and their land (xiii). The repetition of verbs, “rain and rain,” also reflects a rhetorical style of Pima (and other O’odham languages) in which “reduplication” is used for aesthetic purposes and for grammatical functions, the marking of “plurality” on verbs and nouns (Zepeda 7). Here, reduplication has been carried over from Pima into English to form a part of Pima English, which points to how the traditional grammar pattern persists. The reduplications of “dry, very dry” and “rain and rain” ultimately make a rhetorical, political parallel between corporate encroachment (water development) and indigenous resistance (rainmaking).

This pattern becomes evident in the third and fourth stanzas that detail the Pima and other Natives working on a cotton farm run by an American company, “john jacobs”:

coming into Phoenix from north
you pass by john jacobs farm
many of the people there
they live in one room shacks
they’re provided for by john jacobs
pays them about $5 per day in sun
enough for quart of wine on Friday
ira got his water alright

the water which you think about
sometimes in empty desperation
it’s in those green very green fields
which are not mine

you call me a drunk Indian go ahead. (Ortiz, “And” 20-27, 40-44)
Hayes, who returned to his homeland, hoped to live a normal life, only to be exploited by the corporation like the cotton farm workers. Hayes and other Natives shared a common hardship that they experienced before and after World War II, as summarized in the poem’s description of “the green fields” (6) and “a few a very few” (7). The phrases reinforce the poetic juxtaposition of the lands; although “the green fields” coexist with the native landscape along the I-10, they contrast with the “yellow / and dry” (13-14) lands of the communities, as they have become useless without water. The description implies how capitalist-driven US federal policy affected the Gila River communities. From the 1880s to 1924, the communities suffered from consistent famines and drastic environmental changes due to the lack of water caused by the advance of non-Indian farmers, who, supported by the federal government that was initiating the early twentieth-century acculturation and relocation policies, appropriated land upstream of the Gila River. Meanwhile, Pima water rights were completely ignored, which threatened the way of life of the Akimel O’otham (“River People”), who had always been based on the river that they regarded as sacred. As a result, many Pima were forced to leave their communities and work for nearby mines, local non-Indian farmers, or the railroad. The poem’s description of Hayes’s water rights turned into just a “quart of wine,” which made him “a drunk Indian,” poignantly summarizes that history.

The representations in “And the Land is Just as Dry” reveal how contemporary capitalist exploitation affected both indigenous peoples and lands and was still, at an even greater scale, occurring during the Red Power era. In the early 1970s, the mass encroachments of US corporations—Tucson Gas and Electric, Utah International, Texas Transmission Corporation, Peabody Coal Company, and El Paso Natural Gas—were a major concern for many Native communities in the US Southwest, particularly the Navajo nation, one of the so-called “National Sacrifice Areas” in the Four Corners area of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah, which the US government uses as a “dumping ground” for toxic byproducts of its energy development. Such federally subsidized industry encroaching into the region was particularly “fueled by nuclear capabilities, fed by uranium,” and constituted “radioactive” or “internal” colonialism (Churchill and LaDuke 242-43). In response, the Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT) was established in 1975, presenting a united effort in protecting natural resources on tribal lands.

Ortiz’s “Long House Valley Poem: Black Mesa Rape” represents such context, condemning corporate encroachments with a powerful voice. The poem was printed in ABC in the fall of 1970, when the Occupation of Alcatraz was gaining national and international attention, and in A Good Journey in 1977. Interestingly, in the version that appears in A Good Journey, the subtitle “Black Mesa Rape” is dropped from the poem. The provocative expression in the original version, which corresponds to ABC’s radical, militant voice, was designed to effectively
deliver the sense of what happened when a sacred indigenous land, Black Mesa, was exploited by capitalist corporations. Combining news report and poetic representation, Ortiz explains in an epigraph that

the valley is in northern Arizona
near where it is proposed that one
of the largest power centers on the
continent will be built (1-4)

The epigraph is co-extensive with his role as a reporter for ABC who uncovered and published stories not widely known, reinforcing the poem’s already powerful stance of resistance.7

