Annette Angela Portillo. *Sovereign Stories and Blood Memories: Native American Women's Autobiography*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017. 204 pp. ISBN: 978826359155.

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Annette Angela Portillo's *Sovereign Stories and Blood Memories: Native American Women's Autobiography* (2017) inscribes itself into an important and emergent field of enquiry. In this book, the author seeks to reclaim "narratives of truth and survivance" (ix) and promises to "extend and adapt the work of Native American autobiography theorists" (17). Portillo's central claim is that "the memories of these women who tell and write their stories of survivance are articulating a place-based and land-based language. And their autobiographical discourses express communal storytelling practices that embody ancestral identities across multiple regions, times, and spaces" (17). The first chapter of the book serves as an introduction to the key terminology and offers a brief overview of its methodological concerns. This chapter furthermore briefly argues that a recuperation of indigenous epistemologies and sovereignty is essential for understanding Native American women's life writing, and relates these concerns to an overall settler colonial context. Portillo positions her approach to self-writing and autobiography primarily in relation to older scholarship such as Arnold Krupat's studies of authorial collaboration and authenticity (1988 and 1994), Hertha D. Wong's discussions about hetereoglossia and tradition (1992), as well as Greg Sarris' exploration of authorship and authority (1993) and John Beverley's work on testimonio (1992, 1993 and 1996).

Chapter two offers a "remapping" of the authority of the Kumeyaay elder, Delfina Cuero, from an anti-colonial Native-centered historiographical perspective meant to reassert Cuero's agency. Analyzing Cuero's relationship with the anthropologist Florence C. Shipek, who edited the narrative, Portillo demonstrates how Cuero uses a land-based, indigenous epistemology to reclaim an erased presence in the US-Mexico borderlands of the Kumeyaay and their neighboring tribes. As Portillo writes, "Cuero's stories not only assert the ongoing presence and challenges brought to her people; her narratives and blood memories serve as witnesses to new forms of genocide, resistance, and healing" (24). The chapter includes a historical discussion of Kumeyaay agency and knowledges, based on Michael Connolly Miskwish's scholarship, and a short discussion of genre and the publication history of Cuero's narrative. These serve as points of departure for Portillo's textual analysis, which covers silence and humor as subversive acts, Cuero's awareness of her multiple audiences, and land-based strategic performances of "transborder citizenship" (39), which leads Portillo to conclude that Cuero "ultimately controls the narrative voice, because she chooses which stories to tell Shipek and, more importantly, which ones to explain" (35). The chapter ends with a somewhat awkward sketch of the relevance of Cuero's story to twenty-first century concerns about transnational indigeneity in the light of increased militarization of the border and its attendant (geo)political discourses. These are important issues that deserve more attention than the three pages Portillo awards them, and their presence in this form is more surprising than illuminating.

The third chapter explores Leslie Marmon Silko's self-published life story *Sacred Water* (1993) and the memoir *The Turquoise Ledge* (2010) as reconceptualizations of autobiography as a genre. The two narratives are multimodal, and Portillo argues that "through storytelling and

photography Silko creates an indigenous feminist practice that redefines colonial spacializations [sic] of indigenous land and peoples" (53). Portillo begins the chapter with a short account of the history of photographic colonization of Native bodies and identities, starting with Edward S. Curtis. This leads into her discussion of Silko's subversion of the power-discourse related to photography and her construction of a land-based epistemology in the two self-writings. Moreover, Silko expresses sovereignty and self-determination by refusing to acquiesce to the publishing industry when she decides not only to publish *Sacred Water* herself, but to physically construct the book (58-59). Portillo argues that "Silko complicates the notion of photography as objective, pure, and authentic" (60) by incorporating the visual into the textual narrative of the autobiographical form. Moreover, Portillo claims that this complication of form relates to the complication of the human as separate from the natural. Portillo discusses Silko's conception and critique of 'landscape' as a misleading word and her extensions of the notion of kinship to non-human actors at length, and she argues persuasively that the toads, snakes, bees and other critters become more than just symbols of survival, they become central to survivance (63). In this way Portillo accounts for Silko's complex critique of environmental destruction as more than mere nature writing or an ecofeminist (settler) preoccupation with conservation, but rather as related to blood memories of the land and "as unmappings of colonial discourses" (18).

