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Digging Up the Bones of the Past: Colonial and Indigenous Interplay in Winona LaDuke's *Last Standing Woman*

STEVEN SALAITA

In decolonization, there is the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation. If we wish to describe it precisely, we might find it in the well-known words: "The last shall be first and the first last." Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence. That is why, if we try to describe it, all decolonization is successful.

—Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*

Anishinaabe politician, author, and activist Winona LaDuke is one of the most recognizable tribal figures in modern America. Attaining minor fame as Ralph Nader's vice-presidential candidate on the Green Party ticket in 1996 and 2000, LaDuke has often been assigned the role of Native spokesperson by non-Natives in both mainstream and leftist media.¹ The attention given LaDuke is focused overwhelmingly on her land reclamation and environmental work, which are detailed in *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*.² Although LaDuke's status as a notable Indian is well established among non-Indian Americans, it is considerably more nebulous within Native Studies itself. Also, despite—or perhaps because of—her notoriety as an activist and environmentalist, LaDuke's work as a novelist has gone virtually unnoticed by either American or Native critics. Only a handful of reviews met the publication of her 1997 novel, *Last Standing Woman*, which has received scant critical attention.³ This essay attempts to address that deficit by looking in detail at *Last Standing Woman*, placing emphasis on the interplay between white settlers and indigenous Anishinaabeg.

While the multivocal, nonlinear structure in *Last Standing Woman* has been employed often in Native letters—and, more specifically, in the fiction of LaDuke's Anishinaabe contemporary Louise Erdrich—the novel offers

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readers and scholars valuable textual features for consumption and critique. One difficulty of examining the book, in fact, lies in the wide range of themes LaDuke presents: religious, feminist, activist, environmental, tribal, historical, colonial, decolonial, postcolonial, biographical, autobiographical. This ambitious groundwork, coupled with the large number of characters in the book, challenges the reader and complicates the task of the critic. It is clear that when setting out to construct her first novel, LaDuke intended to avoid the comforts of conventional fictive expression by representing myriad voices in as many contexts as the scope of the project could accommodate.

Because of the novel's heterogeneity and the limitations of small-scale critical essays, I will narrow my framework to the novel's historical, colonial, decolonial, and postcolonial aspects, drawing from tribal, activist, and autobiographical themes where necessary to illuminate the primary concern of this article: the manner in which the encroachment of white settlers onto Anishinaabe land transformed Anishinaabe society and produced a cultural, political, and national interplay between colonizer and indigene that underlies the development of both plot and character in *Last Standing Woman*.

The national interplay is especially crucial; it highlights the conflict between two separate ethnic entities struggling for the same parcels of land as separate national entities. That is to say, the categories of "ethnic" and "national" are conflated to the point that they evolve into the same entity; ethnic conflict therefore presupposes and ultimately foregrounds national conflict. All other conflicts in the text stem from this dispute. The portrayal of indigenous-settler interplay may not be the greatest poetic contribution of the novel, but it is ubiquitous throughout the stories and worth critical appraisal. Of particular importance is conceptualizing what end such an approach meets. In invoking a series of cultural and national interactions for discussion, I do not intend to argue that LaDuke creates a space for mediation, as critics such as James Ruppert have argued in regard to other novels,⁴ nor am I much interested in the now well-worn concept of ambidexterity, which in a broad way asserts that subjects are able to move back and forth with varying degrees between separate cultural norms. While both of these paradigms may be at work in minor ways in *Last Standing Woman*, neither offers the reader or critic a comprehensive basis for interpretive projects. Instead, they would lead one to reductive categories. Disparate ethnic groups with disparate narratives focused on the struggle for identical commodities and the power to name and control those commodities interact in complicated arenas of contestation. Any interplay with which they are involved, then, will never be simple enough to highlight properly within a fixed theoretical rubric. *Last Standing Woman* is no exception.