To dramatize that situation, Ortiz opens the poem with rather bucolic images of Black Mesa’s “sheep & woman” (5). The images starkly contrast with the heavy machines that represent twentieth-century technology exploiting and ravaging “the long brown & red land” (6) where indigenous peoples have raised their sheep for centuries. As one of the most sacred places for adjacent tribes—Navajos, Hopis, and Pueblos, in northern Arizona—Black Mesa is described as a life-giving and refreshing entity for people and animals to “breathe so deeply” (8). Here, the speaker evokes and personifies “tsegí” (9), a Diné word meaning “rock canyon,” as if it is saying “hello & goodbye / but always hello” (11-12). This personification effectively summarizes the way the grand but friendly landscape has welcomed all lives for “millions of years” (13).

However, in the subsequent stanzas, the cold, terse descriptions of how capitalist invasion of Euro-Americans brought radical changes to the sacred place offset the pastoral tone:

tourists
crusaders
missionaries

power line over the mountain
toward Phoenix toward Denver

and then the Peabody Coal Co.
the Black Mesa Mine

a yellow & black song:
Open Range
Caterpillar smoke & dust
from the wounded mountain

A PLAGUE ON ALL YOUR DAMN HORSEPOWER
AND ALL YOUR KENNECOTT COPPER BLIGHTS (12-14, 18-27)

The speaker describes Black Mesa, like Pima lands in “And the Land is Just as Dry,” as completely exploited. Corresponding to “woman” in the opening of
the poem, the land is represented as a female raped by capitalism. That image is again dramatized in the closing stanzas where the poet depicts mining trailer company machines, “Caterpillar[s]” rolling over the “[o]pen range” of Black Mesa that they dig out with “smoke & dust.” The contrast between the images is reinforced by a photograph Ortiz (as the editor) intentionally placed above the poem (see fig. 2). The female image of Black Mesa combined with that of “Mother Earth” invokes colonial narratives in which indigenous lands, including the Americas, are represented as uncultivated and virginal, to be invaded and conquered by Western civilization. For the colonizers, this metaphor justifies the act of colonizing that would bring beneficial civilization to the lands. For Ortiz, however, the metaphor exposes the colonizing act as harmful and destructive, and he finishes the poem with a curse on “ALL” the capitalist machines and companies, defining the colonial power as “BLIGHTS.” Starkly contrasting with the calm and somber tone in the previous stanzas, this capitalized curse in the last two lines resonates with the legitimate anger of the speaker.

An article in ABC, “Black Mesa” (1982), by the NIYC, which features photos of the tractors working on the Mesa, provides a broad context for the poem’s image and the speaker’s concern:

[Black Mesa] has always been part of the miracle of creation. To the Hopi, it is a burial ground for their dead, a sacred center whose destruction presages the destruction of the earth. The Navajo call it the Female Mountain and, together with the Male Mountain, symbolizes the balance of nature. Today, Black Mesa is the site of one of the greatest ecological wreckages of all time. . . . Peabody Coal Company is expanding its coal-mining operation to an even larger area of Black Mesa. (6)
As indicated, the destruction of the Mesa by the colonial acts of US capitalist corporations represents the invasion and destruction of the “balance” between Natives and nature that has been maintained for thousands of years. Ortiz’s poignant condemnation at the end of “Long House Valley Poem” reflects Native resistance similar to many other activists who also express a wish to restore such balance with nature. For example, Russell Means (Oglala Lakota), an important leader in the American Indian Movement (AIM), prophetically asserts that “Mother Earth...will retaliate” against US capitalism’s creation of “imbalance and disharmony” within the natural environment by making “a readjustment that will cut arrogant human beings down to size, [giving] them a taste of that ultimate reality that is beyond their ability to manipulate or control” (xii).

