RE-DESIGNING THE AMERICAN GARDEN: THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. ETHNIC WOMEN’S LITERATURES

By

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To my Mom,
who first introduced me to the beauty of flowers and plants
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I have just completed writing a small garden of my own that is made of “words”—words that are plain, vivid, critical, sometimes sad and painful, but beautiful. While working on this project, I have often thought about, and imagined, how it would feel when I am done with this seemingly endless dissertation work. Looking back all those years I spent at graduate school, now I realize that it was a journey of self-discovery and healing. Laughing and crying with the women writers whom I have studied in this dissertation, I have slowly moved beyond “what I was told to be” and gradually become “the person I want to be,” while learning the beauty of inner life and patience at every stage. Throughout this painful, yet meaningful process of self-actualization, reading, thinking, and writing have always sustained me and greatly enriched my view of human society and the natural world.

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Re-Designing the American Garden examines how contemporary US ethnic women writers employ the trope of the garden as a means of critiquing modern America’s ecological imperialism that naturalizes settler colonialism, racialization, and global capitalism and environmental injustice. While the field of ecocriticism has largely focused on the tradition of American nature writing since its inception in early 1990s, the recent rise of the environmental justice movement has destabilized longstanding nature-culture dualism in Western civilization and leads us to see the intersections of race, gender, empire, science, and the environment in shaping US citizenship. Analyzing contemporary US fiction alongside garden archives, historical documents, visual art, and environmental nonfiction, I argue that women writers of color, including Leslie Marmon Silko, Jamaica Kincaid, Toni Morrison, and Ruth L. Ozeki, work collectively to re-design a singular, nation bounded environmental discourse through what I call “global minority environmentalism,” one that reads across different US ethnic groups (American Indians, African Americans, and Asian Americans), spatial and temporal borders, and humans and nonhumans in local and global contexts.

Using transnational, cross-racial, and interdisciplinary approaches, this project provides a new perspective on the relationship between comparative racialization and the notion of
environmental citizenship in the United States from the past to the present, and envisions the possible futures of American Studies and ecocriticism that are more attentive to the significance of the global environmental imagination in the twenty-first century. Ultimately, *Re-designing the American Garden* will contribute to the environmental humanities, an emerging transdisciplinary discourse that seeks to approach the current environmental crisis through a humanistic perspective, by showing how the environmental narratives of US ethnic women writers, in particular, help us understand the complex cultural and political issues behind the “(un)natural world” and cultivate the ethics of environmental and social care for both humans and nonhumans in the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch shaped by humans.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: WHY GARDENS MATTER

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

-- William Blake
“Auguries of Innocence”

Seeing the World through the Garden

The Farmers Market I stepped into in Rockefeller Plaza, New York City, in August 2012 had some “unusual” hallmarks of this financial capital of the world: tomatoes, carrots, beans, green peppers, red onions, pumpkins, fresh cheese, homemade jam, organic honey, and flowers and plants. People enjoyed shopping at a temporary green oasis in the Big Apple and they delightedly interacted with each other as if they were having a sort of garden party. This greenmarket at Rockefeller Plaza is a part of the Grow NYC program that aims to bring local farm products to the city so that “all New Yorkers have access to the freshest, most nutritious locally grown food the region has to offer” (“Greenmarket 40th Anniversary”). By linking small farmers in the Northeast to consumers in the city, the program has attempted to revitalize the local food system while helping to alleviate the problem of “food deserts”\(^1\) in urban areas, especially among underrepresented groups. While visiting New York City, I witnessed that the green movement of the city was not only limited to several farmers markets in Manhattan, but also greatly extended throughout the New York metropolitan area to many community gardens,\(^1\)

\(^1\) According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), food deserts mean “areas that lack access to affordable fruits vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet.” For example, low-income families living in underserved communities are more susceptible to obesity and other health issues related to food insecurity compared to other Americans because “they live far from a supermarket or large grocery store and do not have easy access to transportation” (“A Look Inside Food Deserts”). Thus, urban agriculture that utilizes vacant lots and rooftops in cities is now considered one of the possible solutions for poverty and health disparities in urban communities across the nation.
school gardens, and urban farms like Brooklyn Farms and Eagle Street Rooftop Farm (Figure 1-1). Later that year, after reading several news articles about food and the urban environment published in the New York Times, I learned that urban agriculture has emerged as a critical concern for farmers and gardeners in the big Rust Belt cities such as New York City, Chicago, and Detroit and it also works to engage more citizens in various types of community gardens and environmental education programs in other regions. Naturally, I have become curious about this emerging cultural phenomenon across cities in America. Why did people living in urban areas begin to be interested in gardening and farming inside their cities? What is the relationship between this changing urban lifestyle and the larger food production systems in the United States and beyond? What is the potential for urban agriculture to develop more just food systems? How does cultivating community gardens (or urban farms) help people to have a better understanding of food production and the environment both locally and globally (Figure 1-2)? Why do we need to care about gardens now?

Re-designing the American Garden emerges from recent debates over food security, sustainable agriculture, and environmental justice to consider how US agricultural power closely correlates to the global environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation and water scarcity, the plantation economy and farm labor, and bioengineering and environmental risks. From Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello gardens and Henry David Thoreau’s Walden to the mid-twentieth century’s suburbs and today’s urban gardens, the garden has signified the Edenic image of America as the land of plenty and self-reliant farmers, the prototype for US citizenship. Both ideas, in turn, largely rely on the view that the cultivation of land is crucial to the development of American democracy and the proliferation of commerce, science, and the arts. Through the uneven development of land and natural resources, white
Figure 1-1. Eagle Street Rooftop Farm, NYC. Accessed October 12, 2016, https://rooftopgrowingguide.com/.

settlers who firmly believed in Manifest Destiny naturalized settler colonialism in the Americas and expanded the scope of their domination from wilderness and indigenous peoples to other cultural and racial minorities, women, the poor, immigrants, and nonhuman species like animals and plants. “The American Eden,” as Carolyn Merchant has argued, “became a colonized Eden that could be extended to other countries. The control of the wild represented the kind of state that Western societies could export throughout the world to colonized ‘Other’ lands” (“Shades of Darkness” 389).2 Thus, taking the garden as the symbolic and material site of environmental citizenship, which has been inseparably linked to the construction of US citizenship, this dissertation examines how modern America’s ecological imperialism has attempted to naturalize the history of US settler colonialism and the dispossession and exploitation of people of color and the poor while working to reinforce the capitalist logic of agribusiness to farmers and consumers in the US and around the globe from the late nineteenth century to the present. The most basic point that Re-designing the American Garden makes is that contemporary US ethnic women writers, including Leslie Marmon Silko, Jamaica Kincaid, Toni Morrison, and Ruth L. Ozeki, deploy the trope of the garden in their environmental narratives not only to critique the racialized and gendered dimensions of US imperialism and global capitalism, but also to create a new social space that positively embraces biocultural diversity and human-nonhuman interactions for the twenty-first century. As Lisa Lowe has recently argued in her book, The

2 Merchant continues to critique the exclusionary aspect of garden politics in modern US history as follows: “That state was the “Self” of western European countries, in particular, those that exported their science, technologies, and methods of controlling resources to the “Others.” The “Others” were the colonized indigenous people, immigrants, and people of color who were outside the controlled, managed garden. Throughout the world, as land was transformed into irrigated gardens filled with monocultures controlled by agribusiness, what lay beyond the periphery were wastelands and deserts, the places of outcasts, of waste, of people of color, and of immigrants—in short, those colonized “Others” not admitted into the enclosed space of the reinvented garden” (389). For more information on the links between Western scientific progress and capitalism and the domination of land and women, see also Merchant’s The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution (1980) and Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture (2003).
Intimacies of Four Continents (2015), what has been rarely examined to date is “particular intimacies and contemporaneities that traverse distinct and separately studied ‘areas’” (6) and, as a result, it becomes more important to read “relation across differences rather than equivalence” and “the convergence of asymmetries rather than the imperative of identity” (11). By closely reading contemporary U.S. fiction alongside garden archives, historical documents, visual art, and environmental nonfiction, I argue that women writers of color collectively work to re-design a singular, nation bounded environmental discourse through what I call “global minority environmentalism,” one that reads across different US ethnic groups (American Indians, African Americans, and Asian Americans), spatial and temporal borders, and humans and nonhumans in local and global contexts.3

Drawing on the emerging field of the environmental humanities4 that attempts to bring together humanities and social and natural sciences disciplines in order to provide a forum for

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3 I build on Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s conception of “minor transnationalism.” Emphasizing the complex dimensions of transnationalism and the need to approach this cultural phenomenon from a minor perspective, they write: “What is lacking in the binary model of above-and-below, the utopic and the dystopic, and the global and the local is an awareness and recognition of the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries. All too often the emphasis on the major-resistant mode of cultural practices denies the complex and multiple forms of cultural expressions of minorities and diasporic peoples and hides their micropractices of transnationality in their multiple, paradoxical, or even irreverent relations with the economic transnationalism of contemporary empires. Common conceptions of resistance to the major reify the boundaries of communities by placing the focus on action and reaction, excluding other forms of participation in the transnational that may be more proactive and more creative even while economically disadvantaged” (7). As Lionnet and Shih suggest, understanding transnationalism based on the center-periphery model might limit the possibilities to explore more diverse and complex aspects of minor transnationalism. But while their analysis mainly focuses on issues of minor cultural citizenship within human society, I believe that it is imperative to expand the realm of “culture” to the environment in the broad sense, so that we can more fully understand how cultural minorities work to approach environmental discourse from below and create a new form of global environmentalism transnationally.

4 Ursula K. Heise provides a succinct definition of the environmental humanities as follows: “The environmental humanities are currently emerging from the convergence of research areas that have followed distinct disciplinary trajectories to date: ecocriticism, environmental philosophy, environmental history, biological and cultural anthropology, cultural geography, political ecology, communication studies and gender studies, among others. The challenge for the environmental humanities lie in staking out common conceptual and methodological ground between areas, as well as in how environmental perspectives are articulated differently within the framework of particular disciplines” (“Comparative Literature and the Environmental Humanities”).
shared environmental concerns, *Re-designing the American Garden* seeks to expand the scope of both ecocriticism and US ethnic literatures by addressing the intersections of race, gender, empire, science, and environment in shaping US citizenship. Situated at the crossroads of environmental literary and cultural studies, comparative ethnic studies, transnational American studies, critical food studies, and science and technology studies, this dissertation asks why and how the narratives of the garden help readers cultivate environmental and social consciousness. Though the field of ecocriticism has largely focused on the tradition of American nature writing since its inception in early 1990s, the recent rise of the environmental justice movement has challenged longstanding nature-culture dualism in Western civilization and demands us to create a new narrative that addresses the complex cultural, economic, and political issues behind the “(un)natural world” and the need to take action to protect our planet. While my textual analysis primarily focuses on contemporary US fiction written by women of color, I would like to highlight that the texts that I examine here are not limited to the boundaries of US nation-state and chronological time that is based on Western modernity’s view of linear-progressive history. As Giorgio Agamben puts it, “Contemporariness is… a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is *that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism*” (41). He continues, “the contemporary is not only the one who, perceiving the darkness of the present, grasps a light that can never reach its destiny; he is also the one who, dividing and interpolating

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time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times” (53). In this respect, the reinvention of the garden by women of color, I suggest, enables us to place ourselves in the past and imagine possible futures for both humans and nature by travelling across diverse spatiality (e.g. desert, European gardens, the tropical rainforest, the farm, the city, digital space) and temporality (e.g. the late nineteenth century, the mid-twentieth century, the present, the near future). Using the power of literature that mobilizes our environmental and social imagination, these women writers establish that multicultural environmental narratives could provide us a transnational communal space that radically alters our perception of human society and the natural world in the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch shaped by humans.

“What Is an American?”: Farming, Transplantation, and Environmental Stewardship

The roots of North American environmentalism and national consciousness lie in the writings of early American agrarians such as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) and Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785). Firmly grounded in John Locke’s labor theory of property, which I will discuss more fully in Chapters 2 and 3, early Americans understood that cultivating land was a crucial step to establish US citizenship and to bring light to the primitive, uncivilized wilderness and American Indians alike. For example, in his text, Crèvecoeur declared that “We are a people of cultivators scattered over an immense territory” (67) andAmericanness is driven by “the spirit of an industry,”

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6 For more detailed explanation of the contemporary, see Agamben’s *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays* (2009), especially the essay “What Is the Contemprorary?” (39-54).

7 Regarding the multiplicity of culture in the age of globalization, see Susan Hegeman’s “Culture, Patriotism, and the Habitus of a Discipline; or, What Happens to American Studies in a Moment of Globalization?” (2005). If “culture,” as Hegeman has suggested, is “the site of the production of particularities,” but if at the same time, it does not necessarily mean “a site of resistance” in the context of globalization, then, I think we may need to re-envision the conception of the garden as a “contact zone” where “the possibility for unexpected change” is entailed as well as “the very unpredictability of cultural creativity, contact and conflict” instead of simply understanding the garden as an self-enclosed human invented space (461-463).
emphasizing the narrative of social and economic progress of poor European immigrants on American soil. Through “the power of transplantation,” he tried to show how new race called “Americans” was born, whose racial identity could be classified as “either an European or the descendant of an European” (69), while excluding the citizenship of other races and women. Interestingly, he used the metaphor of plants to describe European immigrants and further worked to connect human history to natural history by making the links between humans and the environment. In defining the meanings and characteristics of Americans, he wrote: “Men are like plants; the goodness and flavor of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grew. We are nothing but what we derive from the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit, the government we obey, the system of religion we profess, and the nature of our employment” (71). It is tempting to assume that Crèvecoeur’s interpretation here resonates with today’s human-nonhuman interaction theory and thus romanticize the American georgic tradition as the early model of modern environmentalism, especially given the significance of humans’ relationship with nature represented in his work. However, as Crèvecoeur tended to prioritize human laws over natural laws through the act of cultivation, it is crucial to remember how early Americans’ view of nature was based on the anthropocentric perspective that reads nature as the objects of domination and commodification, instead of companions and equal citizens of the earth. John Gast’s famous painting “American Progress” (1872) reflects this paradox of the American garden (Figure 1-3). Led by the giant goddess of Manifest Destiny, who holds a “school book” on her right arm while uncoiling wire from her left hand to help build the telegraph, white settlers work to move toward the West, fight with Indians and wild animals, and cultivate “emptied” land for farms and villages so that other means of civilizations such as
railroads, ships, and bridges can be safely constructed. The image explicitly shows how Euro-American males’ yearnings for “free” land and material abundance not only caused the death and dislocation of many Indian tribes, but also began to destroy the entire ecosystem in North America and greatly increased the rate of species extinctions, most notably wild buffaloes, black bears, and the American mountain deer. As Raymond Williams has observed, “the idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history” (“Ideas of Nature” 67).  

8 Resonant with Williams’s view of nature, in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), environmental philosopher Val Plumwood argues that the links between “the domination of humans” and “the domination of nature” need to be thoroughly examined rather than seeing nature outside human civilization based on nature-culture dualism in Western tradition. She writes: “The category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature. Thus racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity.
Similar to Crévecoeur’s understanding of nature that serves as a means to cultivate social, economic, and moral values for European immigrants, Jefferson interpreted American nature as a cultural space that provides the basis of US democracy and economic growth through white man’s labor and, as a result, naturalizes the transplantation of Europeans in the New World.  

Reflecting his lifelong passion for science and botany, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson, one of the most influential natural historians in his own time, tried to record the climate and plants of the new nation at his Monticello plantation so as to thoroughly examine the commercial value of flora and fauna in North America. While creating the botanical catalogue that contains rich, detailed information on useful native plants for medicinal, commercial, and ornamental purposes, he also compared other races like Indians and African slaves to the conditions of animals:

> Add to these flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgement in favor of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black women over those of his own species. The circumstance of superior beauty is thought worthy attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man? .... The Indians, with no advantages of this kind, will often carve figures on their pipes not destitute of design and merit. They will crayon out an animal, a plant, or a country, so as to prove the existence of a germ in their minds which only wants cultivation. (154)

Equating the intellectual capacities of people of color with those of “animals,” whose minds need to be cultivated by civilized white settlers, Jefferson’s garden experiment, which emblematizes lacking the full measure of rationality or culture” (4). As Plumwood suggests, I also think that seeing nature in relation to the political economy of human society is crucial to understanding the deep connections between the environmental crisis and the oppression of women and other races and species from the past to the present. For more on ecofeminist critique of Western civilization’s exploitation of women and nature, see also Ynestra King’s “Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature/Culture Dualism” (1990), Noël Sturgeson’s *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action* (1997), Karen Warren’s *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (1997), and Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy’s *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* (1998).

the future model of the United States in terms of politics, economy, and moral values, has established restrictions to legal and cultural naturalization\(^\text{10}\) by constantly excluding racial others from the boundaries of US citizenship.\(^\text{11}\) In this sense, the profound paradox of American democracy represented in Jefferson’s writing highlights the significance that more race studies and animal studies scholars need to be in dialogue with each other, and simultaneously urges them to investigate the dynamics of race, animals, and plants that have made modern America’s personhood and cultural agency. As Claire Jean Kim and Carla Freccero have argued in the 2013 special issue on species/race/sex in *American Quarterly*, “theoriz[ing] race and species” provides an “assemblage of varied stories from varied perspectives, which together make the point that species articulates with race and sex in complex and profound ways across time, space, language, and culture,” while challenging us to “reimagine how we might be and act in a multispecies world” (472).\(^\text{12}\) Although race studies scholars, according to Kim and Freccero, have remained

\(^{10}\) According to Imai Shiho, the Naturalization Act of 1790 provided a template for the long history of racial exclusion in the United States. She offers a concise account of the characteristics of this law: “the Naturalization Act of 1790 restricted citizenship to ‘any alien, being a free white person’ who had been in the U.S. for two years. In effect, it left out indentured servants, slaves, and most women. This implied that black and, later, Asian immigrants were not eligible to be naturalized, but it said nothing about the citizenship status of non-white person born on American soil” (*Densho Encyclopedia*). Throughout the nineteenth century, the call for revising this white restrictive view of US citizenship began to grow and the US government ultimately announced the Naturalization Act of 1870s that extended the realm of US citizenship to “aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent” while excluding American Indians and Asian immigrants. Both indigenous people and Asian Americans were not granted legal citizenship status until 1920s.

\(^{11}\) For example, Lisa Lowe investigates how Asian Americans have been denied their citizenship from the political domain, while they have been actively incorporated into the US market economy as a cheap labor force. Posing race not as a fixed, biological category, but rather as a socially constructed idea in relation to US political economy, she has argued that “the material contradictions of the national economy and the political state are expressed in the legal exclusion, disenfranchisement, and restricted enfranchisement of Asian immigrants” (22). However, instead of reading the problem of Asian American citizenship only limited to the economic and political sphere, she suggests that “culture” has emerged as a new form of resistance that questions “the regulatory locus of the citizen-subject” and shows how US government’s racial policies can “neither resolve nor suppress inequality” (22). For more on the racialization of Asian American subject and the US government’s uneven immigration laws in American history, see Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), especially Chapter I, “Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique” (1-36).

\(^{12}\) See also Mel Y. Chen’s *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (2012). By bringing together critical race studies, queer theory, and disability studies, Chen provides a compelling account of the intersectionality
somewhat skeptical toward the intellectual endeavor that tries to read race and species together partly due to the “historically fraught associations of racialized minorities with beasts” and “the mostly white animal movement’s racial blindness” (470), the emerging global environmental challenges such as climate change, species extinction, toxic pollution, and food insecurity ask us to think beyond humans and to perceive other nonhuman species as equal citizens of the larger ecosystem. In pursuing this ontological and epistemological question, *Re-designing the American Garden* departs from the tradition of American agrarianism that revolves around white male farmers’ naturalized environmental and cultural citizenship, and thus seeks to challenge this one-sided view of environmentalism by showing how the garden narratives of US ethnic women writers, in particular, allow us to explore the complex social, economic, and cultural dimensions of the natural world. In *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (2008), Robert Pogue Harrison elaborates that “gardening is a form of education, a plunge into the depths of natural history, an immersion in the element where life first heroically established itself on Earth” (32).

The writers I examine in this dissertation are inspired by many different aspects of the garden—social, political, aesthetic, ethical, real, imagined—and employ the garden trope in their writings to *educate* their readers about a wide range of environmental and social issues: indigenous people’s struggle for food sovereignty and environmental justice in the Southwest (Silko), the trauma of slavery and plantation agriculture in the global South (Kincaid and Morrison), and industrial agriculture, biotechnology, and the loss of biodiversity on a global scale (Ozeki).

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of race, animals, and metals in making Asian American subjectivity and US-Asia relations in the context of environmental justice.

Through garden narratives, these writers help cultivate new ways of seeing nature and culture that unite our awareness and action together and also lead us to join the environmental justice movement as co-constitutive citizens of multispecies communities in the twenty-first century.

**Beyond National: Ecocriticism, US Ethnic Literatures, and the “Transnational Turn”**

The field of ecocriticism as an academic discipline began to emerge in early 1990s when the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was first founded in 1992. Initially inspired by scholars who are strongly interested in “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii), to borrow Cheryll Glotfelty’s words, early ecocriticism focused on the literary texts of Anglo-American male writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold and often tended to romanticize the wilderness, rather than urban and rural landscapes, as the source of North American environmentalism. However, as Lawrence Buell has pointed out, this prevalent tendency in the “first wave” of ecocriticism also unwittingly worked to reinforce the national imaginary, despite the field’s commitment to a more holistic and complex view of nature, because “the value traditionally set on ‘nature’ and ‘wilderness’” served as “definers of US cultural-geographical distinctiveness” (“Ecoglobalist Affect” 229). In response to white male centered environmental discourse, which is largely influenced by deep ecology’s ecocentric perspective, critics in “second-wave” ecocriticism have begun to critique the idea of “pristine” nature that rarely considers the environmental rights of cultural minorities living in urban spaces and nature protection areas and thus they call for more socially engaged environmentalism that aims to address the voices of underrepresented groups in the US and the social and political dimensions
of environmentalism.\textsuperscript{14} While it is true that second-wave ecocriticism’s revisionist interpretation, particularly ecofeminism and environmental justice, has brought new perspectives to environmental literary and cultural studies and expanded the realm of critical inquiry from the “natural” environment to the dynamic interaction of nature and culture, the main subject of ecocriticism has tended to focus on locality and place that are limited to US nation-state and accordingly pay less attention to the environmentalism of the poor\textsuperscript{15} in global and comparative contexts. Critiquing deep ecology’s tendency that standardizes North American environmentalism worldwide without considering other regions’ cultural specificities and local contexts, Indian environmentalist Ramanchandra Guha argues that, as seen in the cases of India’s Project Tiger and Africa’s wildlife tourism, “the wholesale transfer of a movement culturally rooted in American conservation history can only result in the social uprooting of human populations in other parts of the globe” (76). For Guha, one of the major problems of North American environmentalism lies in its “lack of concern with inequalities within human society” (72) and the uneven distribution of environmental risks in the global South directly links to “the disproportionate share of resources consumed by the industrialized countries as a whole and the urban elite within the Third World” (80). Resonant with Guha’s critical claim from a Third World perspective,\textsuperscript{16} in the summer 2009 special issue of \textit{MELUS (The Multi-Ethnic Literature

\textsuperscript{14} On the first and second waves of ecocriticism, see Lawrence Buell’s field defining book, \textit{The Future of Environmental criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination} (2005), 17-28. Explaining the meaning of these waves in ecocriticism, Buell contends: “the concentration on ‘environment’ as ‘nature’ and on nature writing as the most representative environmental genre were too restrictive, and that a mature environmental aesthetics – or ethics, or politics – must take into account the interpenetration of metropolis and outback, of anthropocentric as well as biocentric concerns” (22-23).

\textsuperscript{15} For a more detailed account of the conception of the environmentalism of the poor, see Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier’s \textit{Varieties of Environmentalism} (1997) and Martinez-Alier’s \textit{The Environmentalism of the Poor} (2002).

\textsuperscript{16} In line with Guha’s trenchant critique of Western environmentalism, in the last decade, postcolonial ecocriticism has emerged as a critical response to North America centered environmental discourse and begins to redirect our attention to the inseparable connections between the history of imperialism and human-environmental exploitation,
ecocritics such as Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic have proposed “a new third wave of ecocriticism, which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries” so as to explore “all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint” (“The Shoulders We Stand On” 6). If early ecocriticism primarily focused on American literature within the frame of national literature, then, this call for a new wave of ecocriticism that is more attentive to cultural diversity and global connections in the twenty-first century asks us to think American literature beyond the boundaries of the nation-state and to read it in comparative and transnational contexts.17

Attentive to the “transnational turn” in American studies more broadly, Re-designing the American Garden thus seeks to challenge and diversify North American environmentalism through the environmental narratives of US multi-ethnic women writers and examines how these women of color adopt the global environmental imagination as a means of approaching and rewriting environmental issues from below rather than read minority histories and

between global capitalism and environmental injustice. Attentive to the challenge that makes it difficult to decisively characterize the term “postcolonial ecocriticism,” Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin write: “ provisionally, the field might be defined in terms of those forms of environmentally oriented postcolonial ecocriticism which insist on the factoring of cultural difference into both historical and contemporary ecological and bioethical debates…. But whatever its politics, green postcolonialism brings out a truism that clearly applies to, but is not always clearly stated in, the different strands of both postcolonialism and ecocriticism: no social justice without environmental justice; and without social justice – for all ecological beings – no justice at all” (9-10). For information regarding postcolonial ecocriticism, see also Huggan’s “‘Greening’ Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives” (2004), Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s “Against Authenticity: Global Knowledge and Postcolonial Ecocriticism” (2007), Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley’s Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment (2011), and Rob Nixon’s Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor (2011).

17 I find Wai Chee Dimock’s Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time (2006) is particularly very helpful to formulate my understanding of American literature in the world and the world in American literature. Using a new term “deep time” to explicate the cosmopolitan nature of American literature, Dimock observes: “What this highlights is a set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations, a densely interactive fabric. Restored to this, American literature emerges with a much longer history than one might think. This elongation is effected partly through its off-center circulation in the world and party through the presence of alternate measures—African, Asian, and European—unfolding in its midst. Literature is the home of nonstandard space and time” (3-4). Throughout this dissertation, I follow Dimock’s conception of deep time in order to show how America literature (U.S. ethnic literatures in particular) travels between different cultural, environmental, and national boundaries rather than remain within the realm of the nation-state.
environmentalism in isolation. Since the mid-1990s, American studies has increasingly experienced a sea change in the field, which demands Americanists to examine the study of US culture in a global context and how America affects the world and is affected by it, following the tide of globalization both within and beyond academia. Although this transnational turn in American studies has been actively discussed by many critics such as Shelley Fisher Fiskin, Donald E. Pease, Amy Kaplan, Wai Chee Dimock, and others, in an attempt to address the complex, often neglected, histories and narratives of racial and ethnic minorities in the US and beyond, scholars in American studies to date have not paid much attention to the intersections between ecocriticism and US ethnic literatures, although both fields have developed and

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19 I would like to highlight that this transnational turn in American studies was not limited to “Anglo-American” literary and cultural studies, which has dominated the field since its inception in 1950 and 1960s. Rather, it began to significantly change other fields such as African American Studies, Latina/o Studies, Asian American Studies, and more recently, American Indian Studies by considering the transnational dimensions of racial and ethnic identity formation in the United States. Regarding the transnational turn in Asian American studies, see also Sau-ling C. Wong’s influential essay “Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads” (1995), 1-27. While positively affirming the need for a transnational analysis of Asian American studies, Wong has argued that it also becomes crucial to examine Asian American experiences in relation to US national politics and other ethnic groups’ different cultural contexts. Analyzing the danger that simply accepts a celebratory mode of transnationalism as a perfect solution for the limits of nation-based approaches in Asian American studies, she claims that “at this juncture in the evolution of our field, we need to historicize the push to globalize Asian American cultural criticism. Without such historicizing, one of the most important aspirations of denationalization—to dialogize and trouble American myths of nation—may end up being more subverted than realized” (12). Resonant with Wong’s notion of critical transnationalism that is more attentive to the presence and history of national borders in shaping transnational subjects, my project contends that the garden in US literature and culture functions as a sort of in-between space that negotiates dilemmas and differences between the nation-state and transnational aspiration, between local and global, and between the self and the world. On the emergence of Asian American literary studies in relation to multiculturalism and comparative ethnic studies in the US, see also Wong’s ground breaking work, Reading Asian American Literature. From Necessity to Extravagance (1993).

20 Regarding the absence of environmental perspectives in the tradition of US ethnic literatures, Sarah Wald persuasively points out that “The lack of traditional wilderness motifs does not signal the absence of the more-than-human world in US ethnic literatures, but rather reveals the different ways “nature” often operates in these texts, suggesting the ways environmental ethics in such literature cannot be disentangled from issues of social justice, including US imperialism” (17). For more detailed information on the interrelations of US ethnic literatures and ecocriticism in the context of California agricultural industry, see Wald’s The Nature of California: Race, Citizenship, and Farming since the Dust Bowl (2016).
evolved over the past two decades in the larger context of the transnational turn in literary and cultural studies. In her provocative work *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the old model of disciplines in the humanities (e.g. Area Studies born out of the Cold War politics, Comparative Literature largely influenced by European literary traditions) cannot represent the more complex and diverse aspects of literary studies in today’s rapidly globalizing world, which dismantles the static notion of cultural origin and national identity (11-12). Emphasizing the intellectual rigor that attempts to cross disciplinary borders fearlessly, she introduces the conception of “planetarity” as a possible model of literary studies in the twenty-first century. She writes:

The planetarity of which I have been speaking in these pages is perhaps best imagined from the precapitalist cultures of the planet. In this era of global capital triumphant, to keep responsibility alive in the reading and teaching of the textual is at first sight impractical. It is, however, the right of the textual to be so responsible, responsive, answerable. The “planet” is, here, as perhaps, always, a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right. Its alterity, determining experience, is mysterious and discontinuous—an experience of the impossible. It is such collectives that must be opened up with the question “How many are we?” when cultural origin is detranscendentalized into fiction—the toughest task in the diaspora. (102)

Spivak here uses the term “planetarity” to highlight our *shared humanities* and to describe how we as humans work together to move beyond national and disciplinary boundaries while acknowledging the importance of cultural particularities and situated local knowledge in the era of globalization. Although she does not explicitly mention about environmental criticism throughout her work, I think her insightful analysis of the emergence of global comparative literature provides a good theoretical ground for understanding the meaning and value of transdisciplinary scholarship that risks itself to expand the scope of intellectual inquiry and to reach more audiences, instead of remaining in disciplinary comfort.
This dissertation, then, does not only show that ecocriticism is a crucial lens that we can re-envision American studies in comparative and global contexts. It also establishes that literature (US ethnic literatures in particular) is a laboratory for environmental and social changes that radically alter our perception of nature and culture across humanities disciplines. My aim in this project is to recontextualize the American pastoral and agrarian traditions, which have shaped and influenced the field of American studies since scholars of the “myth and symbol school” like Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx founded the field during the Cold War, and situate them within the social, technological, and environmental histories of US agricultural discourse in the context of transnationalism. As Ursula Heise has argued in Sense of Place and Sense of Planet (2008), I believe that environmentalism in the twenty-first century “needs to foster an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world, and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness” (21). Building on Heise’s concept of “eco-cosmopolitanism,” throughout this dissertation, I want to show how the garden narratives of US ethnic women writers imaginatively reconnect people, land, and species around the world and work to create a new environmental consciousness that allows us to perceive the whole earth as our garden and to cultivate ethics of environmental and social care for global justice. To fully address the dialectic

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21 On the myth and symbol school in American Studies, see Henry Nash Smith’s Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950), Leo Marx’s The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (1964), and Roderick Nash’s Wilderness and the American Mind (1965).