THE BONES OF THE PAST

Last Standing Woman focuses almost exclusively on the Anishinaabe people. Perhaps not by accident, the "cast of characters" presented at the opening of the book lists only Native characters, some with tiny roles, while no white characters are mentioned, even though some are crucial to the development of the narrative. LaDuke's strong interest in her people probably influenced the

amount of Anishinaabe history, biography, and perhaps autobiography she incorporates into the plot. Before I analyze the interplay between settler and Native societies, it would be useful to briefly recount some of these features to better contextualize the forthcoming critique.

LaDuke does not try to hide the real nature of the events she presents. In a disclaimer at the start of the book, she writes, "This is a work of fiction although the circumstances, history, and traditional stories, as well as some of the characters, are true, retold to the best of my ability."⁵ To approach *Last Standing Woman* simply as an historical novel is dubious, however. Although the genre still exists, it is rare when modern historical fiction is also deemed literary; the appearance of historical masterpieces such as Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and James Welch's *Fools Crow* is an infrequent occasion. First of all, the characters, plot structures, and textual features are often underdeveloped in historical fiction because the author focuses on fictionalizing actual events at their expense; the development of characters and storylines in historical fiction, in other words, is contingent on a predetermined course of past events. In *Last Standing Woman*, LaDuke manages to move beyond this formula and employ artistic license in her fictive rendition of modern Anishinaabe history. The historicity of the novel is a structural strategy, not a comprehensive structure.

We can look momentarily at one way this strategy functions. A constant theme throughout the work is the impact of the past on the present. To LaDuke, these effects are not merely cosmetic; the unfolding of each historical moment will reverberate indefinitely in a cycle with consequences not only in the present, but also on the past and for the future. These moments are expressed metaphorically at times. The recurrent theme of ancestors' bones, for instance, can be read both literally and symbolically. Throughout the second part of the book, Anishinaabe characters fight to reclaim the bones of their ancestors, which were unearthed and sent to various East Coast museums or forgotten in the rush of modern construction. While the struggle over these bones of the past actually occurs and is presented as a literal contest in *Last Standing Woman*, its metaphorical qualities are crucial. The fight to uncover hidden histories and return to the people items of the past wrested from them throughout the ages guides the plot development of numerous Native texts and frames the arenas of contestation in *Last Standing Woman*. LaDuke is concerned not only with the actual bones of the past, but also with the effort to name and control those bones by correcting the historical mythologies that became institutionalized in the colonial culture. In an interview with *The Progressive*, she speaks forthrightly about the desire to transform and rename: "The last 400 years have been about building empires. This is not sustainable. Empires are about taking what doesn't belong to you and consuming more than you need. In order to move forward, we need to acknowledge this ongoing history. This is the fundamental paradigm of appropriation that remains unquestioned in America. We need to ask, 'What right does the United States really have to this place?'"⁶

The theft of Anishinaabe bones is only one horror in a series of pernicious colonial encounters, many of which LaDuke recreates with passion. The novel, which spans the years 1800 to 2018, introduces the encroachment of

settlers and missionaries into Anishinaabe territory. That encroachment, according to historian Melissa L. Meyer, resulted in considerable social upheaval: "As Euroamericans created societies of their own, they increasingly sought to incorporate or absorb the land and resources of Indian groups. But the concomitant of incorporation for native people, one that world-systems theorists usually mention only in passing, was marginalization."⁷ The immense changes not only initiated the dissolution of lifeways, according to Meyer, but, more importantly, the expropriation of land: "Substantial land cessions began with the 1837 Treaty negotiated at St. Peter's, the first treaty to recognize the rights of the 'Chippewa Nation' to cede portions of Minnesota and Wisconsin." Much land would be lost in the following decades: "Through a negotiation process that often placed them at a disadvantage, the Anishinaabeg relinquished the larger portion of northern Minnesota between 1837 and 1883."⁸