“We Shall Survive This Way”: Building Reciprocity and Recovering Indigenous Cosmos

As implied in the case of Black Mesa, activists and writers defended Red Power protest actions through their belief in traditional indigenous perspectives and the teachings of ancestors about environmental concerns. On occupying Alcatraz, the IAT declared in its “Manifesto” (1970) in Alcatraz Newsletter: “We will build a new life and a new philosophy based upon the ancient wisdoms of our fathers” (2). In agreement with IAT’s rhetoric, NIYC in ABC’s 1973 “National Indian Youth Council Policy Statement” offers a metaphorical statement of the traditional belief in the inseparable relationship between indigenous land and the lives and culture of indigenous peoples: “Our culture not only exists in time but in space as well. If we lose our land we are adrift like a leaf on a lake which will float aimlessly and then dissolve and disappear” (3). Indeed, the metaphor in the ABC statement corresponds to the perspective of then editor Ortiz, whose writing demonstrates fundamental indigenous beliefs.

The environmental ethics developed by the Acoma and other indigenous peoples formed and inspired Ortiz’s views and representations of the natural world in his writing. History indicates that the Acoma attempted to develop a middle ground between nature and human culture. When the late fifteenth-century Spaniards encountered the Acoma in Sky City (a nickname for Old Acoma, the traditional village on the mesa in Acoma Pueblo communities) during their expedition of the Seven Cities of Cibola in the US Southwest, they were “astonished” to see how the people had established their village on the mesa and “developed irrigation methods” in harmony with the surrounding landscape (Minge 9). This way of life is found in many other Native communities in various regions, such as the Chippewa, who firmly believed in a sense of balance with the natural world.

Romantic descriptions of mainstream environmentalism are not compatible with indigenous environmental values—“balance,” “harmony,” and “coexistence.” The notion of a “noble savage” living in a “perfect” ecological harmony
at home with nature has been a colonial, reductive stereotype derived from and reinforcing Romantic myths that European colonialists have employed against the colonized Other—a notion that was ongoing during the Red Power era.\(^8\) Modern Natives and their ancestors, Weaver asserts, are “neither saints nor sinners in environmental matters,” as the Americas were no “Edenic paradise” (“Introduction” 7).\(^9\) Indigenous peoples never ignored the necessity of using the natural environment and developing human culture. “Like all societies,” Grinde and Johansen note, they “faced the question of how to utilize land for purposes of survival . . . [and] manipulated the environment to improve their material lives” (qtd. in Weaver, “Introduction” 7).

“Reciprocity,” a concept that contemporary indigenous scholars have developed since the Red Power era, helps us to understand how these “purposes” are achieved and how indigenous holistic ecology is maintained. Ortiz explains the process:

> People got what they needed to live from the land-earth, and they gave back, with their work, responsibility, and careful use of natural resources, what the land needed. Their creators gave them life, and they, with prayer, meditation, and ritual, gave back life; they received and gave. . . . [A] system of reciprocity . . . they had with creators and earth was the guiding rule which was applied to their social communal system. (Woven 29)

Land and people exchange only what is necessary for the sustenance of life, and in this vital process they are responsible for each other. Such reciprocity opposes western European emphasis on economic gains that “allowed land and environment to be viewed as commodities to be exploited, and these colonizers imposed their will upon the land with little thought of the consequences” (Robyn 220). The valuing of reciprocity, then, makes the sensory, emotional, and imaginative interrelations between human activities and the natural environment possible.

In many of Ortiz’s early poems, the teachings of the ancestors in the oral tradition, from both medicine societies and warrior societies, urge humans to be humble to engage in deep reciprocal interactions with other beings on Mother Earth.\(^10\) “My Father’s Song” in Going for the Rain, for instance, exemplifies such an understanding of reciprocity in a practical rather than Romantic sense. The speaker portrays agricultural activity in the context of a mutually supportive relation between humans and the making of nature as he recalls following his father’s plow for planting “corn” at “Aacqu” (Acoma). The humble attitude toward the land and nature is shown through “mice” that the father finds during the plowing:

> Very gently, he scooped tiny pink animals into the palm of his hand and told me to touch them. We took them to the edge of the field and put them in the shade of a sand moist clod. (18-23)
The father’s urging his son to “touch” the live mice works as an effective lesson of the mutual relationship among humans, animals, and the land. The touching is an act of identifying with the animals and a promise to protect them despite the father’s desire to cultivate the land. What the speaker felt and now “remember[s],” “the very softness / of cool and warm sand and tiny alive / mice and my father saying things” (24-26), tells us that all lives have a right to be preserved. As the last stanza shows, different life forms on Mother Earth eventually come to terms with each other, overcoming a potential conflict. Ortiz speaks of this knowledge: “In our garden and our cornfields . . . and at home I became aware of how we must care for each other; all of this was encompassed in an intricate relationship which had to be maintained in order that life continues” (“Language” 189).11