22 In spite of its unstable, indeterminate characteristics, Heise defines the meaning of “eco-cosmopolitanism” as follows: “Eco-cosmopolitanism, then, is an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary ‘imagined communities’ of both human and nonhuman kinds. While the cultural mechanisms by means of which allegiance to national communities is generated, legitimated, and maintained have been studied in depth, ecocriticism has only begun to explore the cultural means by which ties to the natural world are produced and perpetuated, and how the perception of such ties fosters or impedes regional, national, and transnational forms of identification” (61). For more detailed account of eco-cosmopolitanism, see Heise’s Sense of Place and Sense of Planet (2008), especially Chapter 1 (17-67).
of the global and the local in shaping environmental discourse and US citizenship, each chapter
develops a transnational context for the topic at hand. This approach enables us to see that
understanding locality and cultural particularities does not necessarily mean that we have to
entirely abandon the global dimensions of US ethnic literary and cultural productions in order to
be rooted in place where we currently live in. By addressing the conflicts and interactions among
the local, the national, and the global through an examination of US ethnic women’s garden
narratives, this project aims to provide a more nuanced account of transnational ecocriticism, one
that takes into account the cultural and environmental histories of US agricultural power in the
United States and beyond.

**How the Chapters Move**

The chapters of this dissertation traverse a wide range of geographical locations, from the
Arizona desert to the Caribbean to the digital space, that contemporary U.S. ethnic women
writers deploy to imagine planetary environmental citizenship beyond national boundaries. *Re-
designing the American Garden* opens with Chapter 2, “The Garden in Motion: Botanical
Exchange and Transnational Encounters in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes*,”
which explores the transatlantic narrative of the garden, focusing on the interrelationship of US
settler colonialism, the fall of American Indian agriculture, and the reification of indigenous
knowledge through imperial botany in the late nineteenth century. By questioning the cultural
stereotype that views Indians as “savages” or “uncivilized,” who do not have the same capacity
as white settlers to control their own affairs and land use, this chapter uncovers that Indians have
actually practiced their own farming methods long before Europeans arrived in the Americas and
shows the problems and contradictions surrounding Lockean conception of land ownership. In
this chapter, I argue that Silko deploys the trope of the garden as a means of critiquing
environmental injustice and modern America’s ecological imperialism, which attempts to naturalize the conquest of Native lands and foodways. While US environmental discourse until now has been largely shaped by elite, white upper-middle class male environmentalists, I find that contemporary American Indian writers like Silko have worked to revise this predominantly Euro-American centered narrative by approaching environmental issues from Native perspectives. Yet, Silko’s environmental imagination in Gardens in the Dunes, I suggest, does not model a form of “center-periphery” cultural exchange or the closed form of “authenticity” (understanding a certain ethnic community requires membership in that community), but rather it focuses more on unexpected, yet productive cultural interactions mediated by the global network of gardens. By tracing how Indigo, young girl of the Sand Lizard people, shuttles between indigenous knowledge and Western science on her transatlantic journey in the late 19th century, I demonstrate that Silko offers a new account of Native modernity—one that is crucial to both the reconfiguration of American Indians’ savage image and the revitalization of indigenous food systems for the survival of tribal people and their biocultural diversity in the region. To this end, Chapter 2 seeks to extend the scope of both American Indian literature and ecocriticism, rather than reading Silko’s work within a single literary tradition, by considering these fields’ connection to other disciplines such as agrarian studies, history of science, and (post)colonial studies that have been rarely examined together among Americanists and ecocritics to date.

Shifting the scholarly focus from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, Chapter 3, “Unsettling Nature in the Global South: Postcolonial Pastoral, Gender, and Environmental Citizenship in Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison” traces how plantation agriculture and the migration of people, plants, and capital have shaped the global dimensions of the African diaspora through the writings of Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison. While
Kincaid’s garden writing has received much attention from scholars in postcolonial ecocriticism due to her trenchant critique of imperial botany and the oppression of people of color and nature, Morrison’s work has been seldom studied in terms of an environmental criticism perspective, though nature plays a significant role that shapes both human and nonhuman histories in many of her writings. Chapter 3 begins with Kincaid’s *My Garden (Book)* (1999) to introduce the links between plantation agriculture and environmental degradation and the exploitation of the dispossessed and people of color in the Americas. Turning to Morrison’s *Paradise* (1997), I investigate how plantation agriculture and its aftermath, such as the trauma of slavery and racial capitalism, have negatively influenced African American communities psychologically, economically, and environmentally. Against critics who read Morrison’s text within the frame of black nationalism, I argue that Morrison’s project in *Paradise* allows her readers to rethink the cultures and violence of agricultural capitalism and its devastating impact on black communities across the US and, simultaneously, redirects our attention to a larger and more complex picture of human freedom, women’s rights, social justice, and environmental ethics in the modern world that transcends disparate cultural and national boundaries. Focusing on the history of plantation agriculture in the Caribbean and the US South, this chapter demonstrates that Afro-Caribbean and African American experiences can be better understood when we pay more attention to their shared, yet differently situated experiences within the global plantation economy along the lines of race, class, and gender. Thus, this chapter intends to show how both Kincaid and Morrison work to reinvent the notion of “the Garden of Eden” in the New World, which has long been associated with Euro-American men’s view of nature, women, and other races, in an attempt to create an alternative vision of ecological utopia from black women’s perspectives.
Moving from the mid-twentieth century to the present, Chapter 4, “The Seeds of the Global Future: Modern Agriculture, Biotechnology, and Ruth L. Ozeki’s Digital Garden” investigates how biotechnology in the garden is closely related to global agribusiness and shows why and how this marriage between food and science causes invisible, long-term environmental consequences, such as land degradation, food insecurity, and biodiversity loss, on a global scale. Drawing upon controversial debates regarding the GMOs and its impacts on human health and the natural environment, this chapter further examines how Ozeki employs the trope of gardening as a tool to challenge contemporary food production systems, which alienate both farmers and consumers from the food production process itself, and to envision an alternative model of food cultures—one that seeks to bridge the gap between people and land via global networks of gardens, most explicitly exemplified by the digital seed library project in the novel. In this sense, this chapter demonstrates how the practice of gardening and botanical references in Ozeki’s *All Over Creation* provide fertile ground for understanding the increasingly complicated history of U.S. agriculture as an experimental laboratory of food science and technology in the twentieth century. Emphasizing the cultural implications of the garden in US history that oscillate between human desires to control nature and the Romantic desire to return to nature, I argue that Ozeki’s botanical fiction not just resists rigid scientific categories and binary thinking, but rather it seeks to cultivate a new form of environmental culture that brings together science, art, and politics for radical social change in the twenty-first century.

This dissertation closes with Chapter 5, “Epilogue: Toward Global Environmental Literatures and Multispecies Communities in the Anthropocene,” and suggests creating new narratives that interweave both humans and nonhumans will be an integral part of human experiences and stories in the twenty-first century. Using transnational, cross-racial, and
interdisciplinary approaches, *Re-designing the American Garden* shows how minority women writers critically respond to North American environmental discourse, which has been historically linked to US settler colonialism, racial injustice, and patriarchal white capitalism from its inception, highlighting the ways in which these women reimagine the garden as a vehicle to navigate between their aesthetics and environmental and social practices. In doing so, this project provides a new perspective on the relationship between comparative racialization and the notion of environmental citizenship in the United States from the past to the present, and envisions the possible futures of American Studies and ecocriticism that transcend national and regional boundaries and species distinctions in the context of the “environmental turn” within literary and cultural studies. Ultimately, *Re-designing the American Garden* will contribute to a larger environmental discourse, which has been mostly articulated by scholars in the social and natural sciences, by offering a humanistic perspective that is vital to understanding the role of humans and their narratives in the era of the Anthropocene.
During the first half of the twentieth century, the US government used the garden (for example, the “War Garden” during WWI and the “Victory Garden” during WWII) as the frontier of the war by encouraging citizens to cultivate and preserve their own food in order to provide US troops and allies with sufficient food and other necessary materials.

Figure 1-5. The Slow Food Nation Victory Garden Project in front of San Francisco City Hall (2008). During the summer of 2008, the Slow Food Nation in collaboration with other civic organizations launched “Victory Gardens 2008+” project that aims to rethink America’s outdated food production systems and related problems such as food insecurity, hunger and health disparities, and climate change and thus transforms urban open spaces into community gardens that link farmers, gardeners, environmental activists, and citizens alike. Accessed October 19, 2016, http://www.chowhound.com/food-news/54671/slow-food-nations-victory-garden/.
CHAPTER 2
THE GARDEN IN MOTION: BOTANICAL EXCHANGE AND TRANSNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO’S GARDENS IN THE DUNES

“But you know, grandson, this world is fragile.” …

It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exits alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku’oosh said, the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said; and this demanded great patience and love.

-- Leslie Marmon Silko
Ceremony

In May 1993, the Washington Post featured a news article by Wendy Melillo entitled “Why Are the Pima Indians Sick?” tracing the root causes of the Arizona Pima Indians’s extremely high rate of diabetes, one of the highest rates in the world, along with that of their nearby relatives in the Sonoran Desert, the Tohono O’odham Nation. Based on extensive medical research conducted by the National Institutes of Health since 1965, Melillo concluded that the prevalence of type II diabetes and obesity among the Pimas closely relates to their loss of traditional diet. At the turn of the twentieth century, the federal government started diverting the Gila River, the Pima Indians’ water supply, to growing cities and white settlers’ farms and ranches in the West. The diversion of water soon resulted in the collapse of indigenous food systems because the Pima Indians were unable to cultivate their desert land due to significant water shortage. As such, the Pimas began to lose not only the land and traditional economic base, but also their connection to native foods such as corn, tepary beans, squash, cholla buds, and wild game. These vital sources of nutrition, however, were essential to the Southwest Indians whose genes have evolved over the centuries in the desert’s feast-and-famine cycles. Moreover, food rations sent by the U.S. government after World War II—white flour, sugar, lard, meat, and canned foods—aggravated the health conditions of the Pimas, making them more prone to type
II diabetes and other diet-related diseases. The diabetes epidemic in the Indian reservations continues to grow today, despite the federal government’s and local communities’ efforts to reduce the risk of this disease among the Pima Indians.

Written nearly a hundred years after the construction of dams and water diversion in the Gila River, Leslie Marmon Silko’s third novel, *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), speaks about Southwestern Indians’ continuing struggles for food sovereignty and environmental justice in order to preserve their health and their natural and cultural heritage in the region. Set in the 1890s, in the final decades of the US government’s military assault on Western Indians,¹ Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes* (hereafter, abbreviated as *Gardens*) revolve around the colonization of Indian minds and bodies through a variety of processes, the loss of land and natural resources in general and the disruption of native food practices in particular. Whereas her previous two novels, *Ceremony* (1977) and *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), probe the exploitation and dispossession of the poor and indigenous peoples in the postwar period and late twentieth century, with *Gardens*, Silko focuses on the American West in the late nineteenth century, and correspondingly, invokes traditional literary forms such as the historical epic, literary realism, Victorian children’s literature, and women’s botanical writing. When we consider environmental injustice and indigenous people’s loss of traditional food practices across North America, we can

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¹ In the introduction to the special issue of *Journal of Transnational American Studies* entitled “Circa 1898: Overseas Empire and Transnational American Studies” (2011), Hsuan L. Hsu writes that “US imperialism intensified around 1898, with the massacre at Wounded Knee (1890), the Spanish-American War of 1898, the annexation of Hawaiʻi (1898), the bloody US-Philippine War (1899-1902), the China Relief Expedition in which US troops participated in 1900-1901, diplomatic interventions that set the stage for the Panama Canal, and economic support for the tyrannical regime of Porfirio Diaz in Mexico” (1). As Hsu’s words indicate, it is not coincident that Silko centers her novel *Gardens* on the late nineteenth century given this particular period’s significance to U.S. expansion and global imperialism. Yet, what I would like to highlight in this chapter is not the relation between U.S. and other nations, as Hsu’s work does, but the erased, invisible presence of Native America within the US. In the final section of this chapter, I return to examine how the absence of Native America in American Studies, explicitly and implicitly, reflects the issue of “internal colonialism” that is oblivious to the presence of indigenous communities before the emergence of nation-states.
glean from Silko’s *Gardens* productive insight into the origins of current environmental issues, especially poverty and health disparities, faced by Native peoples, problematizing how the idea of “progress” has played in the US government’s uneven development of the West from the Gilded Age to the present. In this sense, *Gardens* creates a narrative that correlates the American West’s past, present, and future regarding the subjugation of Indians and environmental exploitation.

This chapter examines how Silko deploys the trope of the garden as a means of critiquing environmental injustice and modern America’s ecological imperialism that attempts to naturalize the conquest of Native lands and foodways. Silko’s project in *Gardens* is to show that collecting plants from indigenous peoples for agricultural and commercial purposes and “educating” Indians as US citizens were projects integral to modern nation-building and to constructing Western scientific knowledge and American identity. At one level, the novel presents the garden as a conduit to US imperialism and global capitalism through the rhetoric of cultivation familiar to the discourse of Manifest Destiny. However, the garden in Silko’s text also creates a communal space where different cultures meet and are in dialogue with each other. From this perspective, I contend that we cannot understand the complexity of global botanical networks without exploring how the garden opens a new channel for biocultural exchange between Euro-Americans and American Indians alike. As Silko’s novel traverses across various forms of the garden—from the desert garden in Arizona to a white upper-class garden in New York to the English and Italian gardens in Europe, it both questions the very notion that Indians are “uncivilized savages” who need the vocational care of a “civilized” white society and helps us re-envision the cultural stereotype that has separated the Indian from the realm of civilization.
By tracing how Indigo, young girl of the Sand Lizard people,² shuts between indigenous knowledge and Western science on her transatlantic journey, Gardens challenges us to reimagine Americans Indians beyond the idea of “wilderness” and to perceive them as transnational actors deeply involved in the production and distribution of indigenous food crops globally, which have significantly changed human history.

Recent scholarship on the novel has focused on either the relationship between indigenous peoples and transatlantic voyages or the preservation of traditional Native culture and domestic resistance against US imperialism.³ However, critics have not paid much attention to Silko’s environmental imagination, simultaneously local and global, because they tend to foreground the novel’s transatlantic plot or indigenous women’s search for Native identity rooted in locality rather than reading these plots in relation to each other. Focusing on the significance of gardens and botanical exchange in the text, I suggest instead how the dialectic of the local and the global establishes transnational networks that powerfully resist environmental injustice and social, political, and economic inequalities brought by colonizers and capitalists around the globe in the name of “modernization.” After addressing the fall of Indian agriculture and its impact on the displacement of indigenous peoples during US territorial expansion, I further analyze the “imperial botany of desire”⁴ that organized global plants expeditions and supported the implementation of a museum of natural history. Yet, what interests me most here is how global networks created across gardens could provide the unique opportunity for indigenous peoples to

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² The Sand Lizards in the novel is a fictional small Indian tribe living in the desert area who may not have treaties with the US government like other Indian nations. But they share cultural and geographical similarities with the Pimas and the Tohono O’odham in Southern Arizona.

³ See, for example, Ferguson, Li, Reiger, Ryan.

reclaim their environmental rights beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, instead of remaining under the influence of US imperialism and environmental injustice. Throughout, I demonstrate that Silko’s novel offers a new account of Native modernity—one that is crucial to both the reconfiguration of Indians’s savage image and the revitalization of indigenous food systems for the survival of tribal people and the preservation of biocultural diversity. Using transdisciplinary approaches, this essay ultimately seeks to extend the scope of both American Indian literature and ecocriticism by considering these fields’s connection to other disciplines such as agrarian studies, history of science, and (post)colonial studies that have been rarely examined together among Americanists and ecocritics to date.

Westward Expansion and the Fall of American Indian Agriculture

Silko’s Gardens begins with Grandma Fleet’s education of her Sand Lizard granddaughters, Sister Salt and Indigo, who are now living alone in Grandma Fleet’s house after losing their mother in the havoc of the federal government’s arrest of the Ghost Dance participants. Through the old gardens, Grandma Fleet not only teaches these two sisters how to grow and prepare native foods such as amaranth and sunflowers, but also helps them build strong environmental ethics that equally respect all beings in the natural world, including humans and non-humans. The novel’s opening demonstrates this Native environmental education formally:

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5 It is worth noting that the concept of “indigenous sovereignty” has been very controversial in recent debates over environmental rights. For example, the Rio International Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) states that the ownership of biological and genetic resources belongs to the nation-state, despite its ongoing conflict with indigenous communities whose territories traverse Western notion of national boundaries. As a critique of this one-sided environmental rights, which heavily relies on the idea of modern nation-state, on September 13, 2007, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples addresses various understandings of indigenous sovereignty, including land rights, spiritual concerns, and educational and health issues. See Prasad, “The UN Declaration”; Wiessner, “Indigenous Sovereignty.”

6 For more information on the Ghost Dance, see James Mooney’s The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890.
They [Indigo and Sister Salt] each had plants they cared for as if the plants were babies. Granma Fleet had taught them this too. The plants listen, she told them. Always greet each plant respectfully. Don’t argue or fight around the plants—hard feelings cause the plants to wither…. Sand Lizard warned her children to share. Don’t be greedy. The first ripe fruit of each harvest belongs to the spirits of our beloved ancestors, who come to us as rain; the second ripe fruit should go to the birds and wild animals, in gratitude for their restraint in sparing the seeds and sprouts earlier in the season. Give the third ripe fruit to the bees, ants, mantises, and others who cared for the plants.” (Gardens 14-15)

The old gardens serve as an open field of nature education for Indian children where they learn their deep connection to land and ancestors as well as the ethics of environmental care. Not only “the birds and wild animals,” but also small, unrecognized things such as “the bees, ants, mantises” are described as active participants in cultivating the garden as much as the human gardener. Here we can read Grandma Fleet’s teaching in line with what Michael Pollan calls “coevolution” (xxi), a concept that emphasizes the constant interactions between humans and plants rather than seeing plants as the objects of human desire. In Gardens, Indians’ holistic stance toward nature resonates with this idea of coevolution. If white settlers’ view of nature, as I discuss later in this chapter, stems from the Lockean concept of property rights over land, Grandma Fleet’s words corroborate how indigenous peoples read nature as Mother Earth that cannot be possessed or sold by humans. As the plot proceeds, Grandma Fleet’s education in the old gardens plays a crucial role in connecting Indigo to her sister by creating an emotional landscape, in which both characters can inhabit through remembrance even when they are taken away from their desert home in Arizona.

Yet, places like Indigo and Sister Salt’s dreamy old gardens in the desert encounter a serious threat that possibly endangers the foundation of indigenous culture and biodiversity as a

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7 The term “coevolution” originates from Paul R. Ehrlich and Peter H. Raven’s article “Butterflies and Plants: A Study in Coevolution” (1964). While Ehrlich and Raven’s use of this concept primarily focused on the interaction between non-humans, Pollan extends the term to humans’ interaction with other species so that humans can be also considered as part of the ecosystem, moving beyond modern society’s nature-culture dualism.
whole when the US government implements the Indian removal policy. With its objective of colonizing the West, the government’s ruthless policy of relocating Indians, reaching back to the trail of tears in the 1830s, had worked to “clean” land for white settlers by removing its native inhabitants to the reservation areas and to “civilize” indigenous peoples by sending Indian children to boarding schools through which they could learn ways to be part of white society. As a consequence, native peoples gradually became “developmental refugees” (in Thayer Scudder’s term) who lost their rights to land and natural resources, despite their deep historical roots, and were forced to assimilate into white society at the expense of their own cultures and languages. Emphasizing the direct violence of the federal government’s forced removal act, the novel reveals how the Indian reservation, contrary to its propaganda, functioned as prison:

There was nothing to eat on the reservation; the best farmland along the river was taken by the white people. Reservation Indians sat in one place and did not move; they ate white food—white bread and white sugar and white lard. Reservation Indians had no mesquite flour for the winter because they could not leave the reservation to gather mesquite beans in August. They were not allowed to go to the sandhills in the spring to gather delicacies—sprouts and roots. Poor people! If they couldn’t travel around, here and there, they wouldn’t be able to find enough food to eat; if people stayed in one place too long, they soon ate up everything. The government bought sheep and cattle to feed the reservation Indians through the winter, but the Indian agent and his associates got more of the meat than the Indians did. (17)

Extending the rhetoric of wilderness preservation, the government asserted that the main purpose of creating the Indian reservation was to protect endangered Indians from white ranchers’ and gold miners’ possible attacks. However, the novel sheds light on the hidden side of this rhetoric of wilderness preservation. Since reservation Indians are not allowed to leave the area, they have

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8 Silko notes that when she was working on Gardens, she was first inspired by the stories her grandfather Hank told her about “his high school years at the Indian Boarding School, the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California…. [It] was a trade school for Indian students from all over the U.S. and Alaska.” See Silko, “Delight,” 206. As a means of disciplining “Indian savages,” the US government operated many different types of Indian boarding schools across the nation and pushed Indians’s successful assimilation into white society. For more on the Indian boarding school, see Adams and Lomawaima.

9 Quoted in Nixon, Slow Violence (152).
to “[sit] in one place” and eat “white food—white bread and white sugar and white lard” rather than farming and gathering traditional Native foods in the fields. Eating “white food,” then, symbolically indicates American Indians’ cultural and biological assimilation into white society. Through the reservation, the “wild Indian” has entered the realm of “civilization” that rests on the Western concept of private property and land cultivation, and, simultaneously, the inscrutable Native “other” comes closer to the lens of modern science for cultural rationalization. Thus, while the reservation contains Indians, usually on undesirable and marginally productive land, the more efficient management of natural resources can be undertaken in the emptied land. It is here that Silko invokes what Rob Nixon calls “spatial amnesia,” a mode of thinking that is oblivious to the presence of pre-existing local communities and their inhabitants before development. In Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor (2011), Nixon insists that “[c]ommunities under the banner of development, are physically unsettled and imaginatively removed, evacuated from place and time and thus uncoupled from the idea of both a national future and a national memory” (151). Through resource development, as a way of displaying the image of the modern nation-state, people living in the developing areas are often categorized as “surplus people” and these people treated like waste are dumped into the remote areas. In Silko’s novel, Indians are described as “surplus people” and have been violently converted into “uninhabitants,” borrowing from Nixon’s words. Indeed, this politics of invisibility has not only generated many unwanted “ghost communities” throughout the West, but also continues to erase the presence of its inhabitants and

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10 Throughout the novel, Silko describes how eating native food is closely linked to sustaining Indian identity and culture. For example, when Sister Salt bears her son, little black grandfather, the baby insists her to “eat Sand Lizard food, not all this animal grease and cooked food.” While the baby’s father, Big Candy, “insisted [her] eat plenty of meat, and each night he brought back big platters of leftovers—beef rib roasts and stuffed pork loins and bowls piled high with orange yams and stewed okra.” Sister Salt finds that “the odor of meat and its grease made her nauseous; she ate the okra and yams but pushed the meat aside” (339).
environmental injustice such as poverty and hunger in the region from the public’s awareness (153). Thomas R. Wessel comes to this point in his analysis of Indians and agricultural discourse in U.S. environmental history. “Much of the conflict between Indians and whites on the frontier,” he observes, “revolved around the agricultural year… Persistent destruction of Indian fields reduced many tribes to relying almost exclusively on the hunt and conforming to a life whites insisted the Indian savages represented. Debilitated and destitute tribes became an easy prey to the land-grabbing schemes of frontier governors who insisted that the Indians made no use of the land… Firm in the notion that they were the vanguard of civilization, to acknowledge that Indians could be farmers too required admissions that few were willing to make” (14; emphasis added). Contrary to notions that Indians are savages who have inherently maintained “uncivilized” pre-modern lifestyle such as gathering and hunting due to their lack of intelligence or “undeveloped” nature, this comment indicates that American Indians had actually practiced their own farming practices before European settlers arrived in the Americas and provokes questions about the prevailing cultural image that often reads whites as the legitimate proponents of environmental stewardship (Figure 2-1). Crucially, the relocation of Indians to the reservations, driven by white settlers’ capitalist farming and ranching in the West, led to the collapse of indigenous agricultural systems that had maintained in the region for more than thousand years. This decline of Indian farming practices, however, not only resulted in the

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11 To understand the interrelationship of the development of the US Southwest and environmental injustice represented in literature, one only needs to look at works such as Silko’s first novel Ceremony (1977), Terry Tempest Williams’ Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place (1992), and Rebecca Solnit’s Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Landscape Wars of the American West (1994). These works closely examine how the geopolitics of the desert, which is deeply rooted in nuclear testing and environmental degradation in the region, has triggered environmental illness such as breast cancer, and simultaneously problematizes how local communities suffered from environmental injustice have slowly disappeared from public discourse.

Figure 2-1. Agricultural Machinery Advertisement in the 1890s. This advertisement explicitly shows the violence of US imperialism and Western modernity that sought to “standardize” the globe through its “worldwide-cut” cultivation. Trade Literature Collection, Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

expansion of white foodways, but it also rapidly pushed indigenous peoples’ integration into mainstream American society by destroying independent Indian economies based on subsistence farming and by forcing Indians into marginal wage work.13 While listening to her grandmother and mother’s stories, Indigo realizes that “they had been forced to abandon the old gardens after [Indian] refugees came and ate everything” (Gardens 34) because “food became more and more scarce” (18). Taking the fall of Indian agriculture as a precursor of indigenous peoples’

13 In his study of Indian agriculture and the Southwest’s cultural and biological diversity, Lebanese American ethnobotanist Gary Paul Nabhan observes: “Much of the arable land that Native Americans had formerly utilized for farming, hunting, and gathering was thus usurped by others. Where supplemental water was essential to avoid crop failure, Indian often found irrigation projects biased toward their non-Indian neighbors. Once their land and water were taken away, it is no wonder that Indian farming declined, and with it went much of the remaining native crop diversity” (61). See Nabhan, Enduring Seeds: Native American Agriculture and Wild Plant Conservation (2002), especially Chapter 4.
incorporation into US market economy, the narrator sketches this last survived Sand Lizard family’s new life in the city: “In the railroad town called Needles they managed to find a little to eat each day. Mama washed dirty linens for the hotel next door to the train station. Grandma Fleet carried Indigo on her back while she and Sister Salt scavenged scraps of lumber to build shelter for them on the floodplain of the river” (18). If Native farming, as Indigo imagines, enabled her family to maintain self-sufficient life in the desert, now their life in the city demands them to work as low-wage workers, whose jobs are to do laundry for white people and to make and sell “small frog-shaped and dog-shaped baskets” (19) to tourists on the railroad platform. It becomes clear, then, that the decline of Indian agriculture was inseparably linked to the colonialist project of “developing” the West that heavily rests on imperialist white capitalism. Yet, in Silko’s text, this cultivation of “wilderness” has not just been limited to the physical environment, but also encompasses the social and cultural domain that shapes our perception of other civilizations and the natural world. In what follows, I further examine how the knowledge and practices of Western modernity were complexly interwoven with the rise of the garden industry and the establishment of a museum of natural history at the turn of the twentieth century.

**The Garden as the Museum of Natural History**

Silko’s novel announces the significance of plants in understanding the link between colonialism and commerce via a narrative about the development of modern science and knowledge production. In her interview with Ellen Arnold, Silko explains how she became interested in plants: “They come from all over the world, and they’re also another way of looking at colonialism because everywhere the colonials went, the plants came back from there”

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14 See Max Oelschlager for more details about the idea of wilderness in Western traditions.
(“Listening” 181). Breaking from her initial plan to write a “non-political” novel after experiencing harsh criticism of her angry and intensely political previous work, *Almanac of the Dead*, she confesses that “it wasn’t too long before I realized how very political gardens are … I had actually stumbled into the most political thing of all—how you grow your food, whether you eat, the fact that the plant collectors followed the Conquistadors” (“Listening” 164). Silko’s fascination with plants that mark the history of colonialism in a global context is apparent in the plot of *Gardens*. When Indigo runs away from the Indian boarding school to find her separated sister and to return home, she encounters the Gilded Age aristocrats, Hattie and Edward Palmer, who will soon become her white adopted parents. Edward, the proprietor of a vast citrus plantation, mansion, and garden in Riverside, California, is also a botanist whose “ambition was to discover a new plant species that would bear his name” (78) because naming plants (botanical nomenclature) is another way of possessing nature and claiming his property rights. For Edward, “the garden was a research laboratory” (73) where he could add valuable plants obtained through his expeditions to his botanical collections and test their commercial value. He is especially interested in “aromatic grasses and plants, which always were highly prized by horticulturists and gardeners” (78). Gardening in the late nineteenth century thus emerged as the global enterprise, which depended on wealthy white consumers’ growing interest in exotic plants and flowers as luxury goods. To meet this increasing need for rare and beautiful plants, trading companies were eager to support botanists’ expeditions to remote areas and foreign countries and, in turn, these commercially motivated botanists returned home with valuable plants such as coffee, tea, sugarcane, cocoa, and orchids. In narrating his enthusiasm for plants to the reader, the narrator describes Edward “a man of science” (77), but his scientific investigations are always intertwined with commercial enterprises (Figure 2-2).
Prior readings of *Gardens* tend to focus on Indigo’s transatlantic journey that provides a channel to reconcile Europe and indigenous peoples in the Americas or the relationship between women characters in the novel by emphasizing Indigenous women’s sisterhood (Indigo and Sister Salt) or transracial feminine solidarity (Indigo and Hattie) as a means of domestic resistance against US imperialism, white patriarchy, and cultural genocide. Yet, these readings have not fully addressed the interrelationship of the local and the global that plays a vital role in shaping Silko’s environmental imagination. Although I concur with Terre Ryan and Stephanie Li’s interpretation of the novel as an ecofeminist text that shows the inseparable connection between white and male supremacist ideology and the domination of women and nature, I would argue that Edward, who often viewed as a minor villain in contrast to other characters in the novel, deserves closer scrutiny in that his professional occupation as a botanist helps us understand the long history of ecological imperialism in the Americas and its connection to the expansion of Western knowledge production system. Simply put, Edward demonstrates the ways in which plant collectors at this time served as what David Mackay calls “agents of empire” (qtd. in Schiebinger 11) whose inventories were full of the precious, unknown commercial crops and medicinal herbs collected from indigenous peoples before shipping to various libraries, museums, and botanic gardens in the Western world. In the eighteen and nineteenth centuries, natural historians— from the Swedish botanist and taxonomist Carl

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15 Regarding the transatlantic aspect of *Gardens*, see Ferguson and Reiger. For more on the relationship between the power of gardening/storytelling and indigenous women’s resistance, see Ryan and Li. Terre Ryan’s work is the first attempt to read “the image of the garden to illustrate imperialism on international, national, local, and domestic levels,” rather than merely treating the garden as the background of the novel, by focusing on the nineteenth century American gardening aesthetics and landscape arts in relation to indigenous peoples’ dispossession of the land and their culture (115-16). Similarly, Stephanie Li’s work extends the meaning of gardening by incorporating the revolutionary power of storytelling and mothering into the reading of Silko’s novel.

16 See, for example, Alfred W. Crosby’s *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (1972) and *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (1986).
Linnaeus to German explorer Alexander von Humboldt and American nature writer Henry David Thoreau—understood that the exact study of nature is indispensable to the advancement of science and human knowledge in general and to the wealth of nations in particular. According to historian of science Linda Schiebinger, while “[e]arly conquistadors entered the Americas looking for gold and silver,” naturalists, their successors in the eighteenth century, were interested in “green gold” instead (7). Whether they were “voyaging botanists” (24) sponsored by trading companies or sent by the government, the main task of these botanists was to bring valuable plants “all into production within the boundaries of the empire itself” (11).