LaDuke illustrates how the loss of land transformed Anishinaabe spiritual practices and social systems. She details the rapid changes that governmental infringement on Anishinaabe territory entailed—for instance, when the Anishinaabe diaspora had reached full gravity in 1930: "That year, many were to go. Soon there were no longer enough to attend to the ceremonies. The drums were left on their own."⁹ The negative bureaucratic impact is not limited to the Natives, however, as when corrupt agricultural bylaws compel banks to withhold operating loans to white farmers, inflaming tensions among farmers and Indians. LaDuke also examines changes within government policy and among white settlers. Her multidimensional exploration of conflicting cultures and national narratives is perpetually fluid, allowing for a thorough gaze at the comprehensive dynamics of colonialism in Minnesota. This approach is important in creating fuller aesthetic designs from which to frame dialogue among characters and institutions with conflicting interests and worldviews: Lance Wagosh and Elaine Mandamin, Norman Grist and George Agawaateshkan, individual farming and egalitarian agriculture, hierarchical social systems and cyclical worldviews. Although much of *Last Standing Woman* is predicated on exposing the results of land theft and cultural sacrifice, LaDuke avoids recounting or creating simple binaries for ethical consumption. Rather, she complicates each conflict, ranging from the interpersonal to those involving entire nations. Readers are offered a wide range of interplay as a result. These relationships are crucial to the expression of moral complexity in the text.

The invocation of broad historical dynamics is relevant to this point. LaDuke moves beyond the theft of land as an historical groundwork to frame the narrative's progression. The technique is a realistic presentation of actual events. "Settlement," Meyer explains, "did not threaten the Anishinaabeg as much as deforestation, environmental degradation, and declining animal populations did."¹⁰ The actualization of these threats is presented throughout the novel, sometimes in detail, along with more extensive analyses of modern conflict in northern Minnesota. Some of the more notable historical portrayals in the novel include the Dakota War of 1862,¹¹ the advent of the 1867 Nelson Act,¹² the ratification of the 1887 Allotment Act, the sale of allotments

to white settlers, the appearance of government anthropologists at White Earth, the devastation of forests by logging companies, the consolidation of organized Anishinaabe resistance, the occupation by Anishinaabe activists of tribal headquarters, and the legal struggle to regain stolen land.

It would be reasonable to argue that the unearthing of these “bones of the past” is more than a political and aesthetic strategy. LaDuke likely had culture in mind, as well. According to Basil Johnston, “Traditionally, Anishinaubae history and heritage were taught by the elders and others, who instructed the people in everything from history, geography, and botany to astronomy, language, and spiritual heritage, at family and community gatherings during the winter months.... The nightly winter gatherings were lessons, not simply storytelling sessions as so many people refer to them today.”¹³ LaDuke, then, had no desire to construct the present independently of the past. Perhaps she had no point of reference to do so, either. Readers are thus shown a continual dialogue among various episodes that converge as a function of memory, and that are called into existence with the spoken word. In *Last Standing Woman*, the present invariably includes the past, and the past is an inevitable object of imagination.

The reliance on memory and imagination may help to explain why LaDuke incorporates biography and autobiography into the narrative. While many first novels rely on these techniques, often as a cover for underdeveloped authorial skills, in *Last Standing Woman* they seem to be a consciously prescribed function of the text. LaDuke’s incorporation of Anishinaabe history into the plot probably also necessitated an approach to characterization tinged with realism. The biographical sections of the novel are, of course, marked by great artistic license. Their biographical elements are detectable, nonetheless. American Indian Movement (AIM) activist Warren Wabun, for instance, bears a resemblance to Anishinaabe activist Dennis Banks. Numerous characters are also given traits based on members of the White Earth Land Recovery Project, a grassroots group LaDuke helped found in 1988. Autobiographical elements are more subtle, but apparent throughout. LaDuke resembles community leader Elaine Mandamin, who leads the Protect Our Land Coalition, an organization similar to the White Earth Land Recovery Project. I would argue that although LaDuke certainly had her own life in mind when employing Elaine, she is not a fully autobiographical character; she simply shares qualities with the author. This claim is viable because Alanis Nordstrom also encapsulates some of LaDuke’s own history and personality. Alanis’s father, Jim (aka, Jim Good Fox), spent time as a Hollywood Indian extra, something LaDuke’s own father, Vincent, did in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁴ Moreover, Alanis’s tacit desire to sacrifice her comfortable professional life off the reservation in order to return home to White Earth—something she does eventually—is akin to LaDuke’s own experience. LaDuke, who grew up on the West Coast, explains, “Ever since I was little I wanted to come back and work in the Indian community. My father is from White Earth, and I never felt entirely accepted on the West Coast.”¹⁵