Certainly, the articulated knowledge is communal rather than individual since, for indigenous peoples, nonhumans are inseparable from human community.12 “Wind Prayer,” the opening poem in Naked in the Wind, which Ortiz wrote in May 1970 during a trip to Maine, expresses this idea through the act of praying to the morning sun. In the poem, the speaker prays:

. . . help us to walk
. . . i make myself humble
asking to be made cool

for this morning i pray. (11-13, 21)

The speaker’s prayer to the sun voices concern for the health and continuance of the indigenous community, which is one of the important motives in Ortiz’s poetry. The Pueblo people pray to the morning sun in a ritual that recognizes a newborn baby as indigenous, accepting the baby into the community within a balanced cosmos.13 Embodying this ritual, the speaker contrasts “the right path” (20) with “the path” (10) that is “not” indigenous (11), suggesting that “the right path” is defined by “humility” (7), “peace” (14), “good words & love / harmony / & beauty” (17-19). At this point, “i” becomes another point that is opposed to plural entities—“gods, children, kinfolk” (8)—that build community. The speaker, then, represents himself as a humble individual belonging to a larger community on Mother Earth, where a human individual cannot survive and continue alone without the help of other beings, as affirmed in the next poem, “On and On,” in the same collection: “this circle of wind and sun and rain / nourishes life from the ground” (1-2). The Pueblo people’s traditional means of survival manifests the poet’s concern: “Survival depended upon harmony and cooperation . . . among all things[,] . . . the land, the sky, and all that is within them” (Silko 85).

“Watching Salmon Jump,” a short, poignant poem in Naked in the Wind, expresses such concern in regard to indigenous food resources. The speaker envisions the “leaping” of “salmon” as “the soft significance / of roots / of birth” (5-7), singing “how it is / leaping into rock / so that my children may survive” (9-11).
Ortiz notes in an epigraph that this poem is “for Angelina who I knew in my childhood hunger as Frances.” In the poem, the ideas of “hunger,” “salmon,” and “children” are effectively intertwined, traversing time and space—the poverty in Acoma Pueblo (and other Native communities) in the 1940s and the ongoing fishing rights protests over salmon and trout in the Pacific Northwest in the 1960s. The “leaping” of “salmon”—much like the important metaphor for another food resource, “the return of the buffalo,” in many Native songs, poems, and novels—expresses the physical and spiritual survival of “my children,” which broadly alludes to the next generations. “The return of the buffalo” then concerns Native reciprocity, the oral traditional worldview that could be recovered through land-based sovereignty that would ensure the continuation of Native Americans toward the future.

Among many Ortiz poems that concern such a point, “Survival This Way” in A Good Journey is exemplary because the poem, within the context of Red Power, embodies Native Americans’ past and present struggles for the survival and sovereignty of their children. This is the closing poem in the section “A San Diego Poem: January—February 1973.” February 1973 marked the beginning of the seventy-one-day Siege of Wounded Knee by AIM and other activists at Pine Ridge Reservation. As the radical activists’ struggle focused on the survival and liberation of the rural community from capitalist exploitation and colonial violence, Ortiz in “Survival This Way” turns his attention from urban landscape—which he describes during his travel from Albuquerque to LA and San Diego in the previous poems of the section—to rural landscape. In this envisioning, the natural environment, stories, and indigenous peoples intersect in the diction that other Native writers share:

Survival, I know how this way
This way, I know.
It rains.
Mountains and canyons and plants
grow.
We traveled this way,
gauged our distance by stories
and loved our children.
We taught them
to love their births.
We told them over and over
again.
We shall survive this way. (1-13)