Linking the journey of plants to the trade routes of both U.S. and European empires, *Gardens* represents Edward as one of the “independent plant hunters” whose commercial
motivation leads him to join the process of incorporating traditional indigenous knowledge into
the Western world order (128). His expedition to the Pará River to Brazil, for example, testifies
this entwined relationship between plants and empire while disclosing the disruptive influence of
colonial science in indigenous communities and the local environment. When Edward has begun
his botanical exploration (though his real business turns out to be botanical smuggling) to Latin
America in the early of the novel, he stops at the public market in Tampico, Mexico in order to
“collect samples of local and regional agriculture.” “The natives,” Edward reasons, “might
possess unknown medicinal plants with commercial potential or a new variety of citrus or new
source for rubber” (86). He is greatly interested to “purchase archaeological artifacts and
curiosities” and, moreover, he does not forget to bring his camera so that “the more interesting
subjects would be photographed” (86). The narrative details Edward’s act of photography at the
public market: “While the cabin boy steadied the tripod legs, Edward adjusted the camera lens
and arranged the black viewing cloth over his head. At this, the market fell strangely silent;
Indian and mestizo women of the market hid their faces behind the corners of their shawls as
they had when they told the price of a root or seeds” (87). The focalization of this market scene
is noteworthy. Through the lens of camera, Edward expands the scope of his collecting from
concrete objects (plants and archaeological artifacts) to abstract objects (the images of the public
market and indigenous people) by aestheticizing the cultural heritage of indigenous people and
their everyday lives. In Susan Sontag’s words, “[t]o photograph people is to violate them, by
seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it
turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed” (14). Evoking the trope of “I am
the monarch-of-all I survey,” the novel zooms in on Edward, who approaches the public market
not as an open space but as a sort of private property that can be possessed through the colonial
Here, the power relations between “seeing” and “being seen” suggest that colonial science pushes the conquest of the Americas by continuously positing a distance between the colonizer and the colonized. In this respect, when Edward asks Indigo to pose for his photography at his sister Susan’s luxury garden, we can understand a deep reason why Indigo feels uncomfortable about “the big glassy eye of the camera staring at her” (Gardens 190).

Photography, as Susan Hegeman argues, imposes the notion that “[t]he West [has] to be knowable intimately and emotionally as well as abstractly in order to be fully subjugated,” while generating “stereotypes of the West’s indigenous people, which could be used to both justify and create the conditions of their colonization” (56). Thus, collecting, whether bioprospecting or photography, exemplifies colonial science’s capacity to transform indigenous people and their natural knowledge into possessable objects and buttresses the structural inequalities that cement the colonizer privilege.

If Edward’s attitude in the public market scene shows how individual collectors approach the privatization of indigenous knowledge and culture, the episode of his expedition on the Pará River uncovers a larger and more intricate web of the global economic activity surrounding botany and gardens. As we have already seen, botanical exploration was part of a commercial enterprise that rested on the financial support of trading companies and national governments. At the same time, the story reveals that it was a contested site of colonial conflicts.

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17 Here I use the phrase “I am the monarch-of-all I survey” originally appeared in Mary Louise Pratt’s influential book, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992). While closely examining a Victorian discovery rhetoric found in Richard Burton’s Lake Regions of Africa (1860), Pratt provides a compellingly account of the interactions between the painting and imperial power: “The metaphor of the painting itself is suggestive. If the scene is a painting, then Burton is both the viewer there to judge and appreciate it, and the verbal painter who produces it for others. From the painting analogy it also follows that what Burton sees is all there is, and that the landscape was intended to be viewed from where he has emerged upon it….The viewer-painting relation also implies that Burton has the power if not to possess, at least to evaluate this scene” (200-201). Although Pratt’s focus is on the painting, both an art form and a medium frequently used for scientific record before the invention of photography, I think her analysis of the painting in imperial travel writing does suggest a good theoretical ground to understand Edward’s act of photography during his botanical expeditions.
and competition between Western and the Third World countries, showing how the
domestication of indigenous plants directly relates to the successful management of plantations
in distant colonies.

Mr. Vicks was an Englishman who came by special request of the Department of
Agriculture in cooperation with officials at the Kew Gardens. Mr. Albert swore Edward
to secrecy because Mr. Vicks was on a special mission for Her Majesty’s government
and time was of the essence. A virus, rubber tree leaf blight, was destroying Britain’s
great Far Eastern rubber plantations. Mr. Vicks’ mission was to obtain disease-resistant
specimens of rubber tree seedlings from their original source, the lowland drainages of
the Pará River. It was imperative Kew Gardens obtain specimens that resisted and
survived the leaf blight so stricken plantations in the Far East might be replanted with
resistant trees. Otherwise the supplies of cheap natural rubber would be lost to England
and the United States; Brazil would enjoy a world monopoly of rubber once more. (129)

Along with the expansion of European colonialism around the globe, the cultivation of native
land and exploitation of natural resources reached had become more pervasive in the late
nineteenth century. The passage implicitly provides an explanation of how British imperialism
transformed the conditions of agriculture in its Far Eastern colonies, against the needs of natives,
by operating large-scale monoculture rubber plantations, which still exert a negative influence
over the biodiversity and economies of the affected regions. While connecting botanical
expedition in Latin America to colonial plantations in South Asia (“Malaya” and “Ceylon”),
Silko’s geographical imagination attends to the transnational scope of European and U.S.
imperialism that traverses the boundaries of nation-states. Of particular interest to me, however,
is that Kew Gardens, one of the prominent gardens in the world originally founded for the study
of botany and natural history, appears here as the shadow force of British imperialism.18 “Mr.
Vicks,” who is affiliated with Kew Gardens, joins Edward’s expedition secretly in order to
conduct “a special mission for Her Majesty’s government,” that is, to smuggle “disease-resistant

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18 For information on the role of Kew gardens in the expansion of British imperialism, see Lucille Brockway’s
specimens of rubber tree seedlings” from the Pará River to aid rubber plantations in South Asia, and thus ensure the production of “cheap natural rubber.” Otherwise, “Brazil would enjoy a world monopoly of rubber once more.” Commenting on the interrelation between botany and commerce during the colonial period, Schiebinger explains, “[t]he botanical sciences served the colonial enterprise and were, in turn, structured by it. Global networks of botanical gardens, the laboratories of colonial botany, followed the contours of empire, and gardens often served its needs.” Against the common view that gardens like the Kew were centrally “intended to delight city dwellers,” botanical gardens actually functioned as “experimental stations for agriculture and way stations for plant acclimatization for domestic and global trade, rare medicaments, and cash crops” (11).

Similarly, the novel alludes to the fact that the Smithsonian Institution and the Bureau of Plant Industry in the U.S. served a role similar to Kew Gardens as both educational organizations and botanical research laboratories for colonial commerce by organizing a joint exhibition like the World Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans (1894). This exhibition aimed to promote knowledge of “the commerce, industry, and natural history of the Gulf and the Caribbean Sea” that “fit[s] for human consumption” (Gardens 92). It is here that I see the connection between a museum of natural history and the education of U.S. citizens/consumers. If the museum, as Donna Haraway’s account of Teddy Bear Patriarchy shows, embodies the “social construction of knowledge” (278), nature displayed through taxidermy and exhibitions infuses “a tale of the commerce of power and knowledge in white and male supremacist monopoly capitalism” (238) into the minds of the public audience walking along the corridor of the museum. Harraway has argued that the American Museum of Natural History, during the

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19 For the American counterpart of Kew gardens, see Peter Mickulas’s study on the New York Botanical garden, Britton’s Botanical Empire (2007).
“Nature Movement” (1890-1930) in particular, was “dedicated to preserving a threatened manhood” by using public activities such as “exhibition, eugenics, and conservation” (283). “All three activities,” she continues, “were a prescription to cure or prevent decadence, the dread disease of imperialists, capitalist, and white culture. All three activities were considered forms of education and forms of science…These activities were all about preservation, purity, social order, health, and the transcendence of death, personal and collective. They attempted to insure preservation without fixation and paralysis, in the face of extraordinary change in the relations of sex, race, and class” (283). More than any other character in Gardens, Edward performs Haraway’s description of “preserving a threatened manhood”: he attempts to restore his (white) manhood through scientific exploration and surveying wilderness. Throughout Gardens, Edward views his wife Hattie’s depression, which relates to her repressed desire for higher education, as female hysteria by simply assuming that she “apparently suffered from the sort of nervous disorder” (401). He also often dismisses Indigo as a “wild Indian”: someone who needs to be “civilized.” Indeed, Silko interweaves Edward’s character with the real life of young Theodore Roosevelt, an avid naturalist and supporter of hunting, and of the American Museum of Natural History, who firmly believed that the conquest of the western frontier correlates directly to “vigorous manliness” as well as the development of the nation.20 Just as Roosevelt was strongly influenced by Fredrick Jackson Turner’s Frontier thesis (1893),21 Edward seems to understand

20 Daniel J. Philippon interprets Roosevelt’s passion for hunting as both an extension of the American frontier spirit and as an expression of his masculine desire: “According to Roosevelt, the western frontier was the source of American democracy and character, providing not only the material resources critical to the success of the nation but also the sense of limitless opportunities and optimism, the mythic newness originating from so much ‘free’ land and ‘unspoiled’ nature….Individualistic, masculine, and powerful, the frontier hunter was the ideal American upon which Roosevelt wished to model both himself and the nation” (46-47). See, Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement (2005), especially Chapter 1. “The Closing of the Frontier: Theodore Roosevelt and the Boone and Crocket Club” (33-71).

21 In his famous essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893), Fredrick Jackson Turner emphasizes the conquest of the West as an inevitable consequence of American progress: “Up to our own day
that the domination of nature through scientific means such as bioprospecting and photography attests to the legitimacy of white and male centered environmental stewardship, and thus justifies the history of settler colonialism in the Americas. However, the text questions this racially exclusive logic of white male environmentalism by making Edward experience a life-threatening ordeal in the middle of the tropical rainforest. During his expedition on the Pará River, Edward is betrayed by Mr. Eliot, whose purpose for travel to Brazil is to set fire to the habitat of the wild orchids to ensure that his investors “[possess] the only specimen of *Laelia cinnabarina*” (142), and has been left alone in the jungle while wounded. Under the burning heat of the tropical sun, Edward suffers from severe dehydration:

He was very thirsty by then; the canteen with safe water and the packet of purification tablets were lost somewhere on the hillside, but he knew that to drink untreated river water invited fever and illness more grave than any broken limb. The sun was high overhead now; his rescuers should be along soon.

He dreamed about the white marble pool and fountain in his sister’s garden; in the dream he drank and drank the cool pure water to satisfy his thirst. Others at the garden party were sipping champagne, and among them, oddly enough, relaxed as if she belonged, was the Negress from the cantina with the little monkey in her arms. One of the guests, an older man he did not recognize, approached and warned him the water was not safe. He offered Edward a glass of champagne, but suddenly the Negress bared one breast to him and the voices of the other guests called out, “Drink! Drink!” (143)

While desperately waiting for the rescue party, injured and unmovable Edward dreams about Susan’s ornamental Victorian garden on the East Coast. Unlike his fear of drinking “untreated river water” in the tropical area that associates with “fever and illness,” Edward, in his dream, feels safe and comfortable about drinking “the cool pure water” from “the white marble pool and fountain” in the garden. The passage invites us to contemplate the relationship between Edward’s

American history has been in a larger degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advances of American settlement westward, explain American development” (1). However, this narrative of “American development,” as Silko’s novel demonstrates, is based on a white male-centered, capitalist movement that does not consider the environmental rights of indigenous people in the Southwest.
fear of wild nature and his anxiety over racial impurity and women. As seen in words such as “safe water,” “purification tablets,” and “pure water,” Edward expresses his obsessive desire for the purity of nature that can be read as a metonym for racial purity. When he notices the presence of the Negress at the wealthy whites’ garden party, he regards this scene “oddly enough” assuming that the colored woman is not supposed to be there but is there “as if she belonged.” This out-of-place woman, however, suddenly “bare[s] one breast to him” at the moment the old man offers Edward “a glass of champagne,” and the guests at the party fanatically urge him to “Drink! Drink!” from her dark breast instead. Whereas “a glass of champagne” represents a commodity produced through the chain of the white capitalist economy, “the Negress’s breast” appears to be untamed and racially-mixed Mother Nature that resists any form of control or reification. Realizing that “voices in his dream [are] voices on the river” (143), Edward is awake and feels much relieved when he is finally rescued by the Frenchman’s mestizo sons, his local guides, because otherwise “he [knows] that he must risk dysentery and fever with a swallow of river water” (144). When Edward falls asleep again after being rescued, the narration turns to his dream of pristine North American nature: “He dreamed of crystalline cascading streams as cold as the snow that fed them from the peaks of the Sierra Nevada where his father took him to fish for trout. He was kneeling along the trout stream about to take a sip of cool water when he heard his father’s voice call him. He wanted a swallow of water so badly he hesitated to stand up and answer his father” (144). Moving from the Negress’s dark breast at the garden party to “crystalline cascading streams” in his subsequent dream, the novel juxtaposes Edward’s fear of colored nature with his yearning for white nature, as “cold as the snow,” “the peaks of the Sierra Nevada,” and “a sip of cool water.” Resonant with Muir’s eulogy of the unspoiled Sierra Nevada, Edward portrays the American wilderness, rather than the tropical rainforest, as a source
of white manhood and youth that calls up his childhood memory with his father “fish[ing] for trout.” Yet his romantic fantasy of the North American wilderness is troubled by the fact that “he remembered his father died years before,” and he acknowledges as well, “how odd that a dead man should call him” (144). The novel hereby asserts that the model of idealized nature—domesticated, purified, and masculine—cannot exist in reality but only find a home in white males’ subconscious mind. Gardens thus critiques colonial science and entire system of Western knowledge production for reifying indigenous nature and culture, and problematizes the exclusion of people of color and women within environmental discourse writ large.

**Reclaiming Native Modernity: Botanical Exchange and Global Indigeneity**

In Gardens’ botanical expedition plot, Silko not only critiques colonial science and its connection to global imperialism and patriarchy but also imagines the revolutionary power of colonial science, which could subvert U.S. imperialism and revise the idea of racial and technological progress, when used by Native people. Although traditionally “national” Indian characters who positively affirm Native cultural heritage and claim their political rights and the land against the violence of white colonizers are strongly espoused by many Native literary critics like Craig Womack and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Silko’s literary imagination in Gardens envisions a “transnational Indian” who can freely cross borders between different Indian nations, Indians and Anglo settlers, America and Europe, and modern and ancient through the re-appropriation of colonial science. At least since Shelley Fisher Fishkin announced the

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22 During the 1980s and 90s, multiculturalism emerged as a critical keyword for American studies and it simultaneously pushed the discipline to revise its predominantly Euro-American centered approaches by addressing more diverse voices of ethnic groups in the US. Yet, according to Native American studies scholars, American studies scholars have overlooked the presence of Native America and its cultural productions compared to any other ethnic group and this absence may lead to the possibility that naturalizes America’s current domination of Indian people and lands as something taken for granted. Therefore, it is necessary to build the tradition of Native American literature separating from American literature, rather than seeing Native literary production as part of American literature. In this context, what I mean by “national” here is not bound to nation-states, but rather it is a concept that
“Transnational Turn” in American studies during her presidential address to American Studies Association annual meeting in November 2004, transnationalism has emerged as a key issue for American studies scholars.\(^{23}\) However, it was not until recently that scholars in Native American studies have begun to examine the possibility of a transnational approach in understanding the complex history of Indian cultures and cultural productions.\(^{24}\) In regard to this recent transnational turn in Native American studies, Shari M. Huhndorf provides a compelling account of the phenomenon: “the increasing importance of pantribal alliance (registered, among other places, in indigenous cultural production) began to complicate nationalist tendencies of Native culture and politics and to foreground the shared colonial situation of global indigenous communities” (362-63). It is true that indigenous nationalism has contributed to the growth of Native American studies as an intellectual decolonization movement that resists the ongoing processes of colonialism in the U.S. from past to present by synthesizing Native studies and social and political activism. But it is equally important to acknowledge that a nationalistic approach, as Huhndorf points out, may risk to “disregard the many indigenous communities that fall outside the category of ‘nation’—those without treaties, or those such as urban communities whose histories render restoration and political autonomy less relevant” (365).\(^{25}\) Besides, native literary nationalism, Huhndorf continues, has not adequately considered “questions of gender” because addressing such questions may weaken Indian national solidarity when indigenous

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\(^{23}\) See Fishkin (17-57).

\(^{24}\) See Arnold Krupat (5-63) for a more nuanced analysis of terms like “nationalism,” “transnationalism,” “trans-indigenism,” and “cosmopolitanism” within Native American studies.

\(^{25}\) Jace Weaver also points out the problems of “closed forms” of Native American studies, emphasizing that the openness of the field is vital not only to address the changing identity of contemporary indigenous peoples, but also to reach more diverse audiences beyond Native communities. See Weaver (233-255).
sovereignty should take a priority over other competing issues in order to achieve unity and self-determination from the U.S. (365). Recognizing the contradictions and problems within a dominant discourse of indigenous nationalism, Silko also comments that

Just because everyone wants to fall in and draw lines and exclude, well, that’s the behavior of Europeans. A lot of that’s been internalized. A lot of the times when my work is attacked, it’s attacked by people who aren’t aware of how much they’ve internalized these European attitudes. The old time people were way less racist and talked way less about lines and excluding than now. So that that way of being in the world and in the Americas is not forgotten, we’re got to be reminded of how the people used to see things. (“Listening” 172)

Thus, reading American Indians in a global context is not about erasing cultural particularities and looking away from colonial histories and contemporary struggles, as nationalist critics argue, but rather about exploring a rich, wide spectrum of traveling indigenous identity in relation to the long history of indigenous communities in the Americas. In this respect, I think it is significant to look at Indigo’s transatlantic journey in the later part of the novel as Silko’s critical response to indigenous nationalism that has “internalized these European attitudes” unconsciously.

Staging a young Indian girl in the global theatre of gardens, the text raises questions concerning the narrow boundaries of nationalism both by extending the discourse of indigenous identity to a transnational scope and by considering indigenous feminism as a radical force for social change.

To address this contested yet productive idea of transnational indigeneity, Silko turns readers’ attention to European gardens, a cultural/natural form of Western aesthetics and art

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26 See Huang, Deloria, Furlan, and Garber (1-15). In discussing the benefits and limitations of “nationalistic approaches” in Native American Studies, they observe: “Intellectually productive as well, such approaches nonetheless run the risk of oversimplifying complex tribal identities, erasing broad networks of interaction and community, and smoothing indigenous histories that have always included transnational elements” (2). Instead, they contend the significance of comparative and trans-indigenous approaches that highlight “the networking and coalition of Indigenous peoples as well as the circulation of Indigenous ideas and cultures” because this kind of scholarship “offers inputs based on indigenous specificities, experiences, and realities to supplement or challenge transnational approaches to imperialism, diaspora, postcoloniality, and globalization” (2-3).
history, and shows how Indigo’s gardening project is a creative synthesis between indigenous tradition and Western knowledge. When Indigo crosses the Atlantic with Hattie and Edward as a decoy for Edward’s planned citrus smuggling in Corsica, she first arrives in England and stays at the house of Aunt Bronwyn, Hattie’s aunt living in Bath after her marriage with an English man. Aunt Bronwyn is an old woman deeply engaged in the local environmental protection group called “the Antiquity Rescue Committee,” an informal organization that aims to “protect an ancient grove of oaks and yews on a hilltop near a small stone circle” (Gardens 240). Unlike Susan’s ornamental garden that demonstrates social status and power, Aunt Bronwyn’s kitchen garden, which harmonizes with the old cloister and local surroundings, seems modest and even plain. Despite its simplicity in terms of garden style, what Indigo finds attractive and interesting from this garden is a wide variety of plants gathered from the world, including traditional Indian plants such as corn and baby pumpkin. “The kitchen garden,” Aunt Bronwyn tells both Indigo and Hattie, “was the modern garden as well. Plants from all over the world—from the Americas, tomatoes, potatoes, pumpkins, squash, and sweet corn; and garlic, onions, broad beans, asparagus, and chickpeas from Italy—grew with peppers from Asia and Africa” (240). The narrator describes Aunt Bronwyn’s garden as the miniature of the world where the local meets the global. Whereas the conception of the English garden frequently links to English tradition and racial and ethnic purity, the kitchen garden, in Silko’s text, appears as a modern space where plants from different cultures meet each other in the same vegetable plot. Keenly observing the rich biodiversity of Aunt Bronwyn’s kitchen garden, the narrator makes readers wonder what “being indigenous” truly means, and whether it is possible to draw a line between native plants and non-native plants when they are so often intermingled. This question of indigeneity becomes especially apparent when Hattie begins to closely examine the kitchen garden:
In the north quadrant, Aunt Bronwyn planted the old raised beds with indigenous English plants—kales, hellebores, dandelions, pinks, periwinkles, daisies. Little white flowering violets cascaded over the edges of the raised beds. The east side of the garden was planted with all the plants the Romans and Normans introduced: grapevines nearly obscured the weathered wooden pergola that slouched down the path between the raised beds planted with cabbages, eggplants, chickpeas, and cucumbers. Hattie was surprised at how few food crops and flowers were indigenous to England...The south garden and west garden were planted with plants from the Americas, Africa, and Asia. (243)

Interweaving traveling plants and cultural authenticity, this description unearths the arbitrary boundaries surrounding the definition of “indigenous.” As Judith Page and Elise Smith’s work on garden theory in Victorian women’s texts reminds us, the novel suggests that botany “leads the student to observe nature closely and to imagine the interior world that microscopy and magnification make possible” (50). And I want to add that the close study of botany also enables us to see the external world that the history of territorial wars and ongoing struggles over indigeneity unfold. In this way, Silko presents Aunt Bronwyn’s garden as a hands-on learning site: a gardener can study global indigeneity comparatively through observing the migration of plants. After learning the origins of plants that consist of the English garden, Hattie “[is] surprised at how few food crops and flowers were indigenous to England” and rethinks her

27 By questioning the conception of “indigenous,” my purpose here is not to deny the presence of indigenous peoples and their situated histories and realities entirely. Rather, I tactically use this term to rethink the taken for granted conditions of settler colonialism in today’s world. According to Jodi A. Byrd and Michel Rothberg: “Indigeneity also marks an intellectual project that challenges and disrupts the logics of colonialism that underwrite liberal democracies in order to question Euro-American constructions of self, nation-state, and subjectivity that have also been the purview of postcolonial theory” (3). In this sense, Silko’s garden project in the novel serves as a means of challenging and destabilizing Euro-American centered conception of “indigeneity” that naturalizes white settlers’ current domination of the land and social and environmental injustice in the Americas by provincializing Europe. Regarding the meanings and complexities of indigeneity, see also Alfred and Corntassel.

28 In the context of Victorian women’s writing, the goal of teaching botany is not only limited to acquiring scientific knowledge such as “plants structure and physiology” (50), but also extends to “the cultivation of sympathy for others and for the natural world as a network of living organisms” (51). Similarly, Silko utilizes this Victorian theme of gardening as a place of education in her narrative in order to show the interconnections between European cultures and American Indian cultures. For more on women’s botanical texts in the nineteenth century England, see Judith W. Page and Elise L. Smith’s Women, Literature, and The Domesticated Landscape: England's Disciples of Flora, 1780-1879 (2011), particularly Chapter 2, “The ‘Botanic Eye’: Botany, Miniature, and Magnification” (50-76).
understanding of the garden as a singular natural space. This observation can be read allegorically with the trajectories of settler colonialism, and brings the questions of national sovereignty to the heart of the discussions of U.S. citizenship: namely, who, exactly, is a native? It is not surprising, then, to read the garden as a place of seeing what has been invisible to us and as a culturally and biologically diverse area that permeates our perception of the environment and human society.

The novel further complicates the status of contained Indians at home as it reveals that American Indians have actively participated in global botanical exchange for centuries. “Your people,” Aunt Bronwyn tells Indigo, “the American Indians gave the world so many vegetables, fruits, and flowers—corn, tomatoes, potatoes, chilies, peanuts, coffee, chocolate, pineapple, bananas, and of course, tobacco” (244). Praising Indigo’s interest in plants and seeds, Aunt Bronwyn gives her a special gift that “held a small silk-bound notebook where Aunt Bronwyn hand-printed the names (in English and Latin) of medicinal plants and the best conditions and methods to grow them” (267) as well as various seeds from her garden. In narrating botanical exchange between Aunt Bronwyn and Indigo, Silko highlights not only that transcultural interactions are mediated through seeds but also that Indians are open to accept Western scientific knowledge, exemplified by Indigo’s notebook full of European botanical information.

29 Hattie’s own ignorance toward the Indian community near her home town Oyster Bay is a good example that shows how Euro-Americans have been oblivious to the presence of Native America by making Indians “invisible.” The narrator describes Hattie’s response as follows: “‘Glen Cove? There aren’t any Indians in Glen Cove!’ Hattie exclaimed. Time was passing and still they had not found her [Indigo]. Mr. Abbott patted Hattie on the back and reassured her; Lloyd knew of some Indian families living on the salt marches just outside of Glen Cove, on Manhasset Bay. ‘I didn’t know there are Indians nearby!’ Hattie exclaimed” (170). Although Hattie has never been conscious about Indians and their communities, Hattie’s encounter with Indigo soon leads her to realize that there are “unknown” nations (Indian nations) within America and how white settler colonialism has destroyed many indigenous communities with its objective of conquering the American West.

30 See Crosby’s The Columbian Exchange (212) for more details about American Indians’ contribution to European foodways.
and sampling seeds. Although Indigo has never intended to join Hattie and Edward’s journey to Europe, now she is riding the railway called modernity and there is no way back to the past as her failed escape from a train at Needles poignantly illustrates. Yet living in the world of Anglo settlers and Europeans means that Indigo may need to change her Sand Lizard tribal identity. Indigo is well aware of this risk: “she was forgetting how dark she was because all around her she saw only lighter faces. Grandma Fleet would really laugh and Sister Salt probably would pinch her and tease her for becoming a white girl, not a Sand Lizard girl” (285). Despite the fear and anxiety of cultural assimilation, Indigo confirms that being “authentic” Indian is not as important as the revitalization of lost foodways and the survival of people in the desert, if adapting Western science helps her people to reconstruct destroyed Native communities again.\textsuperscript{31} “She didn’t care,” Indigo continues, “Wait until they saw all the seeds she gathered and the notebook she brought back with the names and instructions and color sketches too” (285). In this respect, Gardens fleshes out the cultural interaction that Anna Tsing calls “friction.” Tsing defines this mode as “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (4), which helps us imagine that “heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (5). If the development of modern science extends the belief that universal reason “could gather up the fragments of knowledge and custom distributed around the world to achieve progress, science, and good government” (9), Tsing’s notion of friction that focuses more on noise and conflicts between universalism and cultural particularities redirects our attention to the unexpected yet creative power generated through global interactions, while recognizing asymmetrical global power structure and a multitude of indigenous cultures without falling into the traps of cultural essentialism.

\textsuperscript{31} See also Cara Cilano’s and Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s thought-provoking essay, “Against Authenticity.”
This realization helps account for Indigo’s seed collecting throughout the novel. When Indigo first steps in Susan’s garden, she carefully examines Susan and Edward’s conversation on flowers and plants and “pick[s] up seeds and save[s] them in scraps of paper with her nightgown and clothes in the valise so she [can] grow them” (Gardens 185) once she returns home. Analyzing the symbolic meaning of Indigo’s seed collecting, Caren Irr has argued that “[it] is not figured as biopiracy but rather as a continuation of traditional knowledge and a precondition for one of the most utopian images of the novel” (142). Indigo’s seed collecting at the Italian garden affirms traditional knowledge while problematizing Edward’s efforts to reify natural knowledge and ancient cultural heritage. During a visit to Aunt Bronwyn’s friend Laura in Italy, a scholar of Old European artifacts and gardener, Hattie, Edward, and Indigo encounter the old terraced gardens decorated by ancient artifacts and various types of hybridized gladiolus, a flower that originated in Africa. Seeing the rare artifacts displayed outdoors, Edward is surprised at this scene and exclaims that “here truly was an affront to science and scholarship!” (Gardens 293). For Edward, “artifacts of the early millennia” should be preserved safely in the museums and remain “in the hands of scientist and scholars, not in gardens” (293). But what troubles him more than anything is Laura’s respect for Indigo’s interest in botanical studies:

He found himself a bit irritated at the professoressa’s attention to the child, especially her generous gifts of packets of seeds and corms from her hybrids, although he could see that she made an identical bundle for him and Hattie. It seemed a bit ludicrous for Laura to pretend the Indian child would ever plant the corms or seeds, much less perform the pollination process for hybrids, even if she did take notes on all the necessary steps. Of course Laura could not be expected to know anything about American Indians. (303)

Edward’s gesture reveals his myopia: he rejects the possibility of Indigo understanding Western scientific knowledge and transforming it into her own uses. He ignores the possibility that American Indians could be farmers and gardeners too. In her essay “The Indian with a Camera” (1996), Silko insightfully explains the structure of this ignorance as a Euro-American anxiety
over American Indians using modern technology. She writes: “The Indian with a camera is frightening for a number of reasons. Euro-Americans desperately need to believe that the indigenous people and cultures that were destroyed were somehow less than human; Indian photographers are proof to the contrary. The Indian with a camera is an omen of a time in the future that all Euro-Americans unconsciously dread: the time when the indigenous people of the Americas will retake their land” (Yellow Woman 177-78). As Silko’s words indicate, the image of Indians deftly using modern science, whether it is a camera or a gun, is threatening to white colonizers because it envisages the future of the Americas retaken by indigenous people, who are fully armed with modern technology (a tool of Western colonialism). Thus, by presenting Indigo as a Native gardener and ethnobotanist, the novel demonstrates that Indians are capable of managing their own affairs and the land, and undermines the U.S. national myth that Indians remain “pre-modern.”

Through her botanical knowledge obtained from her journey to Europe, Indigo is committed to revitalizing Native foodways, which were destroyed by white settlers during the expansion of U.S. internal colonialism, and attempts to rebuild the indigenous communities whose continuing interactions between the natural world and human society have sustained Indian identity and cultural/biological heritage for a long period of time. This becomes clear in the ending scene of the novel, which depicts Indigo’s gardening project as a combination of traditional Indian plants like amaranth and corn and European hybridized gladiolus. Given the scarcity of water and fertile land in the desert, other Indians, like Vedna and Maytha, the friendly Chemehuevi sisters, openly criticize Indigo for wasting precious water to raise useless flowers. Yet, despite their concern, Indigo’s garden grows and “Big spikes of buds appeared in the first warm days after Christmas, and in no time white, lavender, red, and yellow flowers opened”
The beauty of the flowers soon captures people’s attention and leads them to stop to gaze this spectacle: “the flowers were quite a sight” (475). In the following scene, the text draws readers’ attention to Indigo’s dining table. While eating vegetable stew with Vedna and Maytha, Indigo asks them whether they can recognize what this food ingredient in the stew is. Initially, the twins thought that it is “some kind of potato” (475), but later they realize that “it was a gladiolus spud!” (476). “You can eat them!”, Indigo yells delightfully, confirming that “those gladiolus weren’t only beautiful; they were tasty!” (476). This dining scene is significant for a number of reasons. On the one hand, it materially suggests that traveling knowledge, signaled by the hybridized gladiolus, helps indigenous people rebuild their Indian farming system, even if the resources such as water and good land are not sufficient due to white settlers’ colonization of the American West. On the other hand, it symbolically foretells the future of Native arts and cultures that reconciles aesthetics with politics by creatively synthesizing indigenous artistic aspirations and practical needs. Between survival and aesthetics, the former has taken a priority over the latter in the construction of Native cultural productions over the past few decades. Silko’s imagination, however, asks whether indigenous arts should choose only one path at the expense of the other while illuminating the beauty and utility of hybrid flowers.