These biographical and autobiographical themes indicate LaDuke’s commitment to her community. They also connote a type of politics and ecology connected to place-based encounters. In the novel, the politics and ecology

of place are given a hierarchical arrangement in which the Anishinaabe community is afforded ecological stewardship over the land. The land, in turn, sustains the community's collective identity and ultimately incorporates ecology into all political expression. That political expression arises most explicitly with the appearance of settlers and missionaries—and, by extension, government bureaucracy. The place-based encounter, then, is both violent and personal. Its violence transforms ecological political identity into a resistant consciousness that inspires the people—bearers of the land's identity—to challenge those who reduce land to demographics and statistics. While settlers and government agents wish to expropriate the land for economic or ideological reasons, the indigenes resist that expropriation by keeping their identity bound to land.

The biographical and autobiographical themes are thus a product of the place-based encounter that informs the structure of politics and ecology in the text and that remains inseparable from real history. Rather than craft a pan-Indian novel or a story set in an Indian nation other than her own, LaDuke chose to concentrate on the Anishinaabeg, a decision that lent itself to realism. This overtly political and historical approach can certainly be attributed in part to the limitations of a fledgling writer, but this type of analysis will not explain the approach fully. I would argue that the novel's realistic structure is generally in keeping with Jace Weaver's communitist readings of Native literature.¹⁶ Weaver's theory, which argues that a commitment to community and activism ("communitism") acts as a thematic marker in Native letters, has not become the prevailing theoretical rubric in Native literary criticism, but it offers points of relevance in critically disseminating Native texts. Despite the problematics of the communitist formulation—which derives primarily from novels such as Leslie Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* that seem to break Weaver's pattern—communitism can usefully contextualize *Last Standing Woman*. Community (the Anishinaabeg) and activism (the return of land and self-determination to the Anishinaabeg) both underline the development of the narrative. In fact, both act as catalysts in the imposition of resolution onto various textual conflicts. The traces of biography and autobiography that can be found throughout the book, therefore, intimate a calculated convergence of fiction and reality. Reality is used to frame fiction, and, more importantly, to guide its internal ethics and provide it with communal appeal.

While I am concerned with LaDuke's activism insofar as it informs numerous themes in the novel, I will place more emphasis on textual criticism that follows generally with the communitist framework, as it is the most appropriate Native critical rubric for this particular book. Another useful methodology comes from Robert Warrior. In *Tribal Secrets*, Warrior explores questions about Native literature with accentuation on identifying productive models of critical inquiry. He writes,

If [the Native] struggle is anything, it is the struggle for sovereignty, and if sovereignty is anything, it is a way of life. That way of life is not a matter of defining a political ideology or having a detached discussion about the

unifying structures and essences of American Indian traditions. It is a decision—a decision we make in our minds, in our hearts, and in our bodies—to be sovereign and to find out what that means in the process.¹⁷

This passage is of particular interest in relation to *Last Standing Woman*, which clearly inspires analysis of sovereignty and “the unifying structures and essence of American Indian traditions,” which I will assess below. Taken together, Weaver’s communitism and Warrior’s intellectual sovereignty underline LaDuke’s creative offering. I will use these models—along with, to a lesser degree, the work of Craig Womack and a sampling of postcolonial theories about the creation and maintenance of identity and memory—to guide my critique.

These theoretical approaches provide a context for an analysis of the novel’s underlying features. Assessments of history and politics can contribute to a broad understanding of the book’s overarching structure and general aesthetics, but to overlook interplay and national signification would render any analysis incomplete. It is in this spirit that I will focus on the interaction of Anishinaabe civilization with American society, with which it battled over land and resources and within which it was forcefully absorbed. The renewed battles for land and resources and the conscious detachment of Anishinaabeg from American social systems offer the critic further opportunities to examine the politics of occupation, dispossession, and resistance, along with an attendant discursive substructure.