This seemingly simple statement reiterates the stress on the relationship between humans and nature that persists throughout Ortiz’s poetry. The rain, which makes everything “grow,” represents the revival of indigenous culture and nature, terms that are not separated for indigenous peoples. In this perspective, “stories”
rooted within lands are essential for the people to survive, as the distance of travels is “gauged” only by “stories” that include all living forms along the way. Throughout the journey, the first-person pronoun “I” becomes the third-person plural “we,” which indicates how indigenous peoples shared common “stories” of surviving harsh environments—colonial encroachments on their lands and subsequent relocations. The last line, “We shall survive this way,” implies that although the long journey may change their locations, the people are still rooted and growing in the land. Emphasis on “this” indigenous “way” or identity, teaching children “to love their births,” is key to “Red Power” as activists and writers urged their people to take pride in being “Indian”—a “Red Pride” that Vine Deloria, Jr., vigorously expresses through the provocative title of his book *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (1973).

The idea of embracing indigenous identity reflects Acoma Pueblo belief that “This Land is My People” in *Naked in the Wind*, highlighting that the people and the land are one. The speaker declares:

I come from this land.
This land is my people

........

my mind
travels with it (1-2, 6-7)

This suggests that the land and people, as in “Survival This Way,” move together. Written around 1970, the radical claim “This Land is My People” evokes an important rhetorical theme of Native sovereignty, “This land is my land,” which was used in *Alcatraz Newsletter* and painted on buildings on Alcatraz. The personification of the land approves this rhetoric:

Come out of the ground,
the people like the plants,
the growing of mountains,
spings, thoughts, smoke,
“there was a hole in the ground.” (10-14)

According to Acoma oral tradition, the “hole” indicates Shipapu (or Sipapu), a small hole in the floor of kivas found in various places in Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon in the US Southwest. In *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing* (1998), Ortiz explains that Shipapu is a communal center of the creation story of the Acoma and other Pueblo people and the “origin” of their “culture and community” (xiii). For the Pueblo, the hole fosters the sense of indigeneity, a sense of belonging to the land as “a source” that asserts “their direct relationship with the creative spirit-force-dynamic of the earth” (xiv). Shipapu, as a synecdoche, embodies a “homeland” that promotes, in Silko’s words, “a growing awareness that . . . we are all from the same source” (37). “This Land is My People” develops a Red Power idea of land-based sovereignty that
Means, who led the Siege of Wounded Knee, recapitulates: “We are the children of the Earth. She is our Mother, and . . . [f]rom our traditional ways . . . we must live in harmony with all creation” (xii).

“Power” in the slogan “Red Power” is thus understood as “Earth Power” in regard to the kinship between indigenous peoples and land. For many indigenous people, telling the stories of tribal lands is politics and “power.” The empowerment comes from the sense of homeland, a particular place, such as Shipapu, through which the people identify themselves. Ortiz’s “That’s the Place Indians Talk About” in Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land (1980) references this understanding of “Red Power.” In the poem, the poet represents the Coso Hot Springs in the Northern Paiute land, a sacred place that was being exploited for US military weapons, as a metaphor for a healing process that includes intertribal gatherings around the Springs:

For many years,  
the People went up there.  
Families from all over.  
From Nevada, from Utah, from Arizona,  
from north California, from south,  
from all over, from anyplace. (83-88)

Regarding the gatherings, the poet employs the voice of “an elder Paiute man” who teaches how to heal all indigenous peoples. The voice evokes Wovoka, a Paiute prophet who inspired the pan-Indian gatherings of the Ghost Dance in the 1880s in Northern Paiute land, in terms of the message of the restoration of an indigenous cosmos, effectively making these gatherings into an important precursor and inheritance for the Red Power Movement. Like Wovoka, Ortiz foretells what will happen to all indigenous peoples when they unite to perform indigenous ceremonies for the recovery of indigenous lands, which involves a chain reaction that begins in chanting:

It will come,  
the moving power of the voice  
the moving power of the earth  
the moving power of the People. (117-20)

As represented in the repetitive lines, “Red Power” concerns the unity of land and people as one “voice,” which is a fundamental principle of an indigenous worldview.