Chapter four jumps back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and explores the life stories of Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, Zitkála-Ša, and Pretty-Shield. Beginning with Frank B. Linderman's interview with Pretty-Shield (recorded in 1932), Portillo inserts the life-stories into their sociohistorical contexts and argues that Pretty-Shield's narrative, which falls into the as-told-to genre, is an expression of agency. Similar to Cuero's refusal to divulge information, Pretty-Shield's and other ethnographically collected life-narratives express a sense of resistance by consciously refusing to confirm romanticized preconceptions of indigenous women. Through the use of humor and silences, Pretty-Shield becomes "an agent of storytelling rather than simply an ethnographic informant" (102). With Winnemucca's 1883 *Life among the Piutes* as a point of departure, Portillo discusses the irony of indigenous women strategically using "the autobiography, a traditionally Eurocentric, male-driven genre" as a way to "talk back and rewrite official histories of indigenous peoples" (103). While exploring the tropes of 'blood memories' and community in *Life among the Piutes,* Portillo reiterates arguments about authenticity and Winnemucca's complicity in the perpetuation of stereotypes of her people, concluding that she in fact sought to rewrite dominant master-narratives through the construction of new forms of storytelling (oratory, performance, and autobiography). Several of Zitkala-Ša's stories from the early twentieth century similarly reflect a critique of hegemonic stories, and Portillo argues somewhat confusingly that Zitkála-Ša "not only lectured and wrote essays that openly critiqued the government but also supported assimilationist ideology" (113). Discussing her "complex" position, Portillo situates Zitkála-Ša in the context of the boarding school system with its attendant genocidal discourses and claims that her "sovereign stories and blood memories forced readers to engage in the process of acculturation and torture endured by numerous children" (116). It is, however, unclear from Portillo's writing how Zitkála-Ša's writings managed to acquire this power to "force" engagement. Ultimately, Portillo claims that rather than being the victims of editorial usurpation, both these women create sovereign stories that "reright and rewrite Native American history and culture" (91), and she categorizes their narratives as "protofeminist strories [sic] that assert resistance and agency" (119).

Chapter five contains the book's most original contribution to scholarship, as it details the recent emergence of online, internet-based modes of storytelling and knowledge sharing. Beginning with a history of the Zapatista Movement and its revolutionary methods regarding online and media network construction, Portillo argues that "indigenous organizations, tribal communities, indigenous social justice movements, and individual bloggers have 'indigenized the internet,' thus creating and participating in a communal space of testimonio that resonates with the storytelling practices of indigenous peoples" (128). The Idle No More and NoDAPL movements are highlighted as specific examples of how the new media can benefit indigenous peoples, build coalitions across nations and other borders, and share information. The precise connection of this first part of the chapter to the overall purpose of the book is unclear, and unfortunately Portillo only perfunctorily discusses the more relevant "communo-blographies" (134) by two indigenous women—Margo Tamez and Deborah Miranda—towards the very end.

The final chapter takes as its departure the author's personal reflections of and experiences with teaching Native American studies broadly, and women's autobiographies specifically. Portillo mentions how she engages with an empathic and decolonial pedagogy that centers on debunking stereotypes, unlearning colonialist logics, deconstructing the canon, and fronting an indigenous-centered knowledge system, as contextualization for literary fiction, poetry, and self-writing. As Portillo writes, "I underscore the importance of complicating simplistic definitions of Native American identity and emphasize that each primary text should be read from tribally specific histories and perspectives" (143). Through an examination of Ruby Modesto's *Not for Innocent Ears* (1980), Portillo exemplifies her pedagogical approach, which she calls a "conversive relational methodology" (150). Furthermore, she stresses the importance of tribal community engagement and exchange when teaching indigenous literatures, and argues "that inviting elders and members of indigenous communities to share their specialized knowledge with a class is an integral component in any course on Native American studies" (148). For new teachers of Native American studies, this chapter provides an excellent point of departure. For more experienced teachers, most of Portillo's claims and approaches will already be familiar.

The last two chapters are less well-developed and their ties to the first three chapters are somewhat tenuous and unclear. A deeper engagement with the central claim about women's self-writing and decolonial pedagogy, respectively, would have brought the book full circle more elegantly. Moreover, it is perhaps surprising that Portillo does not clearly position her work in relation to recent developments in indigenous feminist scholarship. Mishuana Goeman's 2008 article on "(re)mapping" is employed to illustrate the importance of stories to native feminisms, but Goeman's spectacular *Mark My Words* (2013) is relegated to a footnote (164). Siobhan Senier's *Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance* (2001), Winona LaDuke's *Recovering the Sacred* (2005) and Cheryl Suzack, Shari M. Huhndorf, Jeanne Perreault, and Jean Barman's *Indigenous Women and Feminism* (2011), to name just a few pertinent volumes, are strangely overlooked in a book that argues that some of the authors discussed resist assimilation narratively, are "protofeminists," or write against (white) ecofeminism. Other feminist works, such as Paula Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop* (1986) and Devon Mihesuah's *Indigenous American Women* (2003), receive scant attention. A more diligent and informed conversation with indigenous feminist theory would have clarified Portillo's particular contribution.