The novel concludes with the return of Indigo and Sister Salt to their home in the old gardens in the desert. Highlighting the earth’s resilience, the narrator sketches the two sister’s reunification with tribal land and their cultural roots: “Today Indigo and [the monkey] Linnaeus ran ahead of the others with the parrot flying ahead of her. At the top of the sandy slope she stopped and knelt in the sand by the stumps of the apricot trees, and growing out of the base of one stump were green leafy shoots. Who knew such a thing was possible last winter when they cried their eyes sore over the trees?” (476). As this multispecies scene clearly shows, Silko’s text
works to revise the tradition of Euro-American environmentalism by presenting a new narrative that seeks to interweave different cultures, peoples, and species together. “Regionalism is the hope,” Silko claims, and this statement asks us to think about “what human beings did with plants and animals and rivers and one another before you had the nation-states trampling in” (“Listening” 186). For Silko, “get[ting] rid of all boundaries” is the first step to create the environmental utopia that she envisions in the novel. Yet, it is crucial to understand that Silko’s vision of regionalism is neither the reduction of cultural particularities nor an extension of a singular natural knowledge. Rather, it is more akin to the trope of the garden as a mediated space between nature and culture, indigenous and foreign, traditional and new, and human and the more-than-human world.  

In articulating Native American studies’ potential contribution to diversifying an American environmentalism that is too often based on the idea of white wilderness and a sense of “unspoiled” place, Nixon similarly points out that “our intellectual challenge is how to draw on the strengths of bioregionalism without succumbing to what one might term eco-parochialism” (242). Through a transnational narrative of gardens, Silko’s novel thus pushes readers to move beyond the limits of monolithic environmental discourse and urges them to rethink the current environmental disputes over land use, water, and food resources that have so profoundly marked the history of settler colonialism in the Americas. Ultimately, Gardens invites us to join the environmental justice movement as locally-rooted citizens of the world.

32 Joni Adamson comes close to my understanding of the garden in Silko’s text. She writes: “the garden metaphor calls our attention to the world as a middle place, a contested terrain in which dispute arises from divergent cultural ideas on what nature is and should be, and on what the human role in nature is and should be. Like the garden where the gardener endeavors to understand how nature’s large-scale patterns work in specific places, multicultural writers are inviting readers into an ever-widening discussion focusing on the large-scale economic, political, cultural, historical, ecological, and spiritual forces affecting both the places where people live and where they do not” (183-184).

Figure 2-5. Saving the Gila River Campaign Logo. Gila Conservation Coalition. The Coolidge Dame was constructed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs between 1924 and 1928 in order to divert the Gila river to white farmers’ lands and ranches in the Southwest. However, it received much criticism and protest from the affected Indian tribes such as the Apache as this irrigation project was biased toward white settlers and, as a result, caused significant water shortage in Indian communities. Today, environmental activists and indigenous tribes continue to struggle over water rights in the Gila river with the federal government and other states including Arizona and New Mexico. Accessed October 20, 2016, http://www.gilaconservation.org/wp/?page_id=1020.
CHAPTER 3
UNSETTLING NATURE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: POSTCOLONIAL PASTORAL, GENDER, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP IN JAMAICA KINCAID AND TONI MORRISON

Relation cannot be “proved,” because its totality is not approachable.
But it can be imagined, conceivable in transport of thought.

-- Édouard Glissant

Poetics of Relation

From the Caribbean to Vermont: Jamaica Kincaid’s (Post)colonial Garden

In the 1970s, black women writers like Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Octavia Butler, and Toni Morrison began to excavate the meaning and significance of the natural world in the life and culture of African Americans and problematized how the metro-centered African American literary tradition established by black male writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard Wright,¹ which often tended to ignore African Americans’ rural experiences by labeling them as backward or pre-modern, has not adequately addressed the variety of black experiences and the role of black women in the black community. For these progressive black women writers, focusing only on the city obscures the fact that, even as the traumatic memory of slavery was affixed to the countryside, African Americans have cultivated and maintained their own environmental tradition for hundreds of years. Their literary works show that this environmental ethics not only helped many African Americans to survive the harsh times of slavery and racism and to imagine better futures to come, but also provides a ground to claim their cultural and environmental citizenship in the US. If the conception of US citizenship was (and is) largely based on Locke’s labor theory of property that reads anyone who labors the land can be a property owner, the presence of black environmentalism dismantles Euro-American centered

¹ On the tradition of African American literature that foregrounds the city as a locus of black freedom and racial and social progress, for example, see W.E.B. Du Bois’ The Souls of Black Folk (1903), James Weldon Johnson’s The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1912), and Richard Wright’s 12 Million Black Voices (1941).
notion of land rights and thus challenges the structural violence that naturalizes racial inequality and the history of US settler colonialism and global capitalist exploitation in the Americas. Yet, unlike black nationalism that prioritizes racial uplift led by strong, patriarchal black men at the expense of gender equality, black women writers critique the absence of a gender perspective in African American literary and cultural productions and reworks this androcentric tradition through a more flexible form of transnational ecological citizenship that embraces the diversity of black experiences traversing national, regional, and cultural boundaries.

Caribbean-American writer Jamaica Kincaid’s memoir *My Garden (Book)* (1999) gives one such account, telling of the writer’s quest to understand the relations between her past life in the Antigua, one of the small islands in the Caribbean, and her transplanted identity in the United States. The memoir asks what it means to be “local” in the world of globalization and how gardening might provide an alternative way of knowing the links between European imperial botany and the exploitation of colonized people and the natural environment in the Caribbean. The first-person narrative opens with the landscape of Kincaid’s garden in Vermont. When being asked to explain the nature of her garden that is far from the traditional forms of garden design, she narrates: “the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembles a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it … the garden is for me an exercise in memory, a way of remembering my own immediate past, a way of getting to a past that is my own (the Caribbean Sea) and the past as it is indirectly related to me (the conquest of Mexico and its surroundings)” (7-8). This is an eco-cosmopolitan practice that reconciles her cultural memory as a Caribbean woman with her current local environment in the Northeast. The oscillation between Kincaid’s attempt to make *home* in the United States and her yearning to return to her cultural roots and the tropical environment frames her story and establishes a new
genre of nature writing, one that Rob Nixon calls “postcolonial pastoral” (*Slow Violence* 245).²

Along with her widely read and critically acclaimed nonfiction *A Small Place* (1988), which describes the negative impact of the tourist industry on the Antigua both culturally and environmentally, Kincaid’s *My Garden (Book)* contributes to the field of postcolonial ecocriticism by emphasizing her diasporic status as a descendant of African slaves, who were forcibly taken to plantations in the Caribbean to provide raw materials such as sugarcane and cotton for European industrialization and white consumption, and adopting a critical stance toward uneven development in the postcolonial era that rarely considers the environmental rights of the poor and indigenous people (Figure 3-1). As Susie O’Brien suggests, Kincaid’s anticolonial garden writing not only shows “the complex connections between local human/nature interactions and the world-shaping force of colonialism,” but also questions “the ecocritical imperative to get back to that world [the physical world] in its explicit focus on culture, as a structure that arises from, as it confounds our attempt to apprehend, our embeddedness in nature” (168).³ For Kincaid, the garden is not a self-enclosed idyllic space, but is part of a transnational colonial network that has shaped imperial gardens and the global plantation economy. Linking her childhood memory in the botanical garden of St. John’s, Antigua to her recent visit to the

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² Regarding the meaning of “postcolonial pastoral,” Nixon defines its characteristics as follows: “writing that refracts an idealized nature through memories of environmental and cultural degradation in the colonies. Postcolonial pastoral can be loosely viewed as a kind of environmental double-consciousness” (245). By focusing on the literary works of postcolonial writers such as V.S. Naipaul and Jamaica Kincaid, Nixon thoroughly examines how writers of color, whose cultural memories are greatly shaped by the history of European colonialism and global economic exploitation, critically respond to the politics of the English pastoral through “the double prism of postcolonial pastoral” (246). For more on the significance of postcolonial pastoral in recent postcolonial writing and art, see Nixon’s book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), especially 245-250.

³ Similarly, other postcolonial studies scholars such as Anne Collett and Jill Didur observe that gardening practice in the literary works of Caribbean women writers serves as a means of navigating the tensions between local and transnational while cultivating an anti-colonial perspective toward coercive labor and violence in the Caribbean and beyond. Regarding the politics of the garden and Caribbean women writing, see Collett’s “Gardening in the Tropics: A Horticultural Guide to Caribbean Politics and Poetics, with special reference to the poetry of Olive Senior,” *SPAN* 46 (1998): 87-103 and Didur’s “Strange Joy: Plant-hunting and Responsibility in Jamaica Kincaid’s (Post)colonial Travel Writing,” *Intervention* 13.2 (2011): 236-255.
glasshouse of Kew Gardens in Britain, Kincaid charts the global trajectory of colonial plant hunting and transatlantic slave trade, and simultaneously disrupts a quiet, peaceful landscape of the English pastoral through a narrative of the global plantation economy that is located behind the bucolic scene. She writes:

… but when I looked at the label on which its identification was written my whole being was sent a-whir. It was not a hollyhock at all but Gossypium, and its common name is cotton. Cotton all by itself exists in perfection, with malice toward none; in the sharp, swift, even brutal dismissive words of the botanist Oakes Ames, it is reduced to an economic annual, but the tormented, malevolent role it has played in my ancestral history is not forgotten by me. Even so, long after its role in the bondage of some of my ancestors had been eliminated, it continued to play a part in my life. (150)

Initially misunderstood cotton as a hollyhock, one of her favorite flowers, Kincaid begins to see the correlations between a long history of colonialism and plantation agriculture and reveals how the image of the New World as Western culture’s garden of Eden is inseparable from colonial
conquest, slavery, and environmental degradation across the Caribbean. Resonant with the business of imperial botany appeared in Silko’s novel, Kincaid’s *My Garden (Book)* also urges us to remember that “perhaps every good thing that stands before us comes at a great cost to someone else” (152), and thus we can realize that the idea of a “completing satisfying garden—Paradise” is not approachable (220). In this way, Kincaid’s garden writing opens the door to explore the nature of paradise that builds on a contested and unstable, though rich, archive of cultural and ecological history in the Americas. Reading the (post)colonial garden, then, is not a simple act that aims to get back to nature as some white elite environmentalists have insisted. Rather, it is a radical act of cultivation that seeks to remember African American cultural memories by tracing the meaning and role of an African-American pastoral in a local, national, and global context.

From this perspective, this chapter aims to read Toni Morrison’s seventh novel *Paradise* (1997) as a *worldly* text that not only interweaves the past and present of African diaspora in relation to global historical events such as the Civil Rights movement, Women’s movement, America’s war in Asia, but also envisions the future of the black community that transcends the narrow boundaries of nationalism and cultural and racial authenticity through the environmental imagination. Previous scholarship on *Paradise* has largely focused on issues of race, class, gender, and citizenship, which are based on the US nation-state and the question of “authentic” black identity, or on the role of religion and religious beliefs, especially Christianity, in the tradition of black salvation narratives (the liberation of black people from the dehumanization of slavery and white oppression). But more recently, scholars have begun to examine Morrison’s

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4 On the relationship between race, gender, class, and black national identity in Morrison’s text, see, for example, Rob Davidson, Peter Widdowson, Andrew Reed, Marni Gauthier, and Katrine Dalsgard. Regarding religious references and a black counter-memory of “the promised land,” see Linda J. Krumholz, Channette Romero, and Carola Hilfrich.
novel in a transnational frame, instead of limiting its reading and interpretation to a national frame, in response to the tide of “transnational turn” in American studies since the millennium.\textsuperscript{5} Yet, whether national or transnational, these readings do not fully account for Morrison’s complex understanding of Western modernity that stems from the idea that “the mastery of nature”\textsuperscript{6} is crucial to both the colonization of the land and its inhabitants and the expansion of the Enlightenment projects—territorial war, missionaries, slavery, plantation agriculture, and the capitalist economy—around the globe and the significance of nature’s agency in the multiple plots of \textit{Paradise}. In other words, nature in Morrison’s literary world often tends to be “left out there” as a mere setting or background rather than being understood as a cultural agent that have shaped black histories and America’s racialized and gendered relationship to the land from the past to the present.

Building on postcolonial ecocriticism and Édouard Glissant’s notion of a “Poetics of Relation,”\textsuperscript{7} this chapter thus shows how Morrison employs the trope of the garden as a vehicle to navigate between black histories and the world and to empower black women as self-reliant gardeners and agents of traditional knowledge and community, while critiquing male-centered black nationalism that internalizes the mechanism of patriarchal white capitalism (e.g. seeing both nature and women as the Man’s property). More specifically, I focus on how the politics and economies of American agriculture have been inextricably bound to the labor of “invisible”

\textsuperscript{5} For more recent readings that attempt to situate Morrison’s text in global contexts, see Holly Flint, Daniel Grausam, Cynthia Dobbs, and Shaun Myers.

\textsuperscript{6} I use this term from the title of Val Plumwood’s \textit{Feminism and the Mastery of Nature} (1993).

\textsuperscript{7} In his influential book \textit{Poetics of Relation} (1997), Caribbean literary critic and writer Édouard Glissant proposes a new term a “Poetics of Relation,” in an attempt to destabilize European hegemony by addressing the ethnic and cultural complexities of the Caribbean experience. He writes: “Every expression of the humanities opens onto the fluctuating complexity of the world. Here poetic thought safeguards the particular, since only the totality of truly secure particulars guarantees the energy of Diversity. But in every instance this particular sets about Relation in a completely intransitive manner, relating, that is, with the finally realized totality of all possible particulars” (32).
people in the United States (e.g. slaves, indentured servants, tenant farmers, and black soldiers), whose citizenship rights were denied and excluded from the realm of the political sphere, and how the trauma of slavery related to plantation agriculture in the rural South continues to exert its power over black communities and reinforces black males’ gendered view of nature and women in the name of “black progress.”

Methodologically, my reading of Morrison’s text (a combination of cultural history, ecocriticism, and gender studies) offers two ways to *decentralize* Euro-American centered literary studies and white male dominant environmental discourse: (1) temporally, it tracks back to the history of plantation agriculture, slavery, and land ownership in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (in the sense of the “longue durée”) in order to understand the origins of contemporary black male violence and the devaluation of black women’s labor, all of which are closely related to what black feminist bell hooks terms “plantation patriarchy”; (2) spatially, it links black women’s liberation movement in the 1970s with the rise of transnational ecofeminism in the context of global decolonization movement from the perspectives of women. In doing so, I argue that Morrison’s project in *Paradise*—the reinvention of the

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9 In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004), hooks contends that the role model of contemporary black masculinity has been grounded in the “gendered politics of slavery” (3). She writes: “… enslaved black males were socialized by white folks to believe that they should endeavor to become patriarchs by seeking to attain the freedom to provide and protect for black women, to be benevolent patriarchs. Benevolent patriarchs exercise their power without using force. And it was this notion of patriarchy that educated black men coming from slavery into freedom sought to mimic. However, a large majority of black men took as their standard the dominator model set by white masters. When slavery ended these black men often used violence to dominate black women, which was a repetition of the strategies of control white slave masters used” (4). Many black male characters in Morrison’s *Paradise* vividly demonstrate this notion of “plantation patriarchy.” In the later part of this chapter, I return to examine how black male violence often becomes *naturalized* in the process of constructing black masculinity and pursuing black progress.

10 My idea of this comparison between black women’s liberation movement and the emergence of transnational ecofeminism like India’s Chipko movement is inspired by Shu-mei Shih’s model of “relational comparison” in
Garden of Eden (an earthly paradise) by women of color—pushes her readers to rethink the cultures and violence of agricultural capitalism and its devastating impact on black communities across the country and, simultaneously, redirects our attention to a larger and more complex picture of human freedom, women’s rights, social justice, and environmental ethics in the modern world that transcends disparate cultural and national boundaries by showing the connections between US settler colonialism and global imperialism in the long twentieth century.

From Thomas Jefferson’s Garden to Toni Morrison’s Garden: Race and Nation

Set in a fictional black town called Ruby, Oklahoma in the late 60s and early 1970s, Paradise begins with the violent scene of black men hunting women in the Convent, an old mansion located outside Ruby. “They shoot the white girl first,” the narrator describes, “With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time and the day has just begun” (3). By foregrounding this shocking and brutally violent scene at the beginning of the novel, Morrison makes her readers curious about the true motive behind these men’s violence on the one hand, and begins to critically examine the problem of naturalized violence, both physical and psychological, within black communities on the other. Led by the town’s powerful twins, Deacon and Steward Morgan, the male citizens of Ruby came to the Convent, which used to be a Catholic boarding school for Arapaho Indian girls and now serves as a refuge for women fleeing domestic violence and sexual abuse, because the Convent women “managed to call into question the value of almost every woman [they] knew” (8). Evoking the US government’s Indian killing during westward expansion in the late

———. world literary studies. For more information on this approach, see Shih’s “World Studies and Relational Comparison,” PMLA 130.2 (2015): 430-438.
nineteenth century, the novel zooms in on Ruby’s male citizens who read themselves as black pioneers while treating the unconventional women in the Convent as animals and as less than human (“witches,” “devils”). Through the use of “clean, handsome guns” (3), they want to control these “dangerous” women, whose transgressive behavior seems to be threatening to Ruby’s patriarchal social order and morality. Ruby’s citizens believe that their town, “the one all-black town” (5) in Jim Crow America, is both “[u]nique and isolated” and an ideal place for black people, where “its people were free and protected” from the violence of white law and racial injustice. Nevertheless, as the descendants of former slaves and survivors in exodus from the American South, the male citizens of Ruby are well aware that the “Freedmen who stood tall in 1889” after Emancipation had to experience extreme poverty and hunger as well as racism through the years of the Dust Bowl and the Great Migration and, as a result, they became “stomach-crawling by 1948” (5). To prevent further changes from destabilizing or destroying their town, the black male citizens of Ruby want to get rid of the Convent women so that “nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain” (5). Juxtaposing Ruby’s utopian image with its violent and destructive aspects, the novel thus raises a set of critical questions regarding the meanings and forms of paradise: What is paradise? Who has power to decide its history, social structure, economy, politics, and citizenship? What is the relationship between race and nation? Why does the idea of paradise always revolve around the politics of exclusion? Can we imagine different, more egalitarian forms of paradise that are free of racism, sexism, and class conflict?

To investigate these questions, Morrison’s novel traces the history of slavery and its impact on the lives of black people and their cultures, and simultaneously leads her readers to contemplate the complex relationship between land ownership and the conception of US citizenship. As I have argued in the previous chapter, John Locke’s labor theory of property, which presumes that working the land justifies its ownership, was widely used to naturalize white settlers’ taking of Indian land and the dispossession of indigenous peoples by denying the history of Indian agriculture in the Americas. Interestingly enough, in Morrison’s *Paradise*, Oklahoma is described as a site of Indians’ double dispossession: (1) the dispossession of Indian lands by white settlers during westward expansion and (2) the subsequent dispossession of Indian lands by black settlers who followed the Homestead Act of 1862 and the Dawes Act of 1887. This conflict over native lands among Indians, whites, and blacks complicates the history of land ownership in the West and, moreover, asks us to carefully examine the dispossession of Indians in multiple contexts, rather than simply approaching the issue through the conventional frame that only highlights conflicts between whites and Indians. Given the significance of agricultural capitalism that constructs the idea of US citizenship and the public sphere, I think it

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12 For more details on Locke’s labor theory of property, see *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), especially Chapter 5, “Of Property.” Locke writes: “Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men: for this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others” (11). According to Locke’s logic, everyman can claim his property rights as long as he labors in the land, regardless of the presence of previous inhabitants, and thus it is possible that white settlers used this logic to justify their conquest of the American West. In the last few decades, however, Indigenous Studies scholars have pointed out the problems and limits of this one-sided view of land ownership that ignores the history of indigenous civilizations in the Americas. In regard to indigenous peoples’ perspectives of land dispossession, see Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States* (2014). Also, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (1999), and Andro Linklater, *Owing the Earth: The Transforming History of Land Ownership* (2013), for agricultural capitalism and property rights in the long history of human civilizations.
is noteworthy to mention Thomas Jefferson’s understanding of race and nation in the early republic. In his seminal study of culture, climate and plants in the New World, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), Jefferson made the following observations about the debate over slavery:

> Many of their advocates [of emancipation], while they wish to vindicate the liberty of human nature, are anxious also to preserve its dignity and beauty. Some of these, embarrassed by the question ‘What further is to be done with them?’ join themselves in opposition with those who are actuated by sordid avarice only. Among the Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture. (155)

As an architect of the national design, both materially and spiritually, Jefferson envisioned the future of this new nation, which had recently achieved independence from Great Britain and consisted of “transplanted Europeans,” and concluded that slavery is necessary to develop and enrich the nation’s economy and wealth, despite the presence of some anti-slavery whites, because he understood that “The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions” (174). Although Jefferson was interested in raising both profitable fruits and slaves in his plantation in Monticello, he was simultaneously concerned with whether racial mixing would engender the possibility of “staining the blood of his master,” if black slaves were freed. Instead of accepting a freed slave as an equal member of the nation, Jefferson insisted that “he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture” and, if possible, he hoped to replace freed black slaves with white laborers like Germans for the racial integrity of the nation (Pauly 30-31).  

13 Crucially, Jefferson’s gardening in Monticello gave way to the

13 Similar to Jefferson’s view of US citizenship, in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), his contemporary J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur (French American) writes the definition of Americans as follows: “They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race now called *Americans* have arisen…. Everything has tended to regenerate them: new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system; here they are become men: in Europe they were as so many useless plants, wanting vegetative mould and refreshing showers; they withered, and were mowed down by want, hunger, and war; but now, by the power of *transplantation*, like all other plants they have taken root and flourished! Formerly they were not numbered in any civil lists of their country, except in those of the poor; here they rank as *citizens*” (68-69; emphasis added). By using words like “promiscuous breed” and “transplantation,” Crevecoeur emphasizes that the success of the new nation
cultures of racial and social exclusion in the United States before westward expansion began to emerge in the nineteenth century. From this perspective, we can see how Euro-Americans’ yearning for paradise in the New World relied on the colonization and dispossession of indigenous peoples and people of color by excluding their presence from the boundaries of “American Eden.”

The cultures of racial capitalism related to US agricultural economy do not only appear in the writing of early agrarians like Jefferson, but also become more visible when we look at other cultural productions created in the nineteenth century. For example, the “Duke Jones” seed catalogue (1894) by W. M. Giradeau, a nursery based in Monticello, Florida, vividly shows how US agricultural discourse continued to rely on the myth of “the happy slaves,” the simple-minded, dutiful slaves who enjoy dancing, singing, and working for their white masters (Figure 3-2). This old seed catalogue portrays two hungry, barefooted black boys eating watermelons in the field and one white man, who seems to be the owner of the farm, just spots these boys in his property. The caption reads:

White man: “What are you doing here, boys?”
Black boy: “We is trying to de ‘Juke Jones.’ We done tried de ‘Favorite’ and de Seminole,’ but dis ‘Juke’ beats dem all holler. Can we help save seed here Boss? We won’t charge you nuffin, we jest wants to eat de hearts out of dese big fellows. ‘Kolby’s Gem’ don’t taste good now.”

increasingly depends on “how Europeans become Americans” (73) through cultivating both the land and European minds. In this context, I think it is interesting to compare Crevecoeur’s willingness to mix white race with Jefferson’s reluctance to mix white and black races together in the process of constructing American identity so as to better understand the origins of US agricultural discourse that the politics of racial exclusion established.

Throughout Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson not only devalues African Americans as part of white man’s property like farms and land, but also undermines American Indians by constantly describing them as “savages” and “animals,” who need to be instructed and ultimately converted to Christians by civilized Anglo-Americans. Thus, we can see the paradox of American democracy that is built on the labor and exclusion of people of color by permitting its citizenship only limited to the Euro-American Man.

Regarding the myth of the happy slave and its deep connection to the Southern plantation economy and racism, see Frederick Douglas’s Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, an American Slave. Written by Himself (1845).
In contrast to the image of abundant land full of big, ripen watermelons, the black boys struggle to overcome hunger and are willing to offer their labor “free” (“We won’t charge you nuffin”) to the “Boss” (white master) as long as he can feed them. At the same time, highlighting a stylized black vernacular speech, the advertisement produces and reinforces the racial stereotypes that black people are “less civilized” and need to be “cultivated” by well-educated, wealthy white male owners. By comparing two different gazes (the white master’s “look down” gaze with the black slave’s “look up” gaze) across racial and class lines, this seed advertisement thus reveals
not only that black labor in the late nineteenth century was considered cheap, plentiful, and less valuable compared to its white counterpart, but also that racism associated with plantation culture was still pervasive in the US South.

Attentive to this historical context, Morrison’s Paradise forges the links between the history of plantation agriculture in the US and black men’s racial anxiety and their obsessive desire for material possessions as a means of reconstructing black masculinity, which was constantly denied and emasculated during the era of slavery, so as to firmly establish their US citizenship. In her short essay that recently appeared in the Telegraph (2014), Morrison says that when she was working on Paradise, she was especially fascinated by old black newspapers published in the late nineteenth century and how these newspapers strongly encouraged black people to establish black towns and their own government, which might have been feverish as white settlers’ rush to claim land in the southwest. What she found interesting in particular is one message that reads “Come Prepared or Not at All” (Paradise 13), which emphasizes the importance of financial autonomy and wealth while settling in the black promised land and pursuing prosperity and happiness there (Figure 3-3). She insightfully analyzes the implications behind this message: “Implicit in those warnings were two commands: 1. If you have nothing, stay away. 2. This new land is Utopia for a few. Translation: no poor former slaves are welcome in the paradise being built here” (“Can We Find Paradise on Earth?” n. pag.).

16 The headline of a feature, “Come Prepared or Not at all,” originally appeared in the Langston City Herald, one of the popular black newspapers in the Southwest in the late nineteenth century. The feature reads as follows: “COME PREPARED OR NOT AT ALL: The colored people who are contemplating Oklahoma as their future home must come with sufficient money to take care of themselves and families until they raise a crop or get into business for which they are adapted … We especially invite people of our race who have some means to come: we warn those who have nothing, that, this being a new country, peopled by strangers, with no ready employment, and everybody husbanding what little cash and effects he or she may have until conditions change, that they will surely suffer by the change. So come prepared to care for yourself and family by all means, and you will make no mistake; if you come penniless you must expect to get it rough, as you ought to do.” Despite its hopeful message for a sort of black paradise, the newspaper highlights that this black community is only for those who have “sufficient money to take care of themselves and families” while warning “penniless” poor blacks to “expect to get it rough, as you ought to
Figure 3-3. The Langston City Herald (Langston City, Okla.), Nov. 17, 1892. This black newspaper was first established by African American business man Edwin P. McCabe (1850-1920) in early 1890s and promoted the idea of black homesteading across vast areas of the Southwest to recruit more black settlers to Oklahoma territory as a means of establishing an “all-black” state in the United States. Although this dream has never been achieved in reality, McCabe’s legacy shows black settlers’ strong yearnings for building their own communities independent from, and protected from, white supremacy and racial violence at the turn of the twentieth-century.


do.” In this way, the newspapers demonstrate how racial uplift and upward mobility were inseparably linked to the rise of black middle-class at the turn of the twentieth century. For more information regarding the history of the black frontier in the American West, see Quintard Taylor’s In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the West, 1528-1990 (1998).
historical reference, in *Paradise*, Morrison shows how freed black people, who were “Smart, strong, and eager to work their own land” (14), constantly experienced “the aggressive discouragement” from the “Negro town already being built” (13) and later realized that, in addition to race, class functions as a crucial factor that defines black people’s social status and cultural identity, as some “learn they did not have enough money to satisfy the restriction the ‘self-supporting’ Negroes required” (14). If the dream of “Negro homesteaders” signified black people’s yearnings for full citizenship as Americans, the novel reveals how freed black people faced a new challenge that limits their acceptance into “colored” paradise: “the money” (115). Thus, for black people, land became a commodity and the object of capital accumulation and profit, rather than fertile ground for subsistence farming and human beings’ spiritual connection to the natural world. This tendency further reinforced the view that the domination of nature is inevitable in order for black folks to progress from dehumanized “ex-slaves” to respected American “property owners” (Figure 3-4). Resonant with Euro-Americans’ fantasy of domesticating the wilderness in the New World, through Ruby’s male characters who measure their black manhood based on material possessions, Morrison skillfully delineates how African Americans began to internalize what Annette Kolodny labels the “uniquely American ‘pastoral impulse’,,” a psycho-sexual fantasy that centers on “the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else—a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a mine, a factory, a city, and finally, an urban nation” through gendering the land as woman (8, 7).  

17 After publishing *The Lay of the Land* in 1975, Kolodny’s research has focused extensively on the other side of American frontier experience in American literature and culture. In her following work *The Land Before Her* (1984), she shows how women’s perspectives matter in shaping the history of the American West by suggesting the female frontiers’ experiences in the Great Plains as alternative narratives of US farming and landownership. However, despite its gender concern, it is true that her works do not fully address a wide spectrum of women’s experiences partly because of their heavy reliance on the writings of white women and little concern toward women of color. But I think the legacy of her scholarly works that attempt to approach the American West from women’s perspectives remains still valuable, especially given that her works opened the new possibilities that seek to create an alternative model of US environmental literature and culture, one that is free from white males’ psychosexual
Indeed, the dream of building a paradise where black male farmers-citizens can safely inhabit and cultivate their romanticized feminine land in racially segregated America becomes more apparent when we closely look at the design of the community itself. Named after the Morgan twins’ sister, Ruby, who died on her journey to the new town due to her sudden illness and subsequent racist medical treatment in the 1950s, as “No colored people were allowed in the wards” (*Paradise* 113), the town emblematizes traditional gender roles that strictly divide the frontier fantasy. More specifically, I find her interpretation of the frontier women’s gardens as “home and community, not privatized erotic mastery” (xiii) is very helpful to understand the complexity surrounding the idea of the American garden. For more on women’s domestic paradise in the Midwest and its connection to gender and environment issues in the history of the American frontier, see Kolodny’s *The Land Before Her* (3-13).
public sphere and the private sphere and rarely give room for black women to express their own opinions or participate in the town’s politics and business. When Deacon and Steward have a meeting with the Fleetwood men at the Fleetwood house in order to discuss their nephew K.D.’s recent physical abuse toward Arnette, who is pregnant with K.D.’s baby, all of these men view this incident as an issue of property rights, rather than as the problem of a black male’s violence against a black woman. Highlighting this naturalized domestic violence, the novel describes the increasing tension and conflict between the Morgan men and the Fleetwood men in regard to the ownership of the land and woman. The young and progressive Baptist Reverend Richard Misner, who attends the meeting as a community peace mediator, begins to explain the situation to the other members of the meeting:

“Let me lay out the situation as I know it. Correct me, you all, if I get it wrong or leave out something. My understanding is that K.D. here has done an injury, a serious injury, to Arnette. So right off we can say K.D. has a problem with his temper and an obligation—”
“Ain’t he a little old to have his temper raised toward a young girl?” Jefferson Fleetwood, seething in a low chair farthest from the lamplight, interrupted. “I don’t call them temper. I call it illegal.”
“Well, at that particular moment, he was way out of line.”
“Beg your pardon, Reverend. Arnette is fifteen.” Jeff looked steadily into K.D.’s eyes.
“That’s right,” said Fleet. “She ain’t been hit since she was two years old.”
“That may be the problem.” Steward, known for inflammatory speech, had been cautioned by Deek to keep his mouth shut and let him, the subtle one, do the talking. Now his words blew Jeff out of his chair.
“Don’t you come in my house dirt-mouthing my family!”
“Your house?” Steward looked from Jeff to Arnold Fleetwood.
“You heard me! Papa, I think we better call this meeting off before somebody gets hurt!”
“You right,” said Fleet. “This is my child we talking about. My child!” (58-59)

Here Arnold Fleetwood, Arnette’s materialistic father, and Jefferson Fleetwood, Arnette’s brother and a Vietnam War veteran, articulate the nature of K.D.’s physical abuse of Arnette. Emphasizing words like “illegal,” “my house,” “my family,” the Fleetwood men interpret K.D.’s behavior as a sort of trespassing that threatens the safety of the family and their private property.
They have rendered Arnette’s body not as her own, but as an objectified site of black men’s battle over property rights. When Steward accuses Arnette of causing K.D.’s physical assault because of her lack of a patriarchal discipline (“She ain’t been hit since she was two years old”), Jeff suddenly exclaims his anger toward the Morgan men, saying “Don’t you come in my house dirt-mouthing my family!” Although Steward immediately questions the patriarchal order of the Fleetwood family (son’s property rights over father’s) asking “Your house?”, following Jeff’s remark, Arnold makes it clear that “This is my child we talking about. My child!” Despite his use of the word, “my child,” several times in the scene, the novel uneartns that Arnold’s view of “my child” is no more than simply asserting his patriarchal authority and control over his daughter (rather than love and kinship) to protect his family’s territory against other black male intruders. As Heather Tapley observes, Morrison’s novel not only shows “the racial purity of Ruby with references to the town having developed as a successful capitalist enterprise” (27), but also reveals that “[w]ithin capitalist/patriarchal logic the masculine subject gains value by way of the devaluation of the feminine Other” (29).