“For the Sake of . . . All People”: Broadening Community and Developing Environmental Ethics toward the Hemisphere

Embodied in Ortiz’s early poetry, “Mother Earth” informs his inclusive poetic diction and metaphors that register a belief in the literary form of ancestral, tribal,
regional, and global traditions. His writing is “defined by an Indigenously grounded holism that envisions community in broad environmental terms” (Brill de Ramírez and Lucero, “Simon” 36). Ortiz, like other Red Power activist-writers, believes that indigenous environmental concerns move beyond one’s tribal, national territory toward a broader community. In the preface of *Earth Power Coming: Short Fiction in Native American Literature* (1983), Ortiz writes: “[I]t has been the evolvement of a system of life which insists on one’s full awareness of his relationship to all life. . . . [I]t is possible to share this awareness with all mankind” (vii). His statement summons the idea that “all life” and “all mankind” share the same destiny on Mother Earth. This holistic ecological orientation emphasizes hemispheric and global realities while maintaining ancestral and historical grounds in the cultures and lands of Acoma Pueblo and the US Southwest.

Ortiz’s recognition of this holistic ecology is firmly based on his experience of having been exploited as a mine worker in 1960 at Ambrosia Lake while employed with the Kerr-McGee uranium corporation, which was then operating in the wider Grants Uranium belt area in New Mexico, a region including the Pueblo communities of Acoma, Laguna, and San Juan, among others. In the field, Ortiz met various groups of working-class people, including whites, “Okies,” Chicanos, and other Native Americans, who were exposed to the dangerous work and lacked any other opportunity for employment; he notes that he “identified with them” (*Woven* 22). Through that experience, Ortiz realized that “The American poor and the workers,” including whites, “must understand how they, like Indian people, are forced to serve a national interest, controlled by capitalist vested interests” that impose sacrifice on the people, especially in “a national sacrifice area in the Southwest” (361).

A reflection on the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 is equally instrumental in the development of such decolonizing ethics. As Ortiz ruminates in *Woven Stone* (1992), the Revolt was the outcome of the alliance of various “dispossessed, oppressed poor” in the extended regions of what is now the US Southwest and Mexico, led by the Pueblo Indian people who “rose against . . . theft of land and resources, slave labor . . . and unjust tribute demands” (30). For Ortiz, the Revolt establishes an inspirational cultural and political background for indigenous resistance to capitalism and vindicates his activism and writing in a new, modern context—that is, the Red Power Movement—in which the same situation was occurring: “Three hundred years later[,] . . . [t]he American political-economic system was mainly interested in control and exploitation. . . . just like the Spanish crown. . . . I understood the reason for the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, and with poetry and prose I tried to express my perception and hope for the present and future” (30).

The metaphors of that legacy are rigorously expressed throughout *Fight Back*, in which a warrior stance against cultural exploitation and destruction of the
environment reverberates across time. “Mid-American Prayer,” the opening poem of _Fight Back_, sets the tone for this stance, employing and developing Red Power rhetoric in its call for unity across all generations of indigenous peoples with “all life that is around us / that we are included with” (10-11) and “the sun, moon, the cycle of seasons / and the earth mother which sustains us” (14-15). The speaker also appeals to the necessity of evoking the alliance of “all things” as a powerful force to emulate and resist capitalist exploitation: “[W]e ask humbly of the creative forces of life” (25). The tactics of this resistance differ significantly from the registers of colonial forces driven by capitalism that proceed from the arrogant view of the land:

we acknowledge ourselves
to be in a relationship that is responsible
and proper, that is loving and compassionate,
for the sake of the land and all people. (21-24)

Building a connection with “all” indigenous peoples and lands through love and compassion matters. Reflecting on his experiences during the Red Power era, Ortiz clarifies that

Our struggles as Native people, as Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, always goes beyond . . . our local or regional attention so that we have a sense of what the old people would say, that we are not the only people who are oppressed. . . . When I say “we[,]” . . . we can no longer see ourselves as isolated or exclusive communities. We are part of a larger _Hanoh[,]_ . . . the people of this earth, responsible for the earth. (Lucero 153-54)

To represent all indigenous peoples and lands, Ortiz employs “_Hanoh_” (people). This Acoma Keres word, coupled with the effective third-person pronoun “we,” pushes the boundary of community struggling for its land and resources from Acoma to the earth itself.