Sovereign Stories and Blood Memories at times shows signs of scholarly shortcomings, especially as relates to theoretical foundations, methodologies, and academic practice. N. Scott Momaday's notion of "blood memories" which is so central to Portillo's argument is never fully explained or operationalized. For example, the important debate between those who see the term as essentialist and racist, such as Arnold Krupat (1989) and those who seek to reclaim it, such as Chadwick Allen (1999 and 2002) is only superficially touched upon in the book's first chapter (2-3). Further, in successive chapters, 'blood memories' seems to be used almost synonymously with 'stories' and a deeper discussion and clarification early in the book would have avoided this terminological vagueness. Similarly, in chapter two, Portillo argues that, "it is therefore more appropriate to read [Cuero's] narrative through a critical 'listening-reading' technique" (30), a technique she does not clearly explain, nor mention again, throughout the book, although she does briefly mention it in the introductory chapter.

A more careful selection of academic sources would also have benefitted *Sovereign Stories and Blood Memories,* as the book often rests on a rather thin foundation, which adds a sense that the author omits pertinent sources, or is unaware of their existence. For instance, it is thoroughly surprising that, in a discussion of the US-Mexico borderlands in chapter two, Portillo claims that, "We rarely think of the borderlands area in terms of its intercultural significance for the multiple indigenous groups who claim this geopolitical space as their ancestral homelands" (46), without acknowledging the essential scholarship on the topic from Gloria Anzaldúa's seminal *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) to the more recent *Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (2016) by María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo. In addition, the communal "we" Portillo utilizes problematically gives the impression of a widespread scholarly lack of attention, which I would argue is incorrectly diagnosed. Similarly, a discussion in chapter three of the role of mythologizations, photography, and US settler colonialism is rendered superficial as it skips from Curtis to contemporary Hollywood "Indian" representations (54-55) with no mention of the history in between. Furthermore, the inclusion of controversial scholars such as Andrea Smith and Ward Churchill as sources deserves further discussion and debate. Especially the latter scholar's work should not be cited without discussion of the serious issues of academic fraud associated with his work, a debate which falls outside of the scope of this review. However, when used as one of three sources given for claims about boarding school experiences (other than life-stories), it indicates a lack of both awareness of the problematic nature of the source, and of the extensive scholarship undertaken by others on the topic.

In addition, certain elements of *Sovereign Stories and Blood Memories* appear unclear or fragmentary. As mentioned above, Portillo includes a short account of the publication history of Delfina Cuero's life-narrative. As this section provides the foundation for Portillo's claims about agency, narrative survivance, and subversion of colonial discourses (and publication practices and power), a more thorough discussion would have benefitted the explication and argument. Likewise, Portillo's discussion of Pretty-Shield's life-story deserves a more in-depth explication than the four pages it receives (98-102). Overall, many points of the book seem preliminary or unfinished, and with a total text of just 160 pages (not including notes and bibliography), further analysis and discussion could easily be accommodated practically.

At times, Portillo's book unfortunately reads like a hastily rewritten dissertation which, in addition to the academic shortcomings listed above, includes many (but perhaps minor) irritations, including but not limited to: lack of proofreading, omission of cited works in the bibliography (71) or careless referencing—such as paraphrasing scholars but only providing a page number, when the bibliography contains three texts by that one author (103)—terminological inconsistencies (such as spellings of tribal names outside of quotes ("Paiutes" p. 108, "Piute" p.105) and oscillation between "indigenous," "Native American," "native," and "Indian" without justifying the terminology), as well as structural and compositional issues which a more rigid editing process would have alleviated. For instance, the introduction switches chapters five and six in the summary section, so that Portillo incorrectly characterizes her own book, stating, "Thus, I end my book by providing a brief overview of new media and review [sic] how the internet is becoming indigenized…" (20), when in fact, the last chapter is focused on decolonizing pedagogy. Of course, individually these are minor concerns, but taken together they may imply an underlying compositional deficiency, and in connection with the academic shortcomings, they indicate fundamental issues relating to academic practice.

In sum, although this book offers convincing readings of the selected life-writings, most of its claims and conclusions can be found more fully explicated in other works in the field. However, as a book-length exploration within an otherwise fairly understudied field, it may spark further and deeper scholarship in the future.

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