Furthermore, the ideology of black patriarchy that closely correlates to capital accumulation becomes more explicit when Deacon offers a settlement (“Maybe we can help out some”) to compensate the damage of the Fleetwoods’s property, Arnette’s premarital sex and pregnancy, through the Morgan family bank’s financing. While listening to Deacon’s negotiation with the Fleetwoods, Steward pauses for a moment and then expresses his concern about whether or not Arnette is willing to abort her baby before leaving the town for college, even if they give money to the Fleetwood family. “August’s a long way off. This here is May. She might change her mind. Decide to stay on” (61). To release Steward’s doubt and confirm this settlement between two families, Arnold clearly shows who is in charge of the whole process: “I’m her
father. I’ll arrange her mind” (61). Throughout the heated meeting of the Morgan and the Fleetwood, interestingly enough, we cannot see any trace of the Fleetwood women, including Arnette herself, except “the tippy-tap steps of women who were nowhere in sight” (61). By showing two separate spaces within the Fleetwood house, one visible space for black men and the other invisible space for black women “pacing, servicing, fetching, feeding—whatever it took to save the children who could not save themselves” (60), Morrison thus critiques the absence of black women in making decisions on their own lives and bodies while highlighting the burden of black women’s domestic labor, which is often unseen in the social structure of the community. Describing the importance of creating an open form of the community that is not bounded to essentialist black nationalism nor internalized white capitalist patriarchy, Morrison remarks:

If I had to live in a racial house, it was important, at the least, to rebuild it so that it was not a windowless prison into which I was forced, a thick-walled, impenetrable container from which no cry could be heard, but rather an open house, grounded, yet generous in its supply of window and doors. Or, at the most, it became imperative for me to transform this house completely. Counter-racism was a never option. (“Home” 4)

Seen from this angle, Morrison’s *Paradise* offers a gendered critique of a black nationalism that attempts to naturalize the logic of patriarchy/capitalism in the name of black progress, while working to “convert a racist house to into a race-specific yet nonracist home” (5). At the heart of much of her novel stands this blunt question: What is the relationship between gender and the building of paradise? In the following section, then, I will further analyze how Morrison’s utilization of the garden trope in *Paradise* provides an alternative vision of black identity and community that is “both free and situated” (5) through its engagement with black women’s liberation movement and the rise of transnational environmentalism.
From the US South to the Global South: Women, Nature, and Community

In a 2008 interview, Morrison tells her readers that the original title of *Paradise* was *War* before she changed it to the current title following her publisher’s recommendation. While describing the overarching theme of *Paradise*, she goes on to explain why this change was made and how it relates to her general ideas of paradise in the novel:

*Toni Morrison:* The title isn’t an accurate description of the town or the Convent or any place in the text. In fact, my original working title for the manuscript was *War*. But they thought that was a bad title.

*Amazon.com:* They being your publisher?

*Morrison:* Yes. And I think they were right.

*Amazon.com:* Because the title was inaccurate? Or bad for sales?

*Morrison:* It was off-putting. Besides, the novel wasn’t about war as we know it, with armies, navies, and so on. I was interested in the kind of violent conflict that could happen as a result of efforts to establish a Paradise. Our view of Paradise is so limited: it requires you to think of yourself as the chosen people—chosen by God, that is. Which means that your job is to isolate yourself from other people. That’s the nature of Paradise: it’s really defined by who is *not* there as well as who is. So I agree with my publishers that Paradise was perhaps a good conceptual title. I was very hesitant at first, but then I realized that since the book was an interrogation about the very idea of Paradise, the title made sense. It has a sort of question mark implied behind it. (“This Side of Paradise” n. pag.)

Morrison highlights that one of the reasons why her publisher strongly urged her to change its original title was the fact that “the novel wasn’t about war as we know it, with armies, navies, and so on,” which would presumably demand a writer to focus more exclusively on soldiers on the American frontier and the violence of war. Yet, despite the absence of actual warfare, throughout *Paradise*, we can see that multiple wars in modern American history such as Indian Wars, WWI, WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam War are meticulously *contextualized* in the novel’s plot. As such, it is not surprising to learn that the geographical location of Ruby rests in

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18 With this thought in mind, it is not a coincidence that Morrison later writes her tenth novel, *Home* (2012), which primarily centers on African American soldier Frank Money’s return to his hometown Lotus, Georgia from the Korean War in the 1950s and his traumatic memory of war across the Pacific.
Indian Territory in Oklahoma and that many black male characters in the novel are veterans who fought for America’s overseas wars in the mid-twentieth century. If the American Dream, as represented by the myth of the Garden of Eden, is based on the very idea of building an earthly paradise in the New World, Morrison then questions “the nature of (this) Paradise,” which often accompanies the politics of exclusion and “the kind of violent conflict.” In this way, Morrison shows the other side of the American Eden through the rich, complex narratives of invisible people in the US emblematized by the citizens of Ruby. To put it differently, Morrison carefully unearths the dynamic interplay between military conflicts and the “racialization of thought” surrounding the botanical paradise that US empire attempts to build in the Americas and abroad by situating the history of Ruby, seemingly local and regional, in global contexts. As Holly Flints suggests, reading Morrison’s *Paradise* globally means that understanding “the forms of black cultural citizenship” is a project that largely depends on how to read across different cultures and

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19 American Indian studies scholar Craig Womack critiques the absence of tribal people in Morrison’s *Paradise*, despite its geographical setting in Oklahoma, and her minimal attention to red and black relations in the American West that shaped a powerful counternarrative of US imperialism and racism. For example, Womack points out the disappearance of two young native girls, Penny and Clarissa (Cheyenne-Arapaho), in the middle of the story. He writes: “*Paradise*, with its fifty-eight words of Indian speech (a word count I am more certain of), accounts for a very large proportion of this dialogue. This reductive and problematic claim makes a dramatic point, perhaps too dramatically, yet in *Paradise*, a 318-page novel, only two Indians are given a name…. One wonders where all these girls, and the rest of their people went. Were they taken up in the Indian version of the rapture of the church? Their erasure oversimplifies the fact that the self-determining town of Ruby, modeled on African American yearnings for freedom, sits on, evidently, western lands taken from Native tribes in Reconstruction treaties signed in 1866 or other treaties depending on where the exact location of the novel is” (34-36). Given the significance of the comparative racialization process in constructing US citizenship, I concur with Womack’s opinion that the study of cross-racial interactions between American Indians and African Americans is necessary and crucial in order to better understand a broad spectrum of US settler colonialism and people of color’s collective resistance against Western hegemony. For more details on Morrison’s depiction of Native people in *Paradise* and its representational problems, see Womack’s “Tribal Paradise Lost but Where Did It Go?: Native Absence in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures*. 21:4 (2009): 20-52.

20 According to Frantz Fanon, colonized intellectuals, similar to European colonizers, tend to understand Africa as a single unity, rather than as a cultural matrix of specific nations and different cultures. In his influential book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), he terms this tendency among colonized intellectuals as the “racialization of thought” (212) (the colonization of the mind), which works against the ultimate goal of the decolonization movement in Africa and beyond. In a similar vein, we can extend and apply Fanon’s conception to the discourse of US race relations that has shown a tendency to define one ethnic group’s identity primarily in relation to mainstream white America instead of reading across the complicated process of “comparative racialization” between different racial and ethnic groups in the United States under the influence of US settler colonialism and economic globalization.
contexts of an “overarching imperial world that exerts multiple and conflicting influences on the residents’ practices of narration” (595).

The interweaving of garden politics and war in Paradise returns us to the episode of the “garden battles” (89) in which Ruby’s women fiercely competed with each other in the beautification of gardens surrounding their houses. Evoking Nixon’s and Khrushchev’s “Kitchen debate” in 1959, this garden rivalry between black housewives of Ruby began with the rise of postwar abundance, when their husbands and sons came back to the US with the GI bills. As a means of expressing their postwar American dreams (a kind of utopian dreams) that heavily rest on domesticity and material abundance, these black women “bought soft toilet paper, used washcloths instead of rags, soap for the face alone or diapers only” (89). Moreover, they worked to shape their feminine identity based on white women’s suburban ideals that consist of a husband, children, and a beautiful house. This racial transformation of black domesticity, for instance, becomes more apparent when the novel depicts the transformation of African American horticulture from kitchen gardens to ornamental gardens.

The dirt yards, carefully swept and sprinkled in Haven, became lawns in Ruby until, finally, front yards were given over completely to flowers for no good reason except there was time in which to do it. The habit, the interest in cultivating plants that could not be eaten, spread, and so did the ground surrendered to it. Exchanging, sharing a cutting here, a root there, a bulb or two became so frenetic a land grab, husbands complained of neglect and the disappointingly small harvest of radishes, or the too short rows of collards, beets. The women kept on with their vegetable gardens in back, but

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21 On July 24, 1959, at the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, Russia, US Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had a heated debate on the benefits of Soviet communism and American capitalism, which later known as the “Kitchen Debate.” Instead of using a military rhetoric, Nixon and Khrushchev compared two countries’ socio-economic structures based on technological innovations in house appliances and claimed their own nation’s superiority over the other. In this cultural exchange (or cultural war), modern house became a site of the Cold War rivalry between the US and Soviet Union and vividly demonstrated how US consumerism defines postwar American identity and begins to replace the image of the American garden as an idyllic pastoral countryside with a land of materialistic abundance and consumerism. In this context, we can read that the transition of Ruby in the text from an agricultural economy to an industrialized consumer economy resonates with the larger change of US economic structure and rapid industrialization during that time. Regarding postwar American consumerism and its connection to the social life, politics, and cultural identity of Americans during the mid-century, see Elaine Tyler May’s Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (1988) and Lizabeth Cohen’s A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (2003).
little by little its produce became like the flower—driven by desire not by necessity. Iris, phlox, rose and peonies took up more and more time, quiet boasting and so much space new butterflies journeyed miles to brood in Ruby. (89-90)

Moving from the legacy of slave gardens (“the dirt yards”) to the proliferation of decorative gardens (“lawns”), this passage juxtaposes the rise of US consumer economy with the decline of subsistence farming within black communities. Historically, slave gardens in the plantation not only provided crucial human food and essential nutrients to African American women and their families, but also helped to maintain Africa’s botanical legacy and their spiritual connection to the land during the hard times of slavery in the New World.22 However, the passage shows how “lawns” and other decorative flowers in modern gardens “driven by desire not by necessity” signify the loss of traditional African American foodways and black people’s subsequent assimilation into the US food and agricultural system and the consumer economy. By “cultivating plants that could not be eaten, steadily eschewing growing traditional food crops such as “radishes,” “collards,” and “beets” in favor of “a teaspoon of sugar” and “a plop of butter in canned [peas]” (82), black housewives of Ruby begin to idealize the model of white American domesticity that strongly buttresses consumerism and conservative gender roles. Steward’s loss of taste, his inability to distinguish the difference between “garden peas” and “canned” (81), is a good example that illustrates the other side of black paradise built on the logic of US capitalism and industrialized food systems.23 When Dovey, Steward’s wife, thinks about him in light of

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23 For example, Daniel Grausam claims that “Morrison critiques the idea of the self-sufficient nation-state through the politics of food and energy” (128). Reading the relationship between Ruby the Convent in the novel as a metaphor of the relationship between the US and developing countries, he shows how “a bell pepper” cultivated by the Convent functions as a critical food commodity that has significantly changed the power relation between two communities. He observes: “The initial interest in the single exotic spice has gradually transformed not simply taste, but the entire food economy of the community, evidenced by the fact that Ruby no longer needs to bother cultivating
“what he had lost,” she narrates that, despite his material success as the owner of the town’s bank, “the more Steward acquired, the more visible his losses” (82).

Contrary to the image of a black American Eden, which black women’s romanticized domesticity in their house gardens crystallizes, the novel alludes to the dark side of the modern landscape of this paradise and excavates how building independent black communities in the US correlates directly to the loss of traditional African American cultures and their family members. In order to establish their full citizenship like their white counterparts, many African American males served in US foreign wars and, moreover, the “war money” (107) they brought into the black community was often used to buy farms, ranches, rural property, shops, and drugstores, in an attempt to assist black economic empowerment in postwar America. However, rather than romanticize or mythologize this contemporary black struggles for freedom and autonomy, Morrison unravels the paradox of a black paradise that is entwined with the trajectory of US imperialism abroad and racial violence at home. When Soane, Deacon’s wife, stands in “the kitchen of the biggest house in Ruby” boiling the kettle, she is unable to see into “the darkness outside,” which emblematizes the hidden side of black paradise, because of “newly installed fluorescent light” in her kitchen (100). She has mostly enjoyed the pleasure of her domestic Eden that is filled with new home appliances, despite a sort of domestic containment in Deacon’s ranch house; her nephew K.D. observes that “Aunt Soane worked thread like a prisoner: daily, methodically, for free, producing more lace than could ever be practical” (53). In the middle of even those vegetables most worth growing at home. If this suggests an outsourcing of production, the novel repeatedly makes the claim that Ruby’s great success has led to its radical interdependence, as it outsources production of even the most basic goods. Ruby comes to rely on the Convent for the peppers; but, more importantly, this reliance gradually causes Ruby to forsake its own food independence altogether” (131). For more information on food and energy economies in Morrison’s Paradise, see Grausam’s essay “On the Idea of In(ter)dependence: ‘Paradise’ and Foreign Policy,” MELUS 36.2 (2011): 127-145.
doing her daily domestic work, one day she learns that her beloved two boys, Scout and Easter, are killed in the Vietnam War.

Babies. One nineteen, the other twenty-one. How proud and happy she was when they enlisted; she had actively encouraged them to do so. Their father had served in the forties. Uncles too … Like a fool she believed her sons would be safe. Safer than anywhere in Oklahoma outside Ruby. Safer in the army than in Chicago, where Easter wanted to go. Safer than Birmingham, than Montgomery, Selma, than Watts. Safer than Money, Mississippi, in 1955 and Jackson, Mississippi, in 1963. Safer than Newark, Detroit, Washington, DC. She had thought war was safer than any city in the United States. Now she had four unopened letters mailed in 1968 and delivered to the Demby postoffice four days after she buried the last of her sons. She had never been able to open them. Both had been home on furlough that Thanksgiving, 1968. Seven months after King’s murder, and Soane had sobbed like the redeemed to see both her boys alive. Her sweet colored boys unshot, unlynched, unmolested, unimprisoned. ‘Prayer works!’ she shouted when they piled out of the car. It was the last time she had seen them whole.

Soane grieves the death of her “[b]abies” and blames herself for being a such a “fool” who “believed her sons would be safe” in the battlefields of Southeast Asia rather than staying in their home country where they have to live under constant danger of racism, lynching, and police violence posed by white supremacy. In this passage, Morrison enumerates the names of cities in the US where historically racial conflicts between whites and blacks occurred and the subsequent civil rights protest took place: “Chicago,” “Birmingham,” “Montgomery,” “Selma,” “Watts,” “Money,” “Jackson,” “Newark,” “Detroit,” and “Washington DC.” This long list of cities, which encompasses from the Deep South to the Midwest to the East Coast, reveals that black people are not safe in any part of the US, except their self-contained town Ruby, and implicitly suggests why Soane, somewhat naively, believed that “war was safer than any city in the United States.”

For many African American characters in Morrison’s *Paradise*, as Homi Bhabha puts it, America represents their “unhomely” home (141). Juxtaposing the death of Soane’s two sons in...

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24 What Bhabha means “unhomely” is “the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place” in a rapidly globalizing world. He continues to explain: “To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and the public.
the Vietnam War with “King’s murder,” the novel thus critiques the violence of US imperialism that exploits and reifies black bodies, similar to the time of slavery, as a tool for America’s war in Asia while denying their full citizenship rights at home. When her dead sons’ bodies are returned for the funeral, Soane is at least relieved about the fact that “Her sweet colored boys unshot, unlynched, unmolested, unimprisoned,” shouting ‘Prayer works!’ In this way, Morrison’s *Paradise* uncovers how African Americans were excluded from the realm of US citizenship while they were more actively incorporated into US market economy and military intervention abroad.

Similarly, Gigi’s experience with the Civil Rights protest in Oakland, California in the turbulent 1960s informs the reader that, as Connie explains, perhaps “Scary things not always outside. Most scary thing is inside” (*Paradise* 39). In other words, neither Soviet communism nor the Viet Cong, but rather America’s own blindness to its racial injustice in the home country becomes the most terrifying threat to the foundations of US democracy and freedom. While participating in the protest with her ex-boyfriend Mikey, who is now imprisoned, Gigi witnessed an act of police brutality that resulted in the death of an innocent black boy.

A street of small houses, lawns. There were no shots—no gunfire at all. Just the musical screams of girls and the steady roar of men in fight-face. Sirens, yes, and distant bullhorns, but no breaking glass, no body slams, no gunfire. So why did a map of red grow on the little boy’s white shirt? She wasn’t seeing clearly. The crowd thickened and then stopped, prevented by something ahead. Mikey was several shoulders beyond her, pushing through. Gigi looked again at the boy on the fresh green lawn. He was so well dressed: bow tie, white shirt, glossy laced-up shoes. But the shirt was dirty now, covered with red peonies. He jerked, and blood flowed from his mouth. He held his hands out, carefully, to catch it lest it ruin his shoes the way it had already ruined his shirt.

spheres… In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relations. The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world” (141). From this perspective, it is possible to interpret Morrison’s use of the garden trope in the text as a lens to see the inseparable connections between home and the world (“the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world”) while moving between local, national, and global contexts.
Over a hundred injured, the newspaper said, but no mention of gunfire or a shot kid. No mention of a neat little colored boy carrying his blood in his hands. (170)

To protest against racial segregation and social injustice in the US, the Civil Rights participants peacefully marched the streets of Oakland, the epicenter of the Black Power Movement in the 1960s, utilizing nonviolent resistance such as “the musical screams of girls” and “the steady roar of men in fight-face.” Yet, like hunters chasing wild animals, “a wall of advancing police” (170) suddenly interrupted the crowd and tried to arrest them violently. At the heart of the turmoil, Gigi, who later joins the army of unconventional women in the Convent, is shocked when she discovers the cruel suburban landscape that displays “a neat little colored boy carrying his blood in his hands.”

Although none of protesters used violence, as seen in words like “no breaking glass,” “no body slams,” and “no gunfire,” Gigi cannot understand why and how “a map of red grow[s] on the little boy’s white shirt.” Reminiscent of the South’s “strange fruit” hanging from trees, “the fresh green lawn” presents “red peonies” that stem from the black boy’s blood. This blood-painted garden simultaneously unsettles seemingly tranquil suburban landscapes that are deeply intertwined with the histories and politics of racial exclusion in America.

Just as Jefferson’s Monticello garden vividly demonstrates, in order to keep America “beautiful” and

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25 This scene that describes the death of a young black boy, who was unarmed but fatally shot by police, overlaps with the recent deaths of unarmed African Americans, who were killed by police violence. Although the post-Civil Rights discourse in the public sphere has largely focused on the arrival of a more egalitarian society that positively embraces racial integration, this ongoing racism in our time challenges us to questions the very idea of the end of racism and pushes us to rethink the forms of racism in the twenty-first century. The Black Lives Matter movement, for example, helps us to understand the links between the historical roots of racism and police violence in the US, emphasizing the problems of structural violence against people of color.

26 For example, Jennifer C. James provides a compelling account of the historical links between slavery and the presence of ecophobia in black culture and society. Analyzing several African American novels that implicitly and explicitly express black people’s fear of nature, which shows how “the term pastoral has become synonymous with racially oppressive visions of the land” (169), she observes: “It is undeniable that many historical atrocities occurred in these spaces, but they also occurred in towns or their bare outskirts. While they did not always involve hangings, in those that did, bodies were hung from telephone poles, bridges, and other symbols of modernity—not only from trees. Whatever its source, racial zoning exerts a dangerous influence on our collective sensitivity about environmental stewardship. It lends power to readings of natural spaces as the domain and therefore responsibility of ‘whites,’ and urban spaces as the domains, and therefore the problem, of ‘black’” (176-177). In this sense, her
Figure 3-5. An Aerial view of Levittown, Long Island, NY. Levittown was one of the first suburban developments that aimed to meet middle-class Americans’ growing interest buying suburban homes. Yet, this factory assembly line like housing plan also represents cultural conformity and the idea of racial purity in the mid-century through the exclusion of colored people from the suburban community. Photograph by the Associated Press, 1948.

“clean,” somebody who does not belong to the standard of this sanitized white paradise should be eliminated like “weeds” in the garden (Figures 3-5 and 3-6). Thus, the novel unmaskส that, for many Euro-Americans, black people who labor in the dark to maintain their beautiful suburban homes and material abundance are considered “invisible people” and their own violence to “protect” the Garden of Eden (white America) can be justified by deliberately erasing the stories of “gunfire or a shot kid” from “the newspaper.” However, I would suggest that Morrison’s project in Paradise does not model the historical or realistic representation of racial violence and the exploitation of black bodies. Rather, it focuses more on the interaction between “two worlds

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analysis resonates with the recent works by black women writers who have strived to rewrite the tradition of African literary and cultural productions beyond the rigid boundaries of nature-culture (or country-city) dualism.
—the actual and the possible” (“The Site of Memory” 97). During her lectures at Harvard university in 1992, Morrison tells the audience: “My vulnerability would lie in romanticizing blackness rather than demonizing it; vilifying whiteness rather than reifying it” (Playing in the Dark xi). Although Morrison is very attentive to the historical background of racial injustice and its detrimental effects on the lives of African Americans, she makes it clear that her concern does not lie in simply replacing “one hierarchy in order to institute another” because she views “the

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27 In her essay “The Site of Memory” (1995), Toni Morrison contends that her works are the cultural productions that interweave both historical facts and the literary imagination. Describing the nature of her projects, she uses the term “literary archaeology,” which emphasizes the significant role of the imagination in understanding and reconstructing the world. She explains the meaning of literary archaeology as follows: “On the basis of some information and a little bit of guess work you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image—on the remains—in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of a truth. By ‘image,’ of course, I don’t mean ‘symbol’; I simply mean ‘picture’ and the feelings that accompany the picture” (92).
exchange of dominations—dominant Eurocentric scholarship replaced by dominant Afrocentric scholarship” is counterproductive and does little to help understand the complex social and cultural structures behind the existence of racism (8). She continues, “More interesting is what makes intellectual domination possible; how knowledge is transformed from invasion and conquest to revelation and choice; what ignites and informs the literary imagination, and what forces help establish the parameters of criticism” (8). In this sense, we can read Morrison’s use of the garden trope in *Paradise* not as an essentialist act of romanticizing blackness, similar to that of black nationalism, but rather as intellectual activism that attempts to destabilize the rigid boundaries between race and human, nature and culture, material and spiritual, and the self and the world. In explicating the nature of her current project, which would later become *Paradise*, Morrison says that she wants to “imagine not the threat of freedom, or its tentative panting fragility, but the concrete thrill of borderlessness” that works to “suggest contemporary searches and yearnings for social space that is psychically and physically safe” (“Home” 9, 10).

Morrison’s characterization of “the concrete thrill of borderlessness” in *Paradise* returns us to the second chapter titled “Mavis,” when Mavis, who is fleeing from the domestic violence of her abusive husband Frank with his Cadillac, first steps into Connie’s vegetable garden in the Convent. As her car suddenly stops outside Ruby, Mavis tries to find the nearest place to ask for help and finally reaches the Convent. She soon encounters Connie, who has lived and worked there like “the servant” since she was brought by the Catholic nuns as a child, and Connie offers Mavis “the hot, salty potatoes” and “some coffee” that relieve her hunger and nerves. As the Convent has “No telephone out here,” Mavis learns that she needs to “Wait awhile. Today maybe, tomorrow maybe” until people come to the place to buy “Garden things. Things [Connie]
cook[s] up. Things they don’t want to grow themselves.” Following Mavis’s footsteps, the novel begins to illustrate the landscape of the Convent garden:

Blowing gently into her cup, Mavis went to the kitchen door and looked out. When she first arrived she was so happy to find someone at home she had not looked closely at the garden. Now, behind the red chair, she saw flowers mixed in with or parallel to rows of vegetables. In some places staked plants grew in a circle, not a line, in high mounds of soil. Chickens clucked out of sight. A part of the garden she originally thought gone to weed became, on closer inspection, a patch of melons. An empire of corn beyond. (40)

Looking out at Connie’s green country, Mavis finds that the garden eloquently blurs the boundaries between aesthetics and utilitarian purposes by cultivating “flowers mixed in with or parallel to rows of vegetables.” Whereas the modern gardens of Ruby’s women represent contemporary US consumption and capitalist exploitation, Connie’s garden emblematizes a multispecies paradise that provides a refuge for both wounded women and other species like plants and animals (“Chickens clucked out of sight”). Through the close examination of the garden, Mavis realizes that “A part of the garden she originally thought gone to weed” is “a patch of melons” that could satiate women’s bodily and emotional hunger, and “[an] empire of corn beyond” follows. The crossover of plants between the garden and the field, an effect of Connie’s careful handiwork, is part of Morrison’s project of hybridizing the black domestic space, making it simultaneously open and safe. Unlike her kitchen in Frank’s house in Newark, NJ, which often makes her feel suffocated and dead, “Here in the kitchen [Mavis] felt safe” and even “the thought of leaving it disturbed her” (41).

Nevertheless, when Connie asks Mavis to help her (“Make yourself useful”) by shelling the pecans, Mavis initially refuses Connie’s request, saying “Think of something else I can do to help. Shelling that stuff would make me crazy” (41). For Mavis, doing farm work seems to be a sign of the degradation of her social status from a black middle-class housewife in the urban North to a poor, hungry farm worker in the rural South. In response to Mavis’s discomfort with
farm labor, Connie says: “You give in too quick. Look at your nails. Strong, curved like a bird’s—perfect pecan hands. Fingernails like that take the meat out whole every time. Beautiful hands, yet you say you can’t. Make you crazy. Make you crazy to see good nails go to waste” (42). Instead of remaining as a modern housewife, who is confined to the house and largely alienated from the natural world, Connie here invites Mavis to experience the pleasure of farm work that reconnects human bodies to the earth through physical labor. Unlike her initial thought, while “working pecans,” Mavis finds herself “economiz[ing] gestures without sacrificing their grace” (42) and begins to feel the comfort of the world that is “Unjudgmental. Tidy. Ample. Forever” (48). In her book, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (2009), black feminist scholar bell hooks has argued that African Americans’ gradual alienation from the land is inseparably linked to the logic of “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” that denies and works to erase the history of the black agrarian past. She writes:

> Living in modern society, without a sense of history, it has been easy for folks to forget that black people were first and foremost a people of the land, farmers. It is easy for folks to forget that at the first part of the twentieth century, the vast majority of black folks in the United States lived in the agrarian south…. In modern society, there is also a tendency to see no correlation between the struggle for collective black self-recovery and ecological movements that seek to restore balance to the planet by changing our relationship to nature and to natural resources. Unmindful of our history of living harmoniously on the land, many contemporary black folks see no value in supporting ecological movements, or see ecology and the struggle to end racism as competing concerns. (36-39)

Here hooks points out that the black community’s lack of understanding of the agricultural past not only propelled African Americans’ incorporation into contemporary US consumer culture and patriarchal white capitalism, but it has also led to the production of cultural amnesia that rarely considers the intersectionality of racism and environmental issues because it looks at nature as a predominantly white space. Like the male leaders of black intellectual tradition in the early twentieth-century, most African Americans have understood black identity to be
commensurate with urban experiences and read nature as a place of fear or threat, rather as a sanctuary or a refuge, especially given that the traumatic memory of slavery is associated with the history of plantation agriculture and lynching in the rural South.\textsuperscript{28} Against this cultural belief, however, hooks provocatively suggests that “Collective black self-recovery takes place when we begin to renew our relationship to the earth, when we remember the way of our ancestors. When the earth is sacred to us, our bodies can also be sacred to us” (40). Crucially, getting back to nature, for African Americans, is not a leisurely retreat from the city like that of many nature-loving white middle-class tourists found in the national parks. Rather, it is a conscious political act that strives to move beyond the painful memories of slavery and racial violence in order to create the new meaning of black rural experiences by remembering the fact that “black people were first and foremost a people of the land, farmers.” In other words, reclaiming black environmental citizenship, as hooks puts it, is the first step to heal the wounded minds and bodies of black people in North America, which link to the tradition of African diasporic practices of

\textsuperscript{28} In Morrison’s \textit{Love} (2003), for instance, Romen’s grandparent Sandler and Vida Gibbon’s conversation at the dinner table clearly shows the tension between African Americans’ strong yearning for racial uplift and their nostalgia toward nature before they were uprooted from the land during the Great Migration in the early twentieth century. While Vida disdains the life of the rural South as it relates to the history of slavery and plantation agriculture, Sandler, by contrast, remembers his immediate agrarian past very fondly. The novel describes their conversation as follows:

“He paid us good money, Sandler, and taught us, too. Things I never would have known about if I’d kept on living over a swamp in a stilt house. You know what my mother’s hands looked like. Because of Bill Cosey, none of us had to keep doing that kind of work.” “It wasn’t that bad. I miss it sometimes.” “Miss what? Slop jars? Snakes?” “The trees.” “Oh, shoot.” …. “Mrs. Cosey said it was a paradise.” Romen reached for a cube of pineapple with his fingers. Vida slapped his hand. “It was a plantation. And Bill Cosey took us off of it.” “The ones he wanted.” Sandler spoke to his shoulder. “I heard that. What’s that supposed to mean?” “Nothing, Vida. Like you said, the man was a saint.” “There’s no arguing with you” (17-18).

In this passage, Vida tends to romanticize the black capitalist enterprise established by Bill Cosey, the owner of the big hotel resort for black folks on the East coast. However, despite Vida’s harsh criticism, Sandler perceives the black agrarian past as a site of beautiful memory that brings him back to intimate connection to the natural world. From this perspective, it is possible to read that Sandler’s gentle attitudes toward nature represent Morrison’s imagination of alternative black manhood that is not governed by the idea of domination or control, as often seen in black patriarchs, but rather this new manhood is largely shaped by his concerns for both human and nonhuman others.
slave gardens that even momentarily allowed slaves to “steal back” their own times and bodies from the white master.