Indeed, such an inclusive decolonizing perspective reflects the Red Power Movement’s growing consciousness of capitalist exploitation of the oppressed on a hemispheric level. The movement was generally in decline after Wounded Knee in 1973, yet its environmental concerns continued to grow well into the 1980s. The establishment of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), a non-governmental organization, in 1973 by AIM and other activist groups across the western hemisphere, exemplifies the effort to protect indigenous environments and land rights throughout the Americas. Common concerns among Red Power journalism reveal this tendency as early as 1970; “The Killing of an Unwanted Race: Brazil’s Dead Indians” (1969-70), an NIYC article appearing in a special _ABC_ report series, tells of a “British-registered” rubber corporation’s deforestation of the Amazon forest, which included the slaughter and enslavement of several thousand Huilolo and Bororo Indians for “labor force in a pattern of colonization and capitalist exploitation” (6-7); “Brazil: Atrocities and
Genocide” (1970), an IAT article in *Alcatraz Newsletter*, in response offers a powerful metaphor: “Exploiting the earth’s fruits is evil enough, but to kill a people is insanity!” (16).

Also manifesting the effort to protect indigenous environmental and land rights is “We Have Been Told Many Things But We Know This To Be True,” a poem republished in *ABC* in 1982, after being originally published in *Fight Back* in 1980. 1982 was roughly eight years after Ortiz left NIYC and *ABC* in early 1974. The poem is printed on a page facing a special report on the Yanomami people titled “Brazil: The Murdering of a People,” which adopts an urgent tone in relating how this tribal group was forced to move from their land and how their “land rights” were being “sacrifice[d] for the economic interests of . . . powerful national and transnational corporations” (6). The idea of “sacrifice” is poignant as it relates a similar situation ongoing in the United States, especially in National Sacrifice Areas in the Southwest. The poem-report combination, then, addresses broader communities of indigenous peoples and stands in opposition to further “sacrifices.” The juxtaposition on the same page of an illustration by a Shoshone activist-artist, Jack Malotte, which portrays unidentified indigenous land sacrificed by railroads, underscores this opposition (see fig. 3).

“We Have Been Told Many Things,” which references no specific tribal lands, opens with simple but broad words: “The land. The People / They are in relation to each other” (1-2), reiterating the reciprocity that is part and parcel of a

The frequent use of the definite article “the” is inclusive rather than restricted, referencing indigenous communities as a whole. The poem brings the people and the land together in a single “family,” where cooperation is essential to survival in facing the threats of “the liars, thieves, and killers” who represent any “individuals or groups . . . who are willing to sacrifice everything to their colonial, political, and economic objectives” (Adamson 85). The idea that the familial relationship between the two independent entities represents “self-reliance” is maintained by depending on and working for “each other.” This idea stands at odds with capitalist ideas of “self-reliance” that seek profits at all cost by dominating and exploiting the land through the slave-master relationship. Inés Hernández-Ávila and Stefano Varese observe: “In the best of circumstances, indigenous people have nurtured, sustained, and reproduced a core identity that encompasses traditional wisdom, a spiritual rootedness to the land (as cultural geocenter and as hemisphere)” (86). Indeed, the belief in such an “identity” and in the inseparability between the human being and Mother Earth “in every way” is the foundation of indigenous resistance to colonialism (Deloria 147).

In all, the politics of the Red Power Movement are inseparable from the environmental issues that appeal to many indigenous peoples across the Americas. Decolonizing struggles during the era register the longstanding communal concerns over capitalist-driven colonial impositions and exploitations of tribal lands and resources that indigenous peoples have tried to protect since contact. By addressing the concerns with a clear and powerful voice, Ortiz’s early poems turn the rhetoric of the Red Power Movement into poetic resistance. Such aspects of
Ortiz’s writing seek “coexistence,” “harmony,” and “balance” between “Mother Earth” and humans in terms of the concept of “reciprocity.” Combined with political expressions and rhetoric appearing in publications such as *ABC: Americans Before Columbus* and *The Warpath*, Ortiz’s poetic diction and metaphors voice “Red Power” as “Earth Power,” which refers to any indigenous land. With such references, the environmental concern and teaching that he expresses in his early poems traverse time and space, addressing both local and hemispheric situations. Ortiz’s early writings continue to inform contemporary indigenous peoples’ ongoing struggle to protect their lands and dignity in the twenty-first century.