“A PECULIAR KIND OF HATRED”

LaDuke occasionally reverts to sociopolitical commentary during transitional points in the narrative. One of the more powerful of these commentaries deals with the normalization of racism among garrison settler societies. The narrator, Ishkwegaabawikwe (*Last Standing Woman*), suggests that “there is a peculiar kind of hatred in the northwoods, a hatred born of the guilt of privilege, a hatred born of living with three generations of complicity in the theft of lives and land.”¹⁸ She goes on to say,

The poverty of dispossession is almost overwhelming. So is the poverty of complicity and guilt. In America, poverty is relative, but it still causes shame. That shame, combined with guilt and a feeling of powerlessness, creates an atmosphere in which hatred buds, blossoms, and flourishes. The hatred passes from father to son and from mother to daughter. Each generation feels the hatred and it penetrates deeper to justify a myth.¹⁹

These passages powerfully highlight the psychology of colonization by evoking an attitude about the moral culpability underlying American sensibilities that is common among Native critics, and indeed among many minority scholars. They also illustrate the workings of a national narrative predicated on the oppression of others. Much more is at work, however.

Ishkwegaabawiikwe implies that settlement inevitably results in poverty not only for the dispossessed, but also for the settlers themselves. This poverty is multivalent, transcending simple economics. It also affects the social perceptions of those directly or indirectly complicit in the suffering of others—a poverty of altruism and egalitarianism, so to speak.

The passages also highlight LaDuke's propensity for formulaic plot structures, for the language appears to be rather didactic. A similar style is used in other areas of the novel, which is most evident in dialogue. It is difficult to determine whether that didacticism is an authorial strategy or an unintended structural fallacy, and it is perhaps irrelevant to speculate. It holds a more specified importance in that one cannot decontextualize the didacticism from communitism. This point, of course, does not mean that didacticism and communitism are inseparable or that communitist methodologies are necessarily didactic. Rather, it indicates that communitism lends itself to didacticism and that didactic methodologies sometimes guide Native fiction that emphasizes community empowerment (Louis Owens, *Bone Game*; Lee Maracle, *Ravensong*; Paula Gunn Allen, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*). Didactic fictive qualities are, in the case of *Last Standing Woman*, a heavy-handed response to heavy-handed American imposition. LaDuke's critique of that imposition ultimately permits her to display more features of the Anishinaabe than of the settler community.

Furthermore, she is able to complicate colonial and indigenous interplay. It is one of the stronger qualities of *Last Standing Woman* that LaDuke avoids a simple oppressor/oppressed binary in describing Indian-white relations. Although real estate agents and government bureaucrats are rightly depicted without sympathy as conniving thieves, the white tenants of stolen land are shown to be unwitting victims of government treachery along with the Natives. In one scene where white farmers gather to discuss the fraudulent nature of their land purchases and the threat of Indian repatriation, it is made clear that the Natives are not the only victims of dishonesty: "It's not the Indians' fault,' John Makela said loudly from the midst of the murmurs and nods. He was a tall lanky man in a plaid shirt with rolled-up sleeves. The room went silent as all eyes turned to him. Forks now rested on plates. 'This has to do with the federal government screwing us all up, and they only just figured it out.'"²⁰ The reality that white farmers were also suffering does not preclude criticism of their role in land expropriation, though. Rather, it complicates simplistic historical valuations by showing colonialism to be a layered and complex process. As a result, an extensive groundwork exists for a nuanced look at the manner in which competing claims of indigeneity intersect with colonialism and resistance.

An analysis of those competing claims is further made possible by the novel's structure. The final section, "Journal of Ishkwegaabawiikwe," confirms that the novel, as a reflection of the Anishinaabe worldview, is intended to be cyclical rather than linear: "