Akin to hook’s call for the recovery of black environmental tradition, on the other side of the globe in the early 1970s, when the Civil Rights movement and black women’s liberation movement reached its climax, India’s Chipko movement began as a grassroots environmental movement that sought to preserve forests and hills in the Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh against unregulated deforestation and the destruction of the ecosystem.29 As environmental degradation (e.g. floods, drought, and biodiversity loss) related to the commercial lumber industry consistently affected the region and its local food systems, village women, who were the primary food producers of the region, realized the need to organize community and claim their environmental rights in order to stop the destruction of the environment and local farming. To achieve this goal, they chose a nonviolent mode of protest, influenced by Mahatma Ghandi’s philosophy of Satyagraha, by hugging trees in the forest and protecting them from the developers’ cutting machine (Figure 3-7). This protest soon raised public awareness about the significance of environmental protection in the region and across the nation, and also provided a successful template for other environmental protest movements around the world. As Dipesh

29 Here I use India’s Chipko movement as one primary example of ecofeminist environmental activism, which shows how more nuanced understanding of ecofeminism can be a powerful tool for social change by addressing the perspectives of people of color and women in the Third World, instead of only serving the needs of white middle-class feminists in the First World. However, the beginning of ecofeminism within feminist theory was no easy feat because ecofeminism’s emphasis on the relations between women and nature was often critiqued by other feminist scholars who read this approach as “essentialism” that naturalizes women’s traditional work such as nurturing and caring. Yet, despite “the charge of essentialism,” ecofeminist critic Stacy Alaimo has argued that “the primary reason why ecofeminism has been branded as ‘essentialist’ is because nature itself has been understood as the ground of essentialism” (“Ecofeminism without Nature?” 302). She continues: “it would be beneficial to address how essentialism depends upon particular philosophical notions of nature and how different, more dynamic and robust notions of nature are emerging within feminist theory” (302). For more on the interaction between feminism and environmentalism, see Noë Sturgeon’s “Ecofeminist Appropriations and Transnational Environmentalism,” Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power 6.2-3 (1999): 255-279, Stacy Alaimo’s Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (2000), and Greta Gaard’s “New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism,” ISLE 17.4 (2010): 643-665.
Chakrabarty keenly observes, the Third World elites’ understanding of development “often displayed an uncritical emphasis on modernization,” which reflects “a clear and conscious desire to ‘catch up’ with the West” (53). As a result, the leaders of Third World nations such as Jawaharlal Nehru (India), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), and Chou En-lai (China) developed and promoted the “pedagogical model” of decolonization, one that reads themselves as “teachers to their nations” (54) while viewing “their peasants and workers” as people who “needed to be educated in the habits and manners of citizens” (53) This “top-down” view of developmental strategies that builds on the logic of patriarchal capitalism is both a reflection of modernist desire and postcolonial anxiety in the Third World. However, contrary to the conventional (of course, gender biased) view of women, who are passive and intellectually inferior to men, the Indian
local women in the Chipko movement demonstrate two critical points: (1) women of color, too, can be agents of community building and the local economy; (2) perhaps more importantly, development from below could bring social change and hope to local communities by revising the logic of patriarchal white capitalism “transplanted” in India and by creating an alternative form of democratic community. In short, the local women in Indian developed an alternative model of development that is based on what Vandana Shiva calls “earth democracy.”

Engaging with the characteristics of the revolutionary garden, a form of domestic resistance and spiritual regeneration in the context of the global decolonization movement, Morrison’s *Paradise* similarly explores the possibility that black women’s reconciliation with nature could heal the trauma of slavery and domestic violence and empower them as subjects of human rights and radical social change for the black community and beyond, emphasizing the need for creating a new relationship with the self and the world in the post-Civil Rights era. The novel describes the ritual of spiritual and bodily healing through black women’s merging with nature:

*The rain’s perfume was stronger north of Ruby, especially at the Convent, where thick white clover and Scotch broom colonized every place but the garden. Mavis and Pallas, aroused from sleep by its aroma, rushed to tell Consolata, Grace and Seneca that the longed for rain had finally come … Consolata started it; the rest were quick to join her. There were great rivers in the world and on their banks and the edges of oceans children thrill to water. In places where rain is light the thrill is erotic. But those sensations bow to the rapture of holy women dancing in hot sweet rain. They would have laughed, had enchantment not been so deep. If there were any recollections of a recent warning or intimations of harm, the irresistible rain washed them away. Seneca embraced and finally let go of a dark morning in state housing. Grace witnessed the successful cleansing of a white shirt that never should have been stained.* (283)

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30 Indian environmental activist Vandana Shiva provides a compelling account of this concept of “Earth Democracy”: “Earth Democracy is both an ancient worldview and an emergent political movement for peace, justice, and sustainability. Earth Democracy connects the particular to the universal, the diverse to the common, and the local to the global. It incorporates what in India we refer to as vasudhaiva kutumbkam (the earth family)—the community of all beings supported by the earth” (1).
While joyfully dancing in the rain, the Convent women participate in the collective healing process and begin to experience the purification of their wounded spirit/mind and body. The scene seems to be resonant with Thoreauvian spiritual healing in *Walden* (1854), but differentiates itself from the tradition of American nature writing by showing a more positive attitude toward the inclusion of women of color within nature.\(^{31}\) Like the image of water that holistically embraces all differences from the beginning of the world’s ancient civilizations (“There were great rivers in the world and on their banks”), “holy women dancing in hot sweet rain” in the Convent demonstrate that nature is neither a place of fear or threat, but rather it serves as a *sacred space* that regenerates black women’s suppressed aspirations under the control of slavery and black patriarchy and help them to redefine the meaning of their own bodies and souls. As Alice Walker elaborates in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1983), reconsidering the role of black women in the black community from “Saints” to “Artists” is crucial to reversing the cultural stereotypes of black women that naturalize the exploitation of black female bodies as “the *mule* of the world” and have forced them to endure “the burdens that everyone else—*everyone* else—refused to carry” (177). While highlighting the power of a black women’s spirituality that is mixed with “the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent [that] drove them insane” (233), during her journey of tracing the artistic life of ordinary black women in the past, Walker confesses that she finds instead “vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited” from “unlikely places to this day” (239), including, most notably her mother’s garden. Like Walker’s explanation of black women’s self-fashioning in the garden,

\(^{31}\) For example, Kathleen R. Wallace and Karla Armbruster have argued that reading Toni Morrison’s novels from an ecocritical perspective is crucial because this kind of approach allows us to see “how her complex representation of African American experiences with nature can productively complicate American environmental discourse and the practice of ecocriticism” (211). Although the role of nature in African American literary tradition has been seldom studied by scholars, they point out that “Morrison’s novels repeatedly illustrate how dominant (white) American culture has employed the concepts of natural and unnatural to reinforce ideological boundaries between the human and the less-than-human, often in the service of denying African Americans their full humanity” (216).
Morrison also envisions the radical potential of the garden that reunites black women’s broken bodies and souls and shows how this gardening practice leads them to reclaim their own eco-social citizenship that is not restricted by white masters or black patriarchs. Through the mouth of Connie, the novel informs the reader about this interconnectedness of body (“bones”) and spirit: “Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary’s mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve” (Paradise 263). Cynthia Dobbs argues that in Morrison’s Paradise, Connie functions as an important figure, who demonstrates the interactions between gender and homemaking, through her “spiritual yet emphatically corporeal template, a space for self-design and self-authorship” (115). In this sense, as Dobbs notes, Morrison shows that “the racialized and gendered body,” which historically has been a “contested location for battles of domination and control,” can be radically transformed into “the space for a self-claiming—a site for decolonization, regendering, and regeneration” (114).

Interestingly enough, however, the novel refuses any attempt to romanticize or reduce black characters based on an either “Booker T. solutions” or “Du Bois problems” category (212).\(^{32}\) even the revolutionary women in the Convent, whose characters are generally described as creative, self-affirmative is not an exception. Later in the novel, we learn that the Convent women are attacked and brutally killed by the Ruby men whose fears lie in the “unknown”

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\(^{32}\) Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois were two leading figures in the black freedom struggle in the early twentieth-century. Both men strongly believed that ending racism is the most urgent and crucial task for black folks in Jim Crow America, but their strategies for racial uplift differ from each other. While Washington proposed a more pragmatic, compromised model of black progress that is based on self-help and material wealth through industrial education (e.g. farming and business), Du Bois harshly criticized Washington’s model that endorses the presence of racism in American society and he claimed instead black people’s full citizenship rights and black empowerment through higher education. On the debate and tension between Washington and Du Bois, see Washington’s “The Atlanta Exposition Address (also known as the Atlanta Comprise Speech)” (1895), Du Bois’s The Souls of Black Folk (1903), especially “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” (34-45), and Mark Bauerlein’s “Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois: The Origins of a Bitter Intellectual Battle.” The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 46 (Winter 2004-2005): 106-114.
danger that these unconventional women, who do not need “men” and “God” (276), could bring to their self-enclosed black community. More than anything else, they fear the fact that the Convent’s isolation from the outside world and women’s independent behavior might intervene in and dismantle Ruby’s social system, which is buttressed by the patriarchal/black capitalist order. After learning more stories and secrets of the town’s people, at the end of *Paradise*, we return to the same scene appeared in the beginning of the novel (the killing of the Convent women), but this time with a very different understanding. Yet, the novel still refuses to clearly answer whether the Convent women are really “dead” or “alive” and how they could appear again in the ending scene, despite the sudden disappearance of their dead bodies after the massacre at the Convent. Here Morrison’s literary experiment that challenges her readers to tolerate ambiguity resonates with what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a “new *mestiza* consciousness” (or a “consciousness of the Borderlands”). Anzaldúa has famously observed that

> The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a

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33 Echoing Morrison’s view of black women’s utopia represented in *Paradise*, black feminist and poet Audre Lord captures the challenges that independent black women who refuse to follow the logic of black patriarchy/capitalism might experience in racist, sexist, and classist American culture and society. In articulating the significance of black feminism that differs from white upper-middle class centered second wave feminism, she powerfully claims: “Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference—those us of who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older—know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning to how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths” (112). By emphasizing the impossibility of imagining a better society when black people simply rely on “[t]he white western patriarchal ordering of things” (9), as too often practiced by many black men, she further suggests that “*For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support” (112). In this sense, I think it is crucial to examine how studying the interaction between black feminism and environmentalism can possibly contribute to diversifying the fields of feminism and environmentalism together. For more on black feminism, queer and sexuality, and social activism, see Lorde’s critically acclaimed work *Sister Outsider* (1984).
long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (102)

When “mestiza consciousness,” I would add, is practiced by people who attempt to transcend “the subject-object duality” deeply embedded in Western culture, the borderland that was once marked by territorial wars and the oppression of people of color and nature can be a site of “healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts.” This remaking of the borderlands that embody the mobility of physical/emotional landscapes is integral to Morrison’s project in Paradise. Through her narrative of gardens that freely navigates black diaspora in local and global contexts, Morrison’s novel thus shows that, as “Piedade’s song” in the ending scene signals, the meaning of paradise can be more holistic and extended to everyone on the planet, rather than being exclusionary. Just like the image of a busy “ship,” “crew and passengers” travelling in the ocean, Morrison finally invites her readers to seamlessly move, work, and inhabit “down here in paradise” (319), which is also called the earth.
CHAPTER 4
THE SEEDS OF THE GLOBAL FUTURE: MODERN AGRICULTURE, BIOTECHNOLOGY,
AND RUTH L. OZEKI’S DIGITAL GARDEN

Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted,
for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other
birthplaces, and so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into
unaccustomed earth.

-- Nathaniel Hawthorne
“The Custom-House”

In his recent New York Times Sunday Review entitled “The Global Solution to
Extinction,” Edward O. Wilson, a renowned Harvard biologist and the author of Consilience:
The Unity of Knowledge (1998), writes his observations on the current flow of environmental
discourse:

Our attention remains focused on the physical environment—on pollution, the shortage
of fresh water, the shrinkage of arable land and, of course, the great, wrathful demon that
threatens all our lives, human-forced climate change. But Earth’s living environment,
including all its species and all the ecosystems they compose, has continued to receive
relatively little attention. This is a huge strategic mistake. If we save the living
environment of Earth, we will also save the physical, nonliving environment, because
each depends on the other. But if we work to save only the physical environment, as we
seem bent on doing, we will lose them both.

Unlike mainstream environmental discourse that prioritizes the “visibility” of environmental
impacts (e.g. land pollution, desertification, and climate change) over the “invisibility” of
environmental degradation (e.g. the loss of biodiversity), Wilson suggests that it is now urgent to
take care of the living environment partly because it is strategically more effective to focus on a
root cause of global environmental crises (the dysfunction of ecosystems) rather than merely
treating the end result of human activities (the physical environment) and, perhaps more
importantly, because it is the foundation of all forms of life, whether known or unknown, on the
planet. If the extinction rate of species around the world is, as he has argued, much faster than
the current estimates, it is crucial to think about the ways in which we conserve natural habitats,
which are directly related to the maintenance of biological diversity, and to provide more spaces
for endangered species so that the planet could “remain relatively natural, without removing
people living there or changing property rights.” Ruth L. Ozeki’s second novel, All Over
Creation (2002), assumes the challenge of preserving biodiversity, exploring whether
understanding the inseparable connections between the expansion of global agribusiness and
large scale environmental change might raise individuals’ environmental consciousness and
cause them to act to help slow the loss of biodiversity.

All Over Creation resonates with Ozeki’s long interest in the relationship between
environmental awareness and environmental activism such as slow food, organic farming, and
free seed exchange. While her first novel, My Year of Meats (1998), unravels the dynamic
interactions between the consumption of food and media and the world an individual perceives
across the Pacific, in All Over Creation Ozeki has expanded her concerns about food and the
environment to a planetary scale by creating a story of an Idaho potato farming family facing the
risks of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the fields. Questioning the ownership of life
and the privatization of the commons recently driven by biotechnology corporations, All Over
Creation imagines the future of contemporary food and culture through an entwined narrative of
industrial agriculture, the demise of the American farm, and counterculture environmentalism in
the second half of the twentieth century.

Drawing upon controversial debates regarding the GMOs and its impacts on human
health and the natural environment, this chapter examines how Ozeki employs the trope of
gardening as a tool to challenge contemporary food production systems, which alienate both
farmers and consumers from the food production process itself, and to envision an alternative
model of food cultures—one that seeks to bridge the gap between people and land via global
networks of gardens, most explicitly exemplified by the digital seed library project in the novel, in which farmers and gardeners around the world collaborate to create what Bruno Latour calls “our common geostory” (3). For Ozeki, the garden not only functions as a lens to see the cultural history of American agriculture as a whole, but also works to provide a form of education that enables citizens to learn about the symbiotic relationship between plants and humans, subject and object, and nature and culture without leaving their urban homes or getting back to the wilderness.

To date, critics have tended to focus on the politics of GMOs in Ozeki’s *All Over Creation* in relation to transnational corporate agriculture and the food industry. Their analysis of the novel mostly centers on the anti-GMO rhetoric that illustrates how genetic engineering might bring unpredictable environmental effects both to the human body and natural ecosystems in the contemporary world. However, what these accounts of the novel have not fully considered, as Allison Carruth points out, is “the form of Ozeki’s fiction” that makes readers contemplate “competing moral and political concerns across characters” rather than taking a single stance (122). In her talk at Cal Poly in 2007, Ozeki herself also remarked: “I’m not an advocate of any particular position or stance, nor do I have a particular agenda. My role is simply to stay curious about what’s going on in the world and to ask questions about what I see, and to describe it in the best detail I can, and in so doing, to sow seeds that produce the kind of collaborative discourse that we’re engaged in, today” (14). Ozeki’s work shows that the novelist’s job is not to simply...

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1 Standing in the age of the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch shaped by humans, Latour argues that understanding “the active role of human agency” has become a more important task than ever before and it is necessary to have critical “storytelling” that addresses “the same shape-changing destiny, a destiny that cannot be followed, documented, told, and represented by using any of the older traits associated with subjectivity and objectivity” (2, 13-15). For more information regarding the Anthropocene, see Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill, and Chakrabarty.

2 See, for example, McHugh, Wallace, and Rouyan.
represent a specific position, but to create an open platform for public discourse in which both
the writer and the reader are actively involved in a “collaborative action” so as to let “it becomes
what it’s meant to be” through the reader’s agency (13, 14).

In what follows, I investigate how the practice of gardening and botanical references in
Ozeki’s All Over Creation provide fertile ground for understanding the increasingly complicated
history of U.S. agriculture as an experimental laboratory of food science and technology in the
twentieth century. Whereas a gardening metaphor in the text has taken an important position in
reading the complex interplay between the notion of American progress and the pastoral ideal, it
has received far less scholarly attention than scientific and ethical issues surrounding the
introduction of GMOs into the food chain. Focusing on the cultural implications of the garden in
the U.S. that oscillate between human desires to control nature and the Romantic desire to return
to nature, I argue that Ozeki’s botanical fiction resists rigid scientific categories and binary
thinking and instead cultivates a new form of environmental culture that brings together science,
art, and politics for radical social change in the twenty-first century.

Luther Burbank’s Garden: Horticulture and Hybridity

A synopsis of All Over Creation reveals the crucial status of gardening and horticulture
to Ozeki’s American farm novel. When the story begins, Yumi describes how her mixed racial
background makes her feel like “a random seedling, a volunteer, and accidental fruit,” which
needs to be pulled out from “a field of genetically identical potatoes” (4). As a daughter of
American potato farmer Lloyd Fuller and Japanese war bride Momoko, she has often been
associated with the idea of an exotic fruit during her childhood in rural Idaho, and this Asian
exoticness inherited from her mother often leads her to perform as “the Indian princess” (7) on
an annual Thanksgiving pageant, regardless of her actual racial and ethnic heritage. After her
illicit relationship with Elliot Rhodes, a young history teacher and recent college graduate who flees to Liberty Falls to avoid the draft during the Vietnam War, the teenage Yumi runs away from her home and moves to California in search of a more diverse community that consists of people from different racial and cultural backgrounds. During her twenty-five-year absence from her Idaho home, she has had three mixed-race children (Phoenix, Ocean, and Poo) from a series of varying relationships (a queer Asian American, a Euro-American, a Native Hawaiian) and is now living with them in Pahoa, Hawaii, working as an adjunct writing instructor while running real estate business. When Cass Quinn, Yumi’s childhood friend who takes care of Yumi’s parents and their farm with her husband Will, tries to contact Yumi using the Internet because of Lloyd’s illness, she is struck by the lush botanical descriptions she finds from Yumi’s real estate business website: “Paradise for Sale! Stunning & productive 20-acre property with established groves of macadamia nuts & mangoes … Guavas, grapefruits, and avocados!” (31). Comparing the varieties of plants and fruits in Hawaii with her and Will’s monoculture potato farm in Idaho, Cass thinks, “Guavas. Macadamia nuts. Mangoes. Made their three thousand acres of Russet Burbanks seem downright dull” (31). Her inability to imagine “paradise” here closely correlates to Ozeki’s use of literary metaphor that has blended botanical diversity and cultural diversity in constructing the blueprint of ecological utopia in the novel. From this perspective, we can see that the limited varieties of plants in Cass’s farm due to large-scale monoculture allude to a dark underside of the image of Idaho as a cornucopia of potatoes in the world.

Recent scholarship on All Over Creation has focused on the interrelationship of biodiversity and cultural diversity and the narrative of GMO potatoes that entwines with industrial agriculture and consumer culture, highlighting the safety of the GMOs and its seemingly invisible environmental effects. Although, in many studies, Luther Burbank (1849-
an American botanist and horticulturalist, has been briefly mentioned as a man who first invented the Russet Burbank (a specific type of potato used in Idaho’s monoculture because of its large size and long shape suitable for making French fries) and as a vignette of the novel, there has been very little research that examines Burbank’s central role in shaping today’s modern agriculture in general and bioengineering in particular. In his book *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (2007), Philip J. Pauly suggests that “attention to the history of horticulture advances our aspirations to see the past as a whole, or more attainably, to see together the histories of the environment, agriculture, science, art, and national development,” emphasizing how “the garden concept” has helped many scholars in environmental history to “overcome dichotomous thinking about the relations of humans and other organisms” (8). Across disciplines, Pauly’s insights allow us to theorize the garden as a map for reading horticultural transformation in relation to the rise of U.S. agricultural science that dramatically transforms the idea of nature from God’s gift to human-made environment at the turn of the twentieth century.

But one might ask how studying the history of horticulture helps us understand the origins of modern agriculture? Why is reading these fields in connection to each other crucial to developing more sustainable agricultural systems and community-based food cultures in the twenty-first century? To answer these questions, Ozeki interweaves Lloyd’s potato farm in the 1970s with Burbank’s garden in the 1870s: “In fact, the entire agricultural backbone of the state of Idaho rests on a bit of luck that turned up in a truck garden in Massachusetts in 1872. The garden belonged to Lloyd’s hero, a man known as the Father of Modern Potato, Luther Burbank. His was an American success story, and Lloyd loved it” (*All Over Creation* 56). Self-educated, the most famous gardener on the planet in the late nineteenth century began his career as a ‘plant
inventor’ from his small garden because the garden, as Michael Pollan explains, was a “good place to try out new plants and techniques without having to bet the farm” (186). Put differently, the garden functioned as an experimental station where people could “try out new hybrids and mutations” (185), before implementing them in the fields, without having to face economic risks.3

In the nineteenth century, as we have seen in Silko’s Gardens in the Dunes in Chapter 2, horticulture was considered to be a forefront of modern science, and commercial botanists sponsored by the government and trade companies at the time were eager to bring valuable foreign fruits and vegetables into the U.S. national border because many Americans believed that the wealth of the nation depended on the varieties of plants it could produce. It was the moment when the United States had emerged as the center of international plant and seed trade. Yet, what distinguishes Burbank from other plant breeders was the fact that he had entirely changed the paradigm of the nineteenth century horticulture from collecting rare, beautiful plants to creating new plants through hybridization and cloning. When publishing his first seed commercial catalog, New Creations in Fruits and Flowers, in 1893, Burbank confidently asserted: “[T]hey (the fruits and flowers listed in the catalog) are new creations, lately produced by scientific combinations of nature’s forces, guided by long, carefully conducted, and very expensive biological research” (Figure 4-1). In contrast to conventional horticulturalists, who were mainly interested in finding new, valuable plants from nature, Burbank emphasized, his products were examples that clearly showed how American horticulture has entered a new era of natural

3 See Michael Pollan’s The Botany of Desire (2001), especially Chapter 4, “Desire: Control / Plant: The Potato” (181-238). In articulating the utilitarian nature of the garden as a miniature version of small-scale farming, Pollan notes: “Many of the methods employed by organic farmers today were first discovered in the garden. Attempted on the scale of a whole farm, the next New Thing is an expensive and risky proposition, which is why farmers have always been a conservative breed, notoriously slow to change. But for a gardener like me, with relatively little at stake, it’s no big deal to try out a new variety of potato or method of pest control, and every season I do” (186).
invention, saying, “we are now standing just at the gateway of scientific horticulture.” While describing the radical nature of Burbank’s garden experiments, remembering her childhood when Lloyd affectionately read Burbank’s autography *The Harvest of the Years* (1926) to her, Yumi narrates: “You see, spudmen don’t propagate potatoes by planting true seeds. They do it by cloning. It’s quick, simple, reliable, and you can understand its appeal to farmers like my father, who are into total control” (*All Over Creation* 57). Rather than dealing with the unexpected outcomes of direct seed planting that may result in “wildly heterozygous” potatoes, through Burbank’s cloning method, American farmers were able to domesticate nature and to produce genetically identical potatoes successfully.  

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4 Yumi continues to narrate that “The reason you clone rather than plant from seed is because potatoes, like human children, are wildly heterozygous. Lloyd taught me that word when I was eight. It simply means that if you try to
as Frederick Jackson Turner argued at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Burbank’s garden demonstrates that the idea of the frontier—adventure, discovery, and expansion—has not died but only shifted its focus to another realm of progress: the advancement of agricultural science and biotechnology.

Yet, it is worth noting that Burbank’s hybrid plants, a capstone of his scientific plant breeding, include both those native to America and those from other countries as, for example, hybrids like Himalaya blackberry and Satsuma plum. In this context, throughout All Over Creation, Ozeki juxtaposes Burbank’s legacy in the garden with Lloyd and Momoko’s home-based seed business. Just as Burbank enthusiastically embraced foreign fruits and vegetables, valuable resources in creating his hybrid plants, to expand the diversity of American horticulture, Lloyd wholeheartedly advocates the introduction of non-native plants, highlighting that farmers and gardeners today can perceive horticultural freedom as a cultural signifier of American freedom. Introducing new arrival seeds in the list to their customers via Fullers’ seed catalog, Lloyd passionately writes:

And while we are on the subject of Exotics, there is an idea in circulation that these so-called “aggressive” non-native plants are harmful, invasive, and will displace “native” species. How ironic to hear these theories propounded by people of European ancestry in America! Just consider this: Not a single one of the food crops that make the U.S. an agricultural power today is native to North America. Our plants are as immigrants as we are!

Mrs. Fuller and I believe, firstly, that anti-exoticism is Anti-Life: “God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body” [1 Corinthians 15:38]. Secondly, we believe anti-exoticism to be explicitly racist, and having fought for Freedom and Democracy against Hitler, I do not intend to promote Third Reich eugenics in our family garden. Finally, we believe anti-exoticism to be propaganda of the very worst kind. I used to farm potatoes, and I have witnessed firsthand the demise of the American family farm. I have seen how large Corporations hold the American Farmer in thrall, prisoners to their chemical tyranny and their buy-outs of politicians and judges. I have come to believe that anti-exotic agendas are being promoted by these same

propagate a domesticated potato using seed, sexually, chances are it will not grow true to type. Instead it will regress, displaying a haphazard variety of characteristics, reminiscent of its uncultivated potato progenitors—it may prove superior to the parent plant or may be wildly inferior” (All Over Creation 57).
Agribusiness and Chemical Corporations as yet another means of peddling their weed killers.

Mrs. Fuller and I believe the careful introduction of species into new habitats serves to increase biological variety and health. (67)

A reference to Lloyd’s philosophy on the interconnectedness between biological and cultural diversity, this passage correlates “non-native plants” with the history of human immigrants in the United States. By claiming that “anti-exoticism to be explicitly racist,” Lloyd here makes a link between the concept of “invasive” species and foreign immigrants, particularly non-European ancestry immigrants, and questions the rigid natural and cultural boundaries that work to naturalize Euro-Americans’ domination of native flora and ecosystems while excluding racialized others. Similar to Ozeki’s literary metaphor in the text that mixes white America’s fear of people of color with the increasing number of foreign plants, pests, and diseases, in 1919 Charles Lathrop Pack, American Forestry Association president, asserted that it is imperative to conduct Plant Quarantine Act 37, which restricts the importation of plants and seeds from other countries, to protect the American natural environment from the invasion of foreign insects and plant diseases. Emphasizing severe damage to American forest ecosystems, Pack compared these destructive foreign insect pests to the image of immigrants and said that America’s plant quarantine policy, which has maintained “an open door to plant immigrants,” should be reconsidered because “these undesirable citizens” with “tremendous appetites” are destroying the beautiful landscape of “the Land of Freedom” and, therefore, it is necessary to exclude “these enemy aliens” for homeland security and to curtail their “treasonable activities” (“Excluding Enemy Aliens with Appetites De Luxe” 1053). Historian Jeannie N. Shinozuka describes Pack’s presidential address—along with the cartoon that illustrates foreign pests and blights wearing pilgrim hats—as an “effective metaphor that depict[s] the American nation as a house under

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5 See Pauly (156) and Shinozuka (834) respectively.
attack by enemy aliens” (834) (Figure 4-2). In particular, she critically analyzes that “[t]he movement of Asian bodies” in the early twentieth century, including “goods from Asia and Asian insects,” “provided the symbolic imagery” that reads Asians as a “contagious yellow peril” (832). Just as African Americans were largely excluded from the realm of US citizenship in Toni Morrison’s Paradise, this kind of cultural image allowed government officials to legally regulate, contain, and exclude Asian immigrants for public health and national security.  

In All Over Creation, however, it seems that Lloyd refutes such claims made by people like Pack and his heirs, and considers “anti-exoticism to be propaganda of the very worst kind”: government propaganda related to anti-immigrant sentiment throughout U.S. history and the current colonization of American farms by global agribusiness. Instead, he asserts that “Mrs. Fuller and I believe the careful introduction of species into new habitats serves to increase biological variety and health,” endorsing the horticultural freedom of individual Americans and the values of plant varieties against the violent regulation of plant/immigrants. It might be true that Lloyd’s positive affirmation of non-native plants is not environmentally accurate, as Ursula K. Heise convincingly suggests, given that invasive species such as Japanese kudzu and the European fungus have rapidly destroyed native habitats and changed the biological landscape of ecological communities across the nation throughout the past century. Rather than simply

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6 In particular, the invasion of the Japanese beetle throughout the East during the 1930s, Shinozuka suggests, “form[s] a central aspect of Japanese migration to the United States and are part and parcel of our understanding of race” (838) because it has reinforced “the perception of Japanese immigrants as a menace to both the native ecology and native (white) bodies” (833). For more on the Japanese beetle and anti-Asian immigration policies, see Shinozuka (838-841).

7 Lloyd’s attitudes toward foreign plants resonate with that of J. Horace McFarland, the entrepreneur and leader of American horticultural society, in the early twentieth century. As opposed to what he calls “scientific hysteria” (the USDA’s Plant Quarantine Act), McFarland said though he “support[s] the efforts to ‘scrutinize plants for bugs and bothers,’ but hope[s] that America ‘ought to continue to be cosmopolitan in plant relation’” (qtd. in Pauly 162).

8 For readings of the critique of the invasive species discourse in environmentalism, see Marris’s Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World (2011), Fearce’s The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature’s Salvation (2015), and Cardozo and Subramaniam’s “Assembling Asian/American Naturecultures.”
equating “social and cultural structures” with “biological forms and processes” or relying on “the problematic habit of deriving socio-cultural ethics and political stances” from environmental science that is both dynamic and unpredictable, Heise asks environmental writers and literary critics to engage more with “theories of cross-cultural belonging” that helps explore the complex interactions between scientific knowledge and cultural ecology we construct, while resisting our temptation to fall into scientific reductionism in scrutinizing humanistic inquiry (400-401). But at the same time, I would add that we need to open the door for the possibilities of “invasion ecology,” which provide a useful lens to see the cultural politics of nature within environmental discourse. Against the idea that “pristine” wilderness is the only valuable source for environmental conservation, firmly supported by many environmental conservationists, recent environmental nonfiction writers like Emma Marris and Fred Fearce suggest that our
conventional environmental thought may need a new approach that acknowledges the significance of invasive species, rather than viewing them as a threat to native habitats, emphasizing these alien species’ regenerative power of creating novel ecosystems in the wild. Similarly, Karen Cardozo and Banu Subramaniam use the term “invited invasions” in order to explain how “foreign species do not randomly circulate through open borders but rather through complex naturecultural processes, and it is ethically incumbent and ecologically imperative upon us to acknowledge this” (5-6, 18). Attentive to the problems of “the unregulated flow of life forms, objects, or capital across borders,” they instead shed light on “disciplinary myopia and political agendas” that tend to blame individual “foreign species” and remain silent to the structural violence of human-driven “unfettered development,” and problematize how this dualistic way of seeing nature (“native” versus “foreign”, “pristine” versus “invasive”) rarely considers “the ecological or economic conditions that tender the species ‘invited’” (18). From this perspective, it is possible to read Lloyd’s view of invasive species as a good example that reflects a complex and constantly changing web of human and non-human interactions.