**Notes**

1. The enactments include the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 and relevant acts such as the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972, the Safe Water Drinking Act in 1974, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act in 1976.

2. Scholars debate whether “Mother Earth” was invented and spread through pan-Indianism in the 1970s, but Jace Weaver asserts that “the fundamental notion is both ancient and widespread” among Native Americans and that the references can be “traced as far back as 1776” (“Introduction” 10).

3. Ortiz worked with the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) as the editor of *ABC*, along with the director, Gerald Wilkinson (Cherokee), for four years from 1970 to 1973 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He had initially encountered NIYC founding members Clyde Warrior (Ponca) and Mel Thom (Paiute) at the Gallup Indian Ceremonial in Gallup, New Mexico, in 1961, long before he actually joined the group. Although aware of Native American activism and its environmental concerns, he was “just a curious boy” unprepared to participate in NIYC right away (Ortiz, Personal).

4. Ortiz served the US Army from 1963 to 1966, which, he believes, “was a foolish thing to do” (Ortiz, Personal).

5. According to David H. DeJong, “while the Indian Service attempted to invoke the beneficial use doctrine to protect Pima water after 1912, it was too late, as the people had suffered through the worst of the years of starvation and famine” (45).

6. The first verse of Peter La Farge’s song, “The Ballad of Ira Hayes” (1963), shares the point:

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Down the ditches for a thousand years
The sparkling water rushed
’Till the white man stole the water rights
And their running water hushed
Now Ira’s folks were hungry
And their land grew crops of weeds
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When war came, Ira volunteered
And forgot the white man’s greed (10-17)

7. Notably, when Ortiz reprints the same poem in *A Good Journey* (1977), the epigraph is dropped; the reprinted version also omits the closing lines, with their capitalized curse against the Kennecott Copper Corporation operating the mine.

8. Exemplifying this tendency is the famous image of “The Crying Indian” that an Italian American actor Iron Eyes Cody, who was then believed to be a Cherokee, performed in a television commercial on the second Earth Day in March 1971. The image was manipulated by a mainstream environmental activist organization, Keep America Beautiful.

9. Ortiz underscores this point in *From Sand Creek: Rising in This Heart which is Our America* (1981) when describing the landscape in Southern Colorado where US militia confronted Cheyenne and Arapaho people before the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864: “[T]here was no paradise” (79).

10. Regarding this idea, Ortiz comments:

   When I talk and think about Indigenous oral tradition I usually do so in the general sense, i.e., categorizing “oral tradition” as inclusive of all forms, styles, and purposes. I am not aware of the differences. . . . [T]ribal communities do not necessarily distinguish between oral tradition for healing and safety from harm in war since safety, health, and success is what’s generally wished for. ("Re: Warrior")

11. N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), another important Red Power writer, attests to Ortiz’s perception. In his influential essay “Native American Attitudes to the Environment” (1976), Momaday calls this understanding of the natural world, which transcends conventional Western thought, “reciprocal appropriation,” by which he means that Natives invest themselves “in the landscape, and at the same time incorporate the landscape into [their] own most fundamental experience” (80).

12. Ortiz defines “community” as “people and people, people and all life” (“You” 124).

13. “After I was born,” Ortiz testifies in an interview, “my grandfather or my grandmother took me and presented me one early morning to the sun” (“Interview” 366). The ritual is significant in many Pueblo tribes, including Acoma and San Juan. See Alfonso Ortiz (30-31).

14. Regarding how the teachings of Wovoka and pan-indigenous gatherings during the Ghost Dance became an important legacy of the Red Power Movement, informing the rhetorics of Red Power publications, see Seonghoon Kim.

15. The Pueblo Revolt is considered one of the most successful indigenous rebellions, as various Natives in the Rio Grande region actually drove the Spaniards out of the territory for twelve years until the colonizers’ return in 1692.
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