Taken together, reading the garden metaphor in Ozeki’s fiction, particularly in relation to environmental history and the rise of U.S. agricultural science, I argue, enables us to navigate the wide spectrum of cultural and natural history, ranging from American horticulture to immigration policies to environmental issues surrounding bioengineering and invasive species, without being trapped into any forms of reductionism (both biological and cultural). A consideration of Burbank’s garden, then, paves the way for understanding the nature of American agriculture as both grounded in the idea of American progress through scientific advancement, and indebted to the politics of exclusion of alien species and implicitly human immigrants as well.
GMOs, Environmental Risks, and “Merchants of Doubt”

In All Over Creation’s botanical plot, the garden forge the link between biodiversity and American democracy and cultural freedom. If plant varieties were linked to the burgeoning of the nation in the nineteenth century, as the rich history of American horticulture demonstrates, we may wonder when and how monoculture has become a synonym for modern agriculture and replaced a wide variety of food crops, which used to be available in the old farms, with a few selected crops such as wheat, potatoes, corn, and soybean. As seen from early twentieth century novels such as Frank Norris’s The Octopus: A Story of California (1901), Willa Cather’s O Pioneers! (1913) and My Antonia (1918), the modernization of agriculture driven by industrialization and technological development has rapidly changed the socio-economic structures of American farms from small-scale farming to large-scale industrial farming that subjugates farmers and land to the logic of the capitalist economy.9 Given the economies of scale in agricultural production, monoculture that focuses exclusively on single crops as products of, and raw materials for, industrial production of food, fuels, plastics, and so forth has emerged as a more efficient, profitable method than a traditional farming practice that combines crop diversity and rotations as a means to reduce soil erosion and control pest populations. In his study of the ecological and cultural crisis of American farming, Wendell Berry describes the concentration of

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9 After World War II, industrial agriculture based on monoculture was hailed as the most productive way to feed the world’s expanding population with limited land and a small number of farmers. However, in order to sustain monocultural practice, farmers were pushed to purchase massive amounts of industrial chemicals and equipment from the agricultural industry and as a consequence they were saddled with heavy burdens of debt, often mortgaging their land. In response to the impending crisis of indebtedness and foreclosure among family farmers, Earl Butz, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture under the Nixon and Ford administrations, stated in 1955: “Adapt or Die; resist and perish…Agriculture is now new business. Too many people are trying to stay in agriculture that would do better someplace else” (qtd. in Kloppenburg 136). As seen in Butz’s words, U.S. government substantially changed farm policy to support the system of industrial agriculture, rather than traditional small scale agriculture, and encouraged large-scale importation of food crops and free trade to meet the rising global demand for “cheap” American food. For detailed information regarding the U.S. government’s farm policy and its impact on farmers and consumers during 1970s, see Jack Kloppenburg’s First the Seeds: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology, 1492-2000 (1988).
monoculture as an extension of U.S. agricultural policy that reads food as a weapon and a global commodity. Critiquing former USDA official Richard E. Bell’s notion that “U.S. agripower is a major force in the world’s exchange of foods and services,” Berry explains, this concept is “not measured by the fertility or health of the soil, or the health, wisdom, or stewardship of the farming community. It is measured by its ability to produce a marketable surplus, which generates ‘agidollars.’ It is to be measured by ‘productivity, combined with processing and marketing efficiency’” (35). Berry’s analysis indicates that the industrialization of agriculture primarily stems from American hegemony that promotes and reinforces food abundance as an act of patriotism, one that contributes to the growth of U.S. national power during the Cold War by supporting the country’s economy through food production and consumption of agricultural products. However, this logic of U.S. food power, strongly espoused by the claim “America feeds the world,” cannot be sustained without the excessive use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and herbicides, and exploitation of land through monoculture. In this context, Ozeki’s novel dissects how the idea that views food as a commodity not only reifies social relations between farmers and land, but also negatively affects the life and health of farming communities and the biodiversity of the planet as a whole.

Riding a biodiesel vehicle called the Spudnik (its comical name evokes both people who are obsessed with potatoes and the first artificial Earth satellite “Sputnik”)10, the Seeds of

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10 Ozeki’s use of the word Spudnik for the name of the Seeds of Resistance’s vehicle is significant for a number of reasons. On the one hand, it adds comical tone and humor to radical environmentalism, which has long been viewed as activities related to eco-centric fundamentalism, so that the general audience feels more approachable about and engaged with an environmental protest movement than its previous fundamentalist image. On the other hand, it highlights the changing relationship between humans and the earth at the time of human intervention in ecosystems as the launching of the Sputnik in 1957 once foretold the arrival of the new age that could free humans from their imprisonment on the earth by opening outer space for scientific discoveries and advancements. For the positive function of comedy as a tool to increase humans and the earth’s resilience against the exploitation of human civilization, see Joseph Meeker’s *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic* (1997). For
Resistance, an anti-GMO environmental activist group, has stopped in Ashtabula, Ohio before they travel to Liberty Falls to meet the Fullers. The MIT dropout and environmental activist Geek explains the main focus of the Seeds’s activities to Frank, a naïve teenage janitor at McDonalds who later joins the group and turns into an eco-activist: “We target a range of food-related issues. Right now it’s genetic engineering. We drive around the country to communities and engage with the people and do actions. Basic biotech. Consciousness Raising 101…. Robocrops. Frankenfoods. Fish genes spliced into tomatoes. Bacterial DNA into potatoes” (*All Over Creation* 52-53). Misunderstanding the Seeds’s activities at first, Frank exclaims his surprise at the varieties of food biotechnology (“Cool! You do all that stuff right in here?”) that sound innovative and cutting edge before Geek corrects him, “No, Frank … We’re *against* that” (53). Through the portrayal of a character like Frank who seems to be ignorant about GM foods and their potential risks, the text indicates that consumers today are unaware of the current status of food biotechnology and discloses their distance from their food production, distribution, and cultures.

As the plot of *All Over Creation* proceeds, the significance of consumer consciousness is mentioned several times. The Seeds of Resistance’s spectacular protest at Thrifty Foods is one of good examples that shows how consumer ignorance is meticulously cultivated through the food chain, ranging from biotech companies and the government to supermarkets and grocery stores. While foregrounding the question of how to transform one’s perception of food production, the group’s environmental activities link up to the production of consumer ignorance in information regarding the complex relationship between humans and scientific inquiry in an age of progressive modernization, see Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1958).

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11 It is worth noting that there is no strong scientific consensus on the safety or danger of GMOs. According to the recent essay appeared in *Gene & Nutrition*, scientists have shown two different perspectives (Pro-GMOS versus Anti-GMOS) on the introduction of GM foods and its possible benefits and risks. Regarding the contested GM foods debate within scientific community, see Buiatti, Christou, and Pastore.
contemporary America, which occupies the central part of *All Over Creation*. As a means of raising consumers’ consciousness on GM foods, the Seeds of Resistance stages an environmental protest at the supermarket that mixes theatrical performance, consumerism, and public education.

When they enter the store, Y, a former psychiatric nurse and a member of the group whose moniker sounds like “Why,” begins to problematize the presence of GM foods in the supermarket aisles, speaking loudly, “Those potatoes, do you know if they are genetically engineered?”

Y turned toward the fit young mother behind him. “Maybe you could tell me,” he said, looking apologetic but still very concerned. “Do you happen to know if these are genetically engineered?”

The woman shook her head. “No, I’m sorry. I don’t know—”

Y nodded. “That’s the problem, isn’t it?” He held out his finger to the infant in the shopping cart, making her dribble and coo. “We don’t know because they don’t tell us! They’re genetically engineering poisons into potatoes these days. But they refuse to label it, so how are you supposed to know what you’re feeding your baby?” (89)

In linking motherhood and GM foods that a baby eats without her mother’s knowledge, this passage signifies that critical consumption is pivotal to prevent children from the possible dangers of environmental illness. When Y raises a question, “Do you happen to know they are genetically engineered?”, the surprised young mother’s response (“I don’t know—”) leads to the real problem that biotech corporations “refuse to label it” though “They’re genetically engineering poisons into potatoes these days.” Throughout, the Seeds’s anti-GMO activism revolves around the Monsanto like biotech company Cynaco’s NuLife® potato, which has been

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12 Throughout the novel, Ozeki’s play with a name demonstrates her fluid understanding of language that resists to be confined within certain social and cultural categories. For example, when Lloyd first meets Yumi’s three mixed children, he seems to be puzzled by their unconventional names. The narrator describes: “‘This is Phoenix. And this is Ocean. This is Barnabas, but we call him Poo.’ He studies their hair, their complexions. Comparing. ‘Say hi to your grandpa, kids.’ He said gruffly, ‘What kind of names are those?’ ‘What do you mean, Dad? Knowing full well what he was getting at, of course. ‘What kind of children have names like that?’” (73). While conservative Christian farmer Lloyd feels somewhat uncomfortable about nonhuman names given to Yumi’s children, as seen from his reaction like “That’s not a proper name. An ocean is a thing, not a person,” Ozeki has tried to transgress the borders between nature and culture by revealing the arbitrary boundaries of humans and other species through language.
newly introduced into the market as a solution for unsustainable agricultural practices that rely heavily on chemical pesticides. If industrial agriculture caused unexpected environmental consequences such as pollution and toxicity, Cynaco emphasizes that its NuLife® potato, a culmination of the industry’s cutting edge bioscience, is an environmentally friendly and safe product because the potato is designed to include “the DNA of a bacterial toxin spliced into its genes,” which “is effective against the Colorado potato beetle” (184). As a result, farmers no longer need to spray pesticides to kill insects and to expose themselves to health threats posed by toxic chemicals and soil and water pollution in the fields. However, contrary to the company’s promise, this seemingly miraculous biotechnology might pose new dangers when we consider the fact that “the NuLife® has never been poison-tested by the EPA” (184). While the supermarket has emerged as a “non-place,” in Marc Augé’s term, in modern America where many consumers nowadays hardly interact with each other, despite its cultural metaphor as an open space, and separate from the environmental and social histories of goods they purchase under the influence of commodity fetishism, the Seeds of Resistance reminds readers/consumers that what we buy at the store has life and a story beyond the marketplace.13 That is, the supermarket is a site of reading our contemporary culture and environmental history. As Y’s attempt to reveal the vulnerability of the baby in the shopping cart to food insecurity generated by GMOs shows, All Over Creation critiques the reification of social relations through commodities and thus turns readers’ attention to consumer economy and the complexity of food science that designs and produces food not from land but from the lab of biotech company.

13 French anthropologist Marc Augé defines the “non-place” as follows: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity 77-78).
To alleviate this kind of tension and anxiety surrounding GMOs, Monsanto has recently begun to create a new image of the corporation as “a sustainable agriculture company” that “focuse[s] on empowering farmers around the world” by helping them “produce more from their land while conserving more of our world’s natural resources such as water and energy” (“Monsanto at a Glance”). One image for Monsanto’s mission of promoting sustainable agriculture globally, displayed on the wall of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, shows a smiling white boy holding the American flag overlapped with the landscape of mechanized farm fields (Figure 4-3). On the top-right-corner of the image, there is a caption that reads as follows: “Every star-spangled banner begins with a farmer.” Resonant with notions of U.S. agripower from the 1970s, the advertisement highlights two interesting, new characteristics. First, Monsanto is an eco-friendly company that cares about the environment and the health of children as opposed to environmentalists’ criticism that questions the safety of the company’s agricultural products and their unforeseeable environmental impacts. Second, the company’s new technology helps farmers grow more food with less land and energy so as to run their farms more efficiently and economically in the course of strengthening the U.S. national economy.

However, All Over Creation counters the myth of American progress that derives from plant biotechnology and crop protection chemicals by unearthing the ways in which environmental discourse is constantly shaped and manipulated by so-called “experts.” It is here that Ozeki evokes what historian of science Robert Proctor calls “agnotology.” While critiquing the deliberate production of ignorance that underlies social, political, and ecological issues in the contemporary world, such as the tobacco industry’s efforts to cast doubt on the health effects of smoking and the George W. Bush administration’s and global capital’s denial of climate change, Proctor defines the term agnotology as “the study of ignorance making, the lost and forgotten.
One focus is on knowledge that could have been but wasn’t’, or should be but isn’t, but we shall also see that not all ignorance is bad” (vii). If the traditional study of humanistic inquiry and scientific knowledge building has been focused on “epistemology (the study of how we know)” (vii), agnotology instead “question[s] the naturalness of ignorance, its causes and its distribution” so as to understand ignorance as “an active production” (3, 9). Emphasizing the need to carefully scrutinize “the deliberate production of ignorance in the form of strategies to deceive,” he further analyzes that “certain people don’t want you to know certain things, or will work to organize doubt or uncertainty or misinformation to help maintain (your) ignorance … Ignorance can be an actively engineered part of a deliberate plan” (8-9). For Proctor, ignorance is not a mere absence of knowledge, it is rather a living example of cultural production that works to naturalize the status of “not-knowing” and social and ecological unconsciousness. Ozeki’s novel shares
Proctor’s notion that ignorance is a socially constructed concept in relation to corporate interests and political propaganda by uncovering how a biotechnology corporation like Cynaco has developed the strategies that yield culturally-induced ignorance regarding GMOs.

If Y’s speech raises questions about the current practice that continues to sell unlabeled GM foods to consumers, Geek’s comic performance as Mr. Potato Head demonstrates a wide range of GMOs on supermarket shelves and explains why knowing the issues, as a small step of protest against an unjust food production system, is critical to safeguard children from possible health risks. Through Mr. Potato Head, who is “a sweet, sporty potato, friendly and dapper” with “a green leisure suit and a Santa Claus hat” (*All Over Creation* 90), the Seeds traverses the boundaries between play and activism and between personal and public. While drawing attention from shoppers at the Thrifty Foods by doing dance and magic for kids, Mr. Potato Head begins to describe the current status of GM foods in the market: “genetic engineering is no joke, not when it comes to the food you feed your children…. Approximately sixty to seventy percent of processed foods now contain some form of genetically modified corn or soy. That means infant formulas, baby foods, pizza, soda, chips….” (92). Mr. Potato Head continues, “The big corporations have introduced genetically modified food into your supermarkets and therefore into your bodies, without your knowledge or consent. There’s been no long-term testing of their safety, but the government doesn’t make them put warning labels on these foods … Without labels, you don’t even know what you are buying and feeding your family! … It is a violation of your consumer’s right to know!” (93). Mr. Potato Head synthesizes the elements of street

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14 See Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957). Packard argues that the marketing industry in contemporary America has sought to “channel our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions, and our thought processes by the use of insights gleaned from psychiatry and the social sciences.” He goes on to contend that “Typically these efforts take place beneath level of awareness; so that the appeals which move us are often, in a sense, ‘hidden.’ The result is that many of us are being influenced and manipulated, far more than we realize, in the patterns of our everyday lives” (31).
performance and public education in order to familiarize the citizens with the GMO issues and heighten the need to know their citizen-consumers’ rights. The familiarization of GM foods controversies helps consumers realize that “Your children are at risk! Their futures—the future of life itself!” (93); it also advances consumer consciousness and actualizes their voluntary participation in the environmental justice movement without necessarily using violent means of protest like those of the radical environmentalist group *Earth First!* and the dam sabotage depicted in Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975).

As we have observed, if the supermarket scene exposes the willful construction of ignorance in food consumption, the Seeds of Resistance’s adventure in Liberty Falls illustrates another form of ignorance produced in the farming community surrounding its seemingly “sustainable” farming practices that employ GM crops. Just as a band of the eco-activists has landed in Liberty Falls, Yumi returns to her childhood home with her three children to look after Lloyd and Momoko. Inspired by the Fullers’ philosophy in their seed business and their profound concern for all life, the Seeds wants to gain the wisdom and knowledge of these “prophets of the Revolution!” (140) while fighting against Cynaco’s attempt to colonize vast farm fields in Idaho with GM potatoes. However, the group’s ecopolitical commitment soon encounters the challenge that generates doubt and uncertainty about the *real* harmful effects of GMOs and thereby rationalizes farmers’ inaction. For those farmers, who are “cash poor” and whose “whole lives tied up in their land and one season’s harvest,” it seems impossible to “try something new” because “[m]argins are tight” and there is “[n]ot a whole lot of room for error” (146). Through the story of the Seeds’s anti-GMO protest, the text reintroduces Elliot, the teacher who impregnated and abandoned the teenaged Yumi. He also comes back to Liberty Falls as a representative of public relations firm Duncan & Wiley in order to establish “a
proactive management strategy geared toward Cynaco’s NuLife Potato line” (84). Just like Monsanto’s sustainable agriculture advertisement, Elliot visualizes the plan that employs a local Indian tribe suffering from the pollution of groundwater caused by toxic agricultural pesticides and stages “a Shoshone spokesperson to endorse the NuLife—fewer pesticides mean clean water for our people” (188). By interweaving Cynaco’s NuLife potato with positive images of American Indians, such as “Wisdom” and “Heritage” and, of course, environmentalism and stewardship, Elliot thinks about the possibility of providing a new image for his troubled corporate client. Yet Elliot’s PR plan, similar to Edward’s colonial photography in Silko’s text, highlights a paradox of the capitalist economy: the reification of the image of the Indian as a racial stereotype and a commodity. Crucially, All Over Creation indicates that the spread of

15 For example, consider the following scene: “‘Duncan & Wiley,’ Geek said. ‘PR firm that spins for Cynaco. They specialize in damage control and crisis management, only they call it ‘solution imaging’ and ‘media intervention’ and ‘constituency building.’ Obfuscating crap. These days it’s all about building fake grassroots organizations as fronts for the corporations and participating in stuff like this Potato Promotions Council. They’ve spun for everyone from big tobacco to the petrochemical conglomerates, and now it’s the gene giants. Basically they suck” (All Over Creation 179).

16 In 1971, the nonprofit organization Keep America Beautiful aired the now famous the “Crying Indian” commercial, which featured actor Iron Eyed Cody who often performed as an American Indian in numerous Hollywood films. Through the image of an American Indian man shattered to witness the destruction of the environment, this campaign sought to promote community engagement and to prevent people from littering. However, unlike its seemingly positive message of community beautification, this campaign has been criticized by both environmentalists and indigenous peoples, because it tries to divert the industry’s responsibility (the manufacturer of disposable products) to the consumer (the user of these products) on the hand, and uses the stereotype of the American Indian as an instinctive environmentalist on the other. Moreover, Iron Eyed Cody was not a descendent of indigenous people, but revealed later that he was actually an Italian American. In this sense, we can read Keep America Beautiful’s the “Crying Indian” campaign in the early 70s as a precedent of Elliot’s greenwash PR plan in the novel.

17 The stereotypes of Native peoples and their cultures in media and popular culture have long been criticized by many American Indian and indigenous studies scholars and activists because these images derived from racial stereotyping tend to negatively affect the general audience’s understanding of Indian people and might cause more violence and hate crime against the Indian community compared to people of other races. For example, the recent controversy over Indian sports mascots and team names clearly shows how the reification of the Indian image driven primarily by the sports industry has brought numerous psychological, social, and cultural problems throughout Indian communities while assisting the growth of the industry as a multi-million dollar making business. Although Elliot in Ruth Ozeki’s All Over Creation does not rely on the “negative” images of Indians (e.g. ruthless warriors, uncivilized primitives) like many sports brands, his plan to use the “positive” images of Indians (e.g. as possessors of ancient wisdom) is fundamentally similar to the mechanisms of mainstream American culture and capitalist economy that have accepted race-based marketing practices.
GMOs in our food chain is not only limited to a biotech company (the creator of GM foods), but also extends to the PR industry, which attempts to reduce the conflicts between corporations and consumers by controlling public relations through the strategic plans that seek to create a “positive” image for their corporate clients. Rather than believing public relations spin, Ozeki suggests that it is critical to raise questions about the world we live in and considers the possibility that people are dangerously uninformed about the possible detrimental effects of genetic engineering when only exposed to disinformation. The novel thus confirms that risk perception, as Ulrich Beck has noted, is “a socially constructed phenomenon, in which some people have a greater capacity to define risks than others” (“Living in the World Risk Society” 333).18

The novel makes palpable, moreover, the manufactured ignorance of the pro-GMO industries, whose irresponsible deployment of scientific expertise and public relations spin rely upon ideas of American progress and global capitalism and how this kinds of ignorance may leave many people misinformed and thus possibly endangered. Upon arriving in Pocatello, Elliot prepares his speech at the Potato Promotions Council to persuade many farmers in the region and expound why they need “D&W’s crisis-management services” (181) to handle the recent controversy over GM potatoes. The promotion material created by him describes anti-GMO environmental activists like the Seeds as “pests”: “Political Activists or Just Plain Old Pests? Whatever you call them, their politics are familiar: anticorporate, antigovernment, antiglobalization. And most offensive of all, anti-American. These so-called radical

18 Ulrich Beck provides a compelling account of the management of risks in the world of globalization: “The inequalities of definition enable powerful actors to maximize risks for ‘others’ and minimize risks for ‘themselves.’ Risk definition, essentially, is a power game. This is especially true for world risk society where Western governments or powerful economic actors define risks for others” (“Living in the World Risk Society” 333). Similarly, Ozeki’s novel represents that the risks of food security are controlled by global agribusiness and experts and further examines how these risks are differently distributed to people around the world depending on their race, gender, and social and economic status.
environmentalists represent the latest fad in the protest movement that traces its roots to the sixties. And, like their progenitors in the political proscenium, the target of their opposition is progress” (165). “Anti-,” repeated four times, reveals the unwelcome presence of environmental activism as it rejects the injustice of the contemporary economy that has been inextricably linked with “corporate,” “government,” and “globalization.” During the Cold War, environmental activists were harshly attacked and often accused by the government and corporations as socialists because they refused the notion of American progress and prowess, which prioritizes the rapid growth of capitalist economy at the expense of the environment and human health. In mainstream America’s view, these environmentalists seemed disruptive and harmful, especially when the U.S. was in conflict with the country’s fierce enemy the Soviet Union. “Pests” and radical environmentalists, “anti-American” and communist: this dyad is the basis of anti-environmental rhetoric, and it provides a template for the “merchants of doubt (to use Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway’s term) at Cynaco and D&W constitute. Analyzing the tobacco industry’s willful construction of ignorance in the 1970s, Oreskes and Conway have argued that one of the most common cultural beliefs that science is always value-free and based on concrete, sufficient evidence needs to be revised given the “crucial role that scientists played in sowing doubt about the links between smoking and health risks” (6). And in the hands of the unscrupulous, even well-constructed scientific information can be used as a tool to deceive the general public. An example of this is the use of the scientific emphasis on verifiability to argue for the uncertainty of, among other things, the harmful effects of GMOs. Its effect is to establish inaction among farmers and consumers where precautionary action may be necessary. Later in All Over Creation, Will and Geek’s debates over monoculture vividly illustrates this point:

“It’s the problem with the system,” Geek said. “Monoculture is weak. You should know that. You’re Irish.”
“If you’re talking about the Famine, it was caused by late blight. You’re confusing blight with beetles. Monoculture is efficient. We got six billion humans on the earth, and a lot of them are starving.”

“Oh, right,” Geek said. “That’s just corporate marketing. The masses aren’t starving because there isn’t enough food. There’s a surplus—you know that! People are starving because that food isn’t being distributed fairly, to those in need. The population explosion argument is the oldest spin in the books!” (272)

Interweaving the Irish potato famine and the weakness of monoculture, Geek contends that the current agricultural practices in Idaho concentrated on the Russet Burbank are problematic in terms of ecological sustainability and its resilience to pests and diseases. As opposed to Geek’s claim, Will defends the benefits of cultivating GM crops that enable farmers to continue monoculture without the excessive uses of toxic pesticides, saying, “We got six billion humans on the earth, and a lot of them are starving.” Akin to Proctor’s and Oreskes and Conway’s notion of the deliberate production of ignorance by the varying industries, Geek asserts that “That’s just corporate marketing” and he further expounds that the main cause for world hunger does not lie in insufficient food production, as the agriculture industry argues, but rather it stems from the uneven distribution of food and access across the globe.

In his 2011 *Foreign Policy* essay titled “The New Geopolitics of Food,” Lester Brown elaborates on a new form of food nationalism, which has recently emerged around the world due to population growth, the increasing desire for better food among the middle-class in developing countries, and the shortage of food production related to climate change. Analyzing how some countries like Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and China, whose food supplies largely depend on importation, have tried to ensure their countries’ food security by arranging secret trade agreements in crops with poor countries in Africa where many people are still starving and are supported through the UN World Food program, Brown observes: “Food nationalism may help secure food supplies for individual affluent countries, but it does little to enhance world food
security. Indeed, the low-income countries that host land grabs or import grain will likely see their food situation deteriorate.” Though Brown’s analysis provides a critical context for the geopolitics of food in the twenty-first century, we must also consider the impact of U.S. agripower, which has profoundly shaped today’s global food economy since the Second World War. Simply put, his approach seems to be North America-centered by not fully addressing the specificities of local situations when examining the issue of the global food security.¹⁹ Contrary to Brown’s claim that food scarcity is directly related to continuing population growth, Ozeki’s character Geek emphasizes, if world hunger derives from environmental and economic injustice, then “[t]he population explosion argument is the oldest spin in the books!”²⁰

In explicating the complexity surrounding GMOs, All Over Creation reveals the links between environmental illness and the military-industrial complex in the contemporary era.²¹

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¹⁹ For example, in the case of South Korea, the U.S. and Korean governments signed the FTA (Free Trade Agreement) in December 2010, which allows the U.S. agricultural industry to export their products without tariffs, particularly beefs, and further reinforces Korea’s dependence on U.S. food economy. As the White House report states, “The United States is already Korea’s top supplier of agriculture products … The U.S.-Korea trade agreement creates new opportunities for U.S. farmers, ranchers and food processors seeking to export Korea’s 49 million consumers, giving American agricultural producers more market access” (“The U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement” 2). Despite many Korean farmers’ and environmental activists’ protest against this unfair food trade, the Korean government implemented the US-Korea trade agreement in order to export more automobiles and high-tech products like a TV, computer, and cell-phone to the U.S. market. For more information on the negative impacts of the FTA on Korean agriculture, see The Korea Times’s news article, “Cattle Farmers in Existential Crisis.”

²⁰ For information regarding a neo-Malthusian theory on population and the environment, see also Paul Ehrlich’s The Population Bomb (1968).

²¹ During the Vietnam War, Agent Orange primarily manufactured by Monsanto and Dow Chemical was widely used by U.S. military in order to deforest the jungles where Vietnamese communist soldiers were hiding and to destroy crops that the enemy might use for subsistence. As a consequence, the large portion of the Vietnam ecosystem was ruined and it has left a serious ecological and health impact on Vietnamese peoples’ lives. In the text, Will describes this historical reality as follows: “In Vietnam, the government said spray and we sprayed. Never gave it another thought. Now I got this numbness in my arms that the doc says may be Agent Orange, only he can’t tell for sure because of the exposure factor on the farm. It bugs me. Cynaco made Agent Orange for the army. They make GroundUp and now the NuLifes, too” (All Over Creation 219). Not only U.S. and Korean soldiers who participated in this military work of spraying Agent Orange to rainforests like Will, but also many Vietnamese are now suffering from cancer and other illnesses related to Agent Orange. However, Monsanto and Dow Chemical denied their defoliant’s link to health problems of the Vietnam War Veterans and the people of the Vietnam. Though U.S. veterans were later able to reach a settlement with Monsanto outside of court, those people (Korean soldiers and Vietnamese) who reside outside U.S. territory have been largely excluded from the benefits of the environmental illness compensation program. This situation reveals how environmental risks have been inequitably
According to Molly Wallace, “discomfort,” the fundamental emotion that structures Ozeki’s novel, helps account for Will’s uneasy feeling about the potential risks of GMOs because he knows that “Cynaco made Agent Orange for the Army. They made GroundUp and now the NuLifes, too” (219) and, therefore, he seems uncertain about the safety of GM foods. Making analogies between Will’s doubt and “a root rot,” she analyzes that “Ozeki describes the ominous feeling of uncertainty that accompanies his choice to plant these ‘novel’ foods” (172). Certainly, Wallace’s premise that analogy can be a useful tool to “conceptualiz[e] genetically modified food” and “understand the ‘unknown’” (176) is convincing and highlights the importance of literary and cultural studies in approaching complex scientific and political issues where science and politics are not clearly distinct from each other. However, this analysis that focuses on “knowing,” rather than “ignorance,” does not fully explain why Will’s doubt over the GMOs (the lack of information) is unable to stop him from cultivating these “unknown” crops. In other words, knowing itself does not guarantee action. As Geek reminds us, it is not only about an individual’s understanding of the issue, but also about “the problem with the system.” *All Over Creation* thus problematizes the reification of scientific knowledge that produces uncertainty and distributed, even among victims of environmental illness, depending on their *citizenship*. For more information regarding the invention of Agent Orange and its impact on both people and the environment, see David Zierler’s *The Invention of Ecocide: Agent Orange, Vietnam, and the Scientists Who Changed the Way We Think about the Environment* (2011).

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22 It is well-known that Monsanto tried to silence growing public concern over the health effects of pesticides they manufactured like DDT when Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) was first published. Following the release of Carson’s book, Monsanto published an article entitled “The Desolate Year,” a parody of “A Fable of Tomorrow” in the opening section of her book, in October 1962. This essay begins with the following remark: “Does the world really need chemical pesticides? Are these compounds (used to control insects, rodents, weeds, parasites and plant disease) better left alone? Is the public being sold a monstrous ‘bill of goods’? The answers to those questions could be learned with finality by seeing what would happen if pesticides were not available. Imagine, then, that by some incomprehensible turn of circumstances, the United States were to go through a single year completely without pesticides. It is under that license that we take a hard look at that desolate year, examining in some detail its devastations” (4). Just as this example clearly shows, Monsanto worked to cover up the health risks associated with their products including the herbicide RoundUp and asbestos by strategically using PR spin and attacking their critics both publicly and legally. See Carson and Monsanto Magazine respectively.
doubt about the possible risks of bioengineering, and simultaneously questions the uncritical thinking that justifies farmers and consumers’ inaction based on the presumption that, according to scientific research, it has not yet been proven harmful.

**Cultivating Hope: Alternative Food Systems, Biodiversity, and the Digital Garden**

Showing the problematic aspects of the production and circulation of GMOs in our food chain, *All Over Creation* critiques the idea of techno-scientific progress that runs through Western culture and civilization. In observing the conflict between techno-utopianism and techno-dystopianism that animates in the tradition of American environmentalism, Heise writes:

> Ecocriticism’s engagement with modernization has been partly shaped by environmentalists’ ambivalence toward scientific inquiry. On the one hand, science is viewed as a root cause of environmental deterioration, both in that it has cast nature as an object to be analyzed and manipulated and in that it has provided the means of exploiting nature more radically than was possible by pre-modern means. On the other hand, environmentalists are aware that the social legitimation of environmental politics and their own insights into the state of nature centrally depend on science. In ecocriticism, this ambivalence has translated into divergent perceptions of how the sciences should inform cultural inquiry. (“The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Ecocriticism” 509)

As Heise’s words indicate, understanding the relationship between environmentalism and science has been a controversial topic that has provoked debates about the role of modern science and technology in achieving environmental and social justice. Given that Ozeki describes biotechnology such as GM foods as a tool that serves the needs of neoliberal capitalism by enabling more efficient manipulation and exploitation of nature, it is tempting to assume that Ozeki belongs to the genealogy of environmental writers who are skeptical about techno-scientific progress. However, it is crucial to recognize that what Ozeki criticizes in the novel is not science itself, but rather it is about how we use science.

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23 For instance, Anahita Rouyan reads the Seeds’ environmentalism as “an anthropocentric fantasy” because it relies on “ecological utopianism, which endorses the strict boundary between what is considered human and natural, or nonhuman” (155). Though it is true that the Seeds’s utopianism is, to some extent, “rooted in the Western pastoral
Technologies generate both hope and anxiety. Just as her previous novel *My Year of Meats* explores the new possibilities of global solidarity through media, which are also used to spread the ideologies of global capital and the U.S. meat industry around the world, *All Over Creation* envisions alternative food systems that work to empower local communities and sustainable small-scale farming through new technologies such as digital networks. The critique of technological progress, for Ozeki, does not mean that we should abandon its use entirely and return to the status of pre-modern agrarianism before the arrival of industrial technologies.

According to environmental historian William Cronon, idealizing wilderness as “our real home,” which has been a tendency among deep ecologists and radical environmentalists, is problematic, even risky, because it leaves out cities and urban areas where we actually live on the one hand, and it “tends to cast any use as ab-use, and thereby denies us a middle ground in which responsible use and non-use might attain some kind of balanced, sustainable relationship” on the other (81, 85). In contrast to this concept of wilderness that constantly posits a distance between nature and culture, urban and rural, and human society and the non-human world, Ozeki instead foregrounds the garden concept that has blurred the categories of science, environmentalism, social practice, political activism, and public education, and destabilizes “the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles” (81). In this last section, building on Heise’s insights and Cronon’s notion of “the middle ground,” I offer several close readings of the second half of *All Over Creation* to examine how Ozeki employs the garden not only as a literary metaphor that represents the American pastoral ideal, but also as a site for synthesizing science, art, and

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As I will argue later in this section, drawing a clear line between ecological utopianism and technological utopianism may limit us to see the possibility to utilize modern technology in building a real-life ecological utopia.
environmental activism in order to create more just, socially engaged food cultures in the twenty-first century.

When Momoko begins her seed business based on a five-acre home garden in Fuller Farms, Lloyd initially considers her work frivolous and feels a bit uneasy about the diversity of plants she cultivates. In Lloyd’s view, Momoko’s garden seems to be a “confusion of flowers, fruits, and vegetables” (111). Images of various plants growing in her garden—an “extravagance of blooms, in sizes and colors and shapes,” “vegetables whose names he did not know,” “fruits with strange pips” (111)—clash against his ideal picture of the farm that is neatly aligned with monoculture, large-scale potato farming. If Lloyd’s farm reflects the Apollonian desire to control nature and make it orderly, following what he dubs “seasonable cultural practices” (6), Momoko’s garden, by contrast, shows the Dionysian impulse that celebrates plants diversity and positively affirms its disorderly orders.

Indeed, the second half of All Over Creation explores different models of alternative food systems, the decentralization of food production in global food economy, through Momoko’s open-pollinated heirloom seeds. The novel frames her seed business as a channel that carries cultural memories of people from different continents as well as various seeds naturally grown in land; at the same time, we learn that her garden has become the critical site of preserving biodiversity. As a declining old farmer, who struggles both from his farm debt and his illness, Lloyd starts to look at Momoko’s garden differently and he soon finds that her main objective of gardening is the farming of seeds. One important scene follows: “She tended her plants, allowing them to ripen, to flower and die—and only then did she get down to business: shaking seeds from their brittle pockets or teasing them wet from their flesh, drying them and sorting them, measuring and labeling them, and slipping them into envelops for dissemination by
the U.S. Postal Service to destinations around the world” (113). Through her seed business, Momoko not only preserves and disseminates seeds that “tell the story of migrations and drifts,” but also continues to make “a set of connections and friendships” with her customers (171, 114). In reading her heartwarming correspondence with the customers, Lloyd is surprised to learn that there is “a whole world, about which he’d known little or nothing” during their thirty-five years of marriage (114). Carefully tended, Momoko’s garden, both real and emotional, renders Lloyd’s world radically strange, but this strangeness in fact provides him with a window onto a new world of love and connections that he has always longed for. As Robert Pogue Harrison puts it, the garden serves as a site of “conversation, dialogue, friendship, storytelling—in short, communalization” (45).

The novel’s plot further traces the relationship between gardening and community gathering in a series of events that take place in Fuller farms. For example, the Idaho Potato Party organized by the Seeds on the Fourth of July clearly demonstrates this idea of communalization. As an effort to “educate people about genetically engineered crops,” the Seeds plans the Idaho Potato Party, an environmental protest that is resonant with the spirit of the Boston Tea Party in the late eighteenth century (“No taxation without representation”) in that they are opposed to “genetic engineering without our consent” (All Over Creation 273, 265). Invoking the Woodstock Music & Art fair in the sixties, held on a dairy farm in New York, this event gathers “over 400 people” together, including “customers of the Fullers, comrades of the Seeds, and citizens and supporters from neighboring cities and towns,” and provides a new model of environmental activism that mixes art, public education, political protest, and community organizing (287). The Seeds’s project that rewrites the definition of
radical environmentalism in the twenty-first century becomes more apparent in the next passage, which outlines a wide variety of community-based environmentalism:

By noon the rally was in full swing. There were information tables set up all around the perimeter of the farmyard where you could learn about worm composting and gene splicing, and the secret to effective protest letters and the ethics of patenting life, the latest in biotech research and European boycotts of American GMOs.

There were workshops, too. “A New Niche Market—Unprecedented Profits in Organic Potatoes” had attracted a few of the local farmers’ wives. Others were taking garden tours with Momoko and Lloyd and learning their seed-saving techniques. Charmey was offering “The Art of the Sprout,” a cooking workshop using sprouted seeds. At three there would be a performance of The Tragedy of Cynaco the Evil Cyclops: A Morality Play in Three Acts…. Frankie was making seed bombs at the “Guerrilla Gardening” workshop when Geek caught up with him. They were planning to bomb the chemical fertilizer plant just outside of Pocatello at the protest march the next day. Geek watched as Frankie spooned some Showy Larkspur seeds in the middle of his large mud pie. (291)

This passage illustrates how the grassroots local food movement has the potential to utilize alternative food systems and distribution that operate independently from the industrialized food system and can contribute to changing our food cultures in a more sustainable way. During the 1960s and 1970s, hippies and radical environmentalists found the farm to be an ideal model for alternative ways of life, which resisted material progress and cultural conformity, because it brought back the spirit of early American agrarians such as J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur and Thomas Jefferson when citizens were also farmers, not mere consumers, and lived on the land self-sufficiently, instead of exploiting nature and humans in the name of modernization (Figure 4-4). Whereas the development of modern environmentalism has been tied to the white upper-middle class’s wilderness fetish, as Cronon observes, and tends to ignore so many inequalities related to rural poverty, natural resources access, hunger and food safety, the Seeds attempt to help people reimagine nature in cities and see the connection between the urban environment and food justice through their participation in the Idaho Potato Party. With this objective, their activities in the text are not only limited to political organizing, but grow increasingly as a sort of
play and social gathering that encourage people to become more engaged in a public debate about the politics of food, rather than remain in the status of apathy, and thus advance them to take an active role in environmental justice movement. By revitalizing the local food system, through an environmental education event like the Idaho Potato Party, the Seeds believe that they can reunite people and land once again and “kee[p] information and energy flowing” like “a seed bomb” (257). The novel thus focalizes “vegetative anarchy” that is geared toward public perceptions and attitudes about food and agriculture in the minds of citizen-consumers.

Along with a series of hands-on learning at Fuller Farms, Lloyd’s speech at the Idaho Potato Party highlights the problems of the current food system that allows corporations to privatize the commons in such things as seeds. Criticizing new agricultural biotechnology called
“the Terminator,” which designs a plant’s DNA to destroy a seed’s own embryos to prevent farmers from seed saving, Lloyd raises questions about the ownership of life and human intervention in ecosystems: “Corporations have words to make this sacrilege sound legitimate. They call it a ‘Technology Protection System.’ They claim it is necessary to protect their ‘investments,’ their ‘intellectual property rights,’ and their novel seed patents …. Mrs. Fuller and I say this: God holds the only patent! He is the Engineer Supreme! And He has given up His seeds into the public domain!” (302). The Christian farmer Lloyd’s speech here echoes Pollan’s assertion that bioengineering is not only potentially threatening biodiversity and human health, but it also puts our human rights and freedom in great danger because this technology that grants the biological patent of seeds will "allow corporations like Monsanto to privatize one of the last great commons in nature—the genetics of the crop plants that civilization has developed over the past 10,000 years" (“Playing God in the Garden”). The act of seed saving, which signifies a dynamic interaction with nature throughout the history of human civilization, no longer remains in the hands of farmers but has been transferred to scientists in the biotech laboratory. Since U.S. Congress passed the Plant Patent Act in 1930, plant breeders and seed companies have become eligible to claim their intellectual property rights over a new variety of plants, yet this new law gives American agribusiness an opportunity to privatize the commons and enforces the systems of U.S. capitalist agriculture globally—even among very poor and subsistence farmers. Just as “sterile seeds” in the text embody futureless life, Ozeki pairs this metaphor with the futures of food and life on the planet that are both controlled by the logic of neoliberal capitalism, so that readers realize that the great risk of GMOs lies in, more than anything else, uneven access to the biological commons.24 If “You are what you eat,” as the famous food dictum says, the novel

24 Rob Nixon offers a succinct explanation of this politics of the futureless future: “That said, neoliberalism’s Achilles’ heel is the crisis of futurity, as Mary Louise Pratt has noted. If access to resources becomes radically,
emphasizes that seeing that the world is deliberately hidden from us is crucial to “[b]ringing back the commons” and building a more just, sustainable food system (All Over Creation 256).

The novel contends, however, that equating the use of technology with a root cause of environmental injustice seems to be one-dimensional thinking and could hinder the possibility to solve our greatest environmental challenges through technological progress. For example, the digital garden project in the sixth chapter of All Over Creation that attempts to archive Momoko’s seeds using digital tools shows how the Seeds of Resistance re-appropriates the technological medium like the Internet to liberate both farmers and the earth from “the corporate hegemony that is seeking to gain total control over global food supplies” (302). As Momoko continues to lose her memory and with it, the names of the endangered seeds, both Lloyd and Geek worry that an “ancient, dusty library” (Fuller’s Seeds) that contains biological information related to “the fruitful collaboration between nature and humankind, the history of our race and our migrations” will be lost forever (161-62). To preserve this living archive of endangered species, Geek plans to digitally document Momoko’s seeds and help “stop the genetic erosion of the earth’s ecosystem” (162). While explaining the operation system of the digital garden to people gathered at Lloyd’s house, Geek highlights the significance of its open-source access policy that allows the public to share seeds freely rather than buying GM seeds from biotech companies annually:

“Welcome to the New Garden of Earthly Delights,” he said, clicking and opening the home page …. “Basically the site is the computerized seed-library database,” Geek said. “The one we’ve been working on with Momoko and Lloyd. It contains every single variety of Fullers’s Seeds, all arranged by genus and species and cross-referenced with the plant names in both Latin and common English.”

explosively uneven; if people increasingly feel they are inhabiting futureless states (in both senses of the phrase); if the many sense that they are being asked to bear few privatize and monopolize more and more resources, hoarding profits, social movements will arise demanding a different distributive politics of the commons, in all its forms” (“Neoliberalism, Genre, and ‘The Tragedy of the Commons” 598).
He paused, waiting for Lloyd to take in the information. “The idea is to invite growers across the country to become members of the virtual Garden. They’ll register with the Web site, adopt whatever seeds they’re interested in, then grow them out and offer them back to other Garden members through the online catalog.” …
“Other members can contact growers by e-mail and request seeds. It’s awesomely simple, because it will take care of itself—it really takes advantage of the nonhierarchical networking of the Web. We sent out a huge mailing to your entire customer list and all our friends and contacts, directing them to the site.” (356)

The Seeds’s “virtual Garden” project suggests the possibility of alternative food systems: it hacks the centralized global food system bounded by the biological patent of seeds, using “the nonhierarchical networking of the Web” for free seed exchange. In *All Over Creation*, the Internet is “a perfect vehicle for dissemination” (354); at the same time, it functions as a kind of double-edged sword that actively promotes and spreads both social interaction and corporate propaganda. Due to its dualistic nature, techno-utopianism, which believes in the advancement of human civilization through techno-scientific progress, has often been criticized by many environmentalists and political activists and rarely considered as a possible model for a sustainable world. Yet, in Ozeki’s literary imagination, technology provides a new platform to decentralize and re-design the uneven structure of the current industrial food system that controls the earth’s biodiversity as well as the global food economy. It is here that Ozeki evokes countercultural environmentalism that seeks to reconcile the American agrarian ideal to harmonize with nature with the modernist desire to achieve social and political progress.

Inspired by British economist E. F. Schumacher’s book, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973), a new generation of environmentalists began to approach modern technology from a different angle and they enthusiastically embraced the idea of “appropriate technology” that strives to “apply advances in science to specific local communities and ecosystems” by regaining “individual control of economics and environments” from the
centralized system of technocapitalism (Kirk 380).25 Exhibiting the Seeds’ transformation of “the Garden of Earthly Delight” from an erotic site used to raise money for their activism to the digital center of free seed exchange, the novel exemplifies that the appropriate use of technology can be one of the possible ways to create hope out of the futureless present we now inhabit and revitalize “the future of life” (152, 122). As Leo Marx observes in The Machine in the Garden (1964), if “to depict America as a garden is to express aspirations still considered utopian” (43), the Seeds’ digital garden project in the novel envisions ecological utopia, in which human civilization and the natural world nurture and nourish each other through appropriating technology, and externalizes early twenty-first century environmentalists’ version of the American pastoral ideal, or what I call “the radical middle ground,” a new mode of environmental thinking that oscillates between technological, social, and political progress (17).26

25 Explaining the central concern of Schumacher’s book, Andrew Kirk writes: “The key to Schumacher’s vision was an enlightened adaptation of technology. In Small Is Beautiful, Schumacher highlighted what he called ‘intermediate technologies,’ those technical advances that stand ‘halfway between traditional and modern technology,’ as the solution to the dissonance between nature and technology in the modern world” (380, emphasis added). Similar to my analysis of the tension between techno-utopianism and techno-dystopianism within environmental discourse, he reads that “the relationship between counterculture environmentalists and technology was always ambivalent” and “the legacy of their technological revolution” also remains ambivalent. Nevertheless, he confirms the importance of counterculture environmentalists’ optimistic view of utilizing technology in changing the cultures of postwar America: “Whether they went back to the land, or into the laboratory, they infused environmentalism with an optimistic hope that one day the nagging question of how to reconcile the tension between the modernist desire to exploit the progressive potential of technological innovation with the antimodernist desire to preserve the natural world might be resolved through politically enlightened technical innovation” (390).

26 In Global Appetites: American Power and the Literature of Food (2013), Carruth interprets contemporary pastoral literature as the representation of changing human-nature relationship in the age of technological intervention, which cannot be easily categorized and understood in terms of nature-culture dualism in Western tradition. She provides a critical perspective regarding the distinctive characteristics of the postindustrial pastoral thus: “In the postindustrial era of networks, the boundary between the lab and the field all but disappears and the rural landscape is as likely to host a server farm as a field of grain … Contemporary representations of the food system thus reorient around a double recognition that the rural no longer provides a retreat from technological and economic networks and that the future of food production may move from the farms of the countryside to the vertical greenhouses and biotech labs of the city” (17). For more information with regard to the tradition of the pastoral ideal in American literature and culture, see Marx and Smith.
The Seeds’ digital garden project in *All Over Creation* thus returns us to the possibility of socially engaged environmentalism that creatively synthesizes environmental activism and modern technology and science in the era of global agribusiness. At first, Lloyd, who is a “stubborn,” “controlling” old farmer (357), is not quite satisfied by this idea of free seed exchange and explicitly expresses his resistance to the Seeds’s plan: “Momoko, they want to give away all our seeds! …. But they’re ours. We have to keep them safe!” (358). However, Momoko persuades him to join this plan because she thinks that the fundamental principle of the act of gardening is neither control nor possession, but it is *sharing* and *giving*. “No. Keeping is not safe,” Momoko says, “Keeping is danger. Only safe way is letting go. Giving everything away. Freely. Freely” (358). After Lloyd realizes that sharing Momoko’s seeds with others may be a good way to preserve the precious seeds safely, despite their own mortality as humans, he quietly agrees with the Seeds’ digitizing plan and endorses “the perpetuity of life itself” by giving up his closed form of love and care, which has governed his whole life.  

Ozeki explicitly weaves this conception of interconnectedness mediated by the garden with the fabric of the novel’s final chapter. Consider the following passage:

He spread his arms out to encompass the contents of the greenhouse with the racks upon racks of drying seeds. “This is the blueprint of your mother’s garden, Yumi. Imagine it in bloom, in all its incredible beauty and diversity and rich profusion, and now … zap! Picture it gone. Now picture the whole planet as a garden, teeming with millions upon millions of flowers and trees and fruits and vegetables and insects and birds and animals and weevils and us. And then, instead of all that magnificent, chaotic profusion, picture a few thousand genetically mutated, impoverished, barren, patented forms of corporately controlled germplasm.” …. Like he’d said, it wasn’t personal. Somehow, though, I got it. The bigger picture. (*All Over Creation* 408-410)

27 Throughout *All Over Creation*, Ozeki shows the deep connections between agricultural control over nature and patriarchal control over women and their bodies. This gendering of nature is important to understand the sexual politics of patriarchal white capitalism that renders nature as women and thus justifies white males’ conquest and exploitation of the land. Reading Ozeki’s text in relation to women’s reproductive rights in the Third World, Rachel Stein also observes that “women’s sexual and reproductive justice is integrally linked to issues of agriculture and horticultural diversity in various ways” (26). For more information regarding the interrelation between patriarchal control in agriculture and women’s reproduction and sexuality, see Stein.
In this scene, Geek tries to show “the big picture,” or “the future of life” (122), to Yumi, who has been very skeptical about the Seeds’ activity in Fuller farms and seems to be less interested in Momoko’s seeds compared to other characters in the novel. As the quotation by Wilson in this chapter’s introduction reveals, one of the greatest environmental challenges we face today is that the pace of biodiversity loss on earth is much faster than our attempts to preserve natural habitats. Similarly, Geek feels anxious about the fact that the rich biodiversity of the planet, represented by Momoko’s rampant garden, will not survive and become extinct, if we do not act now. “We don’t have time!” Geek shouts, “Don’t you see? It’s all moving too fast. Life itself is on the line here, and unless we can slow down the machine, none of this is going to survive!” (408). To help Yumi’s understanding of this serious situation, which is both complex and invisible, Geek juxtaposes the image of Momoko’s garden with the earth’s biodiversity and asks her to imagine what it might look like when all biodiversity disappears and the planet is only filled with “a few thousand genetically mutated, impoverished, barren, patented forms of corporately controlled germplasm.”

Using this literary metaphor (“the whole planet as a garden”), Ozeki helps us travel across time and space and place ourselves in the landscape of the future that we have not yet experienced but will encounter soon, in order to bridge a gap between knowing and doing and promote immediate action (Figure 4-5). While listening to Geek’s voice full of despair and sadness, Yumi has slowly begun to perceive “the bigger picture” that is not bounded by modern conception of property ownership, possessive individualism, or anthropocentrism, but encompasses “the hopeless beauty and fragility and loss of all that is

28 In this context, reading the rise of transgenic narratives in contemporary culture as part of the broader historical changes in our times, Susan McHugh writes: “Approaching evolutionary narrative as collected and collective stories of many species struggling together situates GM technologies as not just another agricultural option but are profoundly as a set of historical changes affecting vital relationships within and across species, as a matter of global biopolitics and not just individual politics of diversity” (46).
Figure 4-5. The Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools (1968). Just as this catalog inspired many of the counterculture generation through its emphasis on ecologically and socially just communities, Ozeki uses her fiction as a tool to help her readers see a larger picture of the earth ecosystem and realize our shared destiny as citizens of the planet.

precious on earth” (410). Looking at Momoko’s seeds contained in the greenhouse during the night, Yumi talks to herself: “He was right, we are responsible. Intimately connected, we’re liable for it all. I had to take responsibility for myself and my kids, but also for Geek and Elliot, and for Charmey and Lloyd, too, and yet at the same time I realized I was powerless to forecast or control any of our outcomes” (410). Just as Lloyd was once afraid of losing control of what he loves most, whether his daughter or the seeds, the novel zooms in on Yumi’s own inner fear that is deeply associated with her inability to “forecast or control any of our outcomes.” Thus, we are reminded that “to love without expectation” may be a “paradox for sure,” but “to accept the responsibility and forgo the control” is “such a relief” that acknowledges the meaning and value
of unconditional love and care toward other species on the planet as well as humans (410). Instead of judging and classifying her characters’ emotions and perspectives, Ozeki renders the garden as a site of exchanging ideas, one that “brings about a transformation of perception, a fundamental change in one’s way of seeing the world, call it a phenomenological conversion,” to borrow Harrison’s words (30). Finally, the novel suggests that the garden can help people expand and enrich their perspectives about the environment and society, and thereby change their futures as well.

The Archive of the Global Future

This chapter began with the important work of recovering, as well as theorizing, the garden archive of Ozeki’s *All Over Creation*. I have argued that reading gardening and botanical references in the novel advances our understanding of contemporary food systems and cultures that are shaped and controlled by global agribusiness. The history of horticulture and agriculture, read alongside race and environmental issues in the US, reveals how technological intervention in the food production system was strongly tied to the expansion of monoculture in the field and how this change could alter the long-standing relationship between humans and nature by crossing the border between natural and artificial and substantially decrease biodiversity on the planet in the near future. While the pastoral ideal in American literature and culture has presented a utopia in which humans harmonize with nature through the careful cultivation of land, the emergence of modern technologies such as the railroad, steam boat, and automobile in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, or what Marx has dubbed “the machine in the garden,” has dramatically changed not only the socio-economic structure of American society from farmers’ country to a more passive, “unconscious” consumer republic, but also begins to ravage the connections between people and land, food production and food consumption, individual and
community, and humans and other species. The garden archive of Ozeki’s fiction, however, provides alternative models of food systems and cultures in the twenty-first century that bring together farmers, gardeners, environmental activists, and citizen-consumers through appropriating modern technology and science.

Questioning the notion of “American progress,” which is restricted to material progress and relentlessly controlled by the logic of neoliberal capitalism, Ozeki asks us to rethink our relationship with nature, humans, and other species and pushes the reader to see “the bigger picture” of the planet that faces the greatest threat in its history due to environmental degradation and the large-scale destruction of biodiversity. “Utopian form,” Fredric Jameson has remarked, “is itself a representational mediation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality” (xii). 29 Attentive to the Utopian desire to radically transform one’s ways of seeing the world, through the narrative of complex, yet fertile, gardens, Ozeki’ novel thus testifies that gardening is a form of education and communalization that seeks to destabilize the rigid boundary between traditional and modern, nature and culture, science and art, and the self and the world, and helps her readers to cultivate a new perspective of environmental and social care—one that rewrites our present and the future to come.

29 In his study of the varieties of the Utopian form and their significance, Jameson argues that the value of reading “the relationship between SF and future history” does not lie in “its capacity to keep the future alive, even in imagination,” but rather it focuses more on “the unexpected rediscovery of the nature of utopia as a genre in our own time” (288-289). That is, to realize “our incapacity to imagine the future, to body forth, through apparently full representations which prove on closer inspection to be structurally and constitutively impoverished, the atrophy in our time of what Marcuse has called the utopian imagination, the imagination of otherness and radical difference” (289, emphasis in original). Similar to Jameson’s view of the Utopian form, as a vehicle to contemplate “our own absolute limits” so that we can take action to change our social reality, Ozeki utilizes the garden as a medium that shows our futureless present and its dystopian future and thereby urges her readers to take direct action in order to build a better future for all forms of life on the planet.
CHAPTER 5
EPILOGUE: TOWARD GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL LITERATURES AND MULTISPECIES COMMUNITIES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

All over the world, native species are migrating, if not disappearing, and in the next millennium the idea of an indigenous person or plant or culture will just seem quaint…. Back in the olden days, my dad’s ancestors got stuck behind the Alps and my mom’s on the east side of the Urals. Now, oddly, I straddle this blessed, ever-shrinking world.

-- Ruth L. Ozeki
My Year of Meats

In Ruth L. Ozeki’s critically acclaimed novel My Year of Meats (1998), protagonist Jane Takagi-Little, a half-white-half-Japanese American documentary filmmaker, describes her mixed racial identity in parallel with the migration of plants around the world throughout human history. By questioning the idea of “authentic” racial and ethnic identity, Ozeki shows how the transnational flow of people, species, and cultures is rapidly changing the world we live in and how Western dualism cannot fully account of the complexity that shifts the cultural borders between human societies and natural worlds. In order to understand the risks and possibilities of this “ever-shrinking world,” then, we need to stretch our imagination beyond national boundaries and to create global environmental consciousness that positively affirms the interconnectedness of humans, cultures, and species for the twenty-first century. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that examining the garden narratives of US ethnic women writers helps cultivate new ways of seeing nature and culture that ask us to contemplate the meaning of environmental rights and US citizenship and this understanding further motivates us to participate in the environmental justice movement as global citizens rooted in local communities. Although my use of a comparative perspective in understanding North American environmentalism in relation to the history of US agricultural discourse has blurred racial, ethnic, and national boundaries, this does not mean that I ignore the differently situated human conditions within the US and across
the globe or entirely endorse the universalizing impulse that is too often driven by scholars in the
global North who have relatively easy access to technologies, economic benefits, and other
resources compared to people who reside in different parts of the world. However, despite the
limits and risks of totalizing human experiences and cultural differences, I believe that it has
become more important than ever to consider our shared humanities across disciplines and
traditional national and regional boundaries, especially given the fact that we have entered into
the age of the Anthropocene and no one can be exempted from this global environmental crisis.¹
In this sense, the work of this dissertation has been twofold. First, it provides a more nuanced
theoretical account of transnational ecocriticism that seeks to establish global ecologies as well
as critical bioregionalism by addressing the complex social, economic, political, and cultural
networks of US agricultural discourse in local and global contexts. Second, it attests that
literature serves as a critical medium that affects our perception and behavior for apprehending
the inseparable links between the history of US imperialism and capitalist agriculture and the
current environmental crisis.

To date, scholars in American studies in general and US ethnic literatures in particular
have not paid much attention to the possibility that an ecocritical analysis of American literature
and culture may provide a new critical lens to read the changing climate of the discipline and
help envision the future directions of the humanities beyond the US. It might be true that
environmental criticism has not developed a distinctive methodology for literary studies,

¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty provides a compelling account of the challenge that reconciles differently located human
experiences with global and planetary changes such as global warming. He observes: “Humans have a sense of ontic
belonging. That is undeniable. We used that knowledge in developing both anticolonial (Fanon) and postcolonial
criticism (Bhabha). But in becoming a geophysical force on the planet, we have also developed a form of collective
existence that has no ontological dimension. Our thinking about ourselves now stretches our capacity for
interpretative understanding. We need nonontological ways of thinking the human” (13). For more on the
conjunction of postcolonial thinking and climate change in the Anthropocene, see Chakrabarty’s “Postcolonial
something that is comparable to other fields such as feminist theory, Marxism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and critical race theory. In *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), Lawrence Buell expresses a similar concern:

> Environmental criticism in literary studies has, thus far, not changed literary studies or environmental humanities so much as it has been increasingly absorbed therein. This in spite of the fact that first-wave ecocriticism, as we have seen, gathered much of its original takeoff energy from disaffection with critical theory-as-usual. But its duality so far rests on its having introduced a fresh topic or perspective or archive rather than in distinctive methods of inquiry. In this respect, environmental criticism, not only in literary studies but also throughout the human sciences, cannot (at least not yet) claim the methodological originality that was injected into literary studies by (say) new critical formalism and by deconstruction. (130)

When Buell first wrote his book a decade ago, ecocriticism was considered a minor subfield of literary and cultural studies that only draws attention from a handful of scholars whose research interests lie in the tradition of American nature writing and its aesthetics. However, since the publication of Buell’s work, ecocriticism has increasingly developed and evolved into a new field of inquiry that reshapes the college and university curriculum and research agendas in many institutions in the US in collaboration with other disciplines in the social and natural sciences, such as environmental studies, food and agrarian studies, and science and technology studies, rather than remain within the realm of the traditional humanities. Given this sea change in academia, the term “the environmental humanities”\(^2\) may be a concept that is broad enough to show how ecocriticism has been transformed into a *critical method*, one that invites scholars in the humanities to consider why environmental consciousness matters in the time of STEM

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\(^2\) More recently, postcolonial critics such as Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan rightly capture some challenges that complicate the development of the environmental humanities as a transdisciplinary field in the academy. In explicating its heterogeneous, unstable disciplinary characteristics, they write: “Two of the main challenges as we see them now involve (1) establishing a clear definition of what environmental humanities research entails and how it can respond effectively to global ecological challenges; and (2) devising appropriately interdisciplin ary methodologies that not only bring different disciplines into transformative dialogue but also constitute new forms of environmental knowledge that can be communicated across the arts and sciences and to public audiences” (“Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities” 7-8).
(Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and how humanistic inquiry becomes a crucial tool to resolve today’s global environmental challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, food security and hunger, and biodiversity loss.

However, my account of transnational ecocriticism has not yet complete for two reasons. This dissertation did not cover the cultural and environmental narratives of California agriculture, which is significant to understand the correlations between the development of industrial agriculture and the formation of US citizenship from the perspectives of immigrants. While many Asian and Mexican immigrants came to the US in the first half of the twentieth century and subsequently joined California’s fruit and vegetable fields as migrant farm workers, this immigrant history has been seldom studied by scholars in American studies and race and ethnic studies in relation to the larger context of US agricultural discourse and environmental justice. Thus, studying the narratives of immigrant farm workers will help us better understand the social, political, and environmental histories of US agriculture by comparing and contrasting their immigrant experiences with other ethnic groups in the US, including American Indians and African Americans, who have been historically dispossessed and exploited by US imperialism and plantation agriculture on a global scale. At the same time, while I have tried to show the diverse aspects of environmental thought through a close reading of US ethnic literatures, in an attempt to challenge and expand Euro-American centered environmental discourse, this project that envisions global ecologies in the twenty-first century still remains incomplete because my primary object of study is limited to Anglophone literature. Who has the power to narrate or to shape differently situated ideas of the environment and multi-scale environmental changes around the world? Can we imagine global environmental literatures beyond literary works written in English? How have other civilizations developed and understood the human-
nonhuman relationship throughout global history? What happens to American Studies and ecocriticism if we put environmental world literature at the center? Having examined the garden as a critical space that opens the new possibilities for reading traces of American literature in the world and the world in America, it is my hope that new directions in the study of environmental literary and cultural studies will create a multilingual, transcultural community that actively investigates literatures written in different languages as well as Anglophone literature and thus find alternative ways of knowing and experiencing multispecies communities in today’s globalizing world.
REFERENCE LIST


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yeonhaun Kang received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Florida in 2016. Her research focuses on 20th/21st American literature and culture, US ethnic literatures, and the environmental humanities, with a particular emphasis on critical food studies and science and technology studies. She is the recipient of the Graduate School Fellowship, O. Ruth McQuown Graduate Scholarship, CLAS Dissertation Fellowship, Tedder Family Doctoral Fellowship, and 2016 AAW (Association for Academic Women) Emerging Scholar Award at the University of Florida. Aside from academic work, she enjoys reading, pot gardening, and walking in the woods, but, in the near future, she hopes to spend more time for creative writing and landscape painting while cultivating her own garden in the beautiful house surrounded by lush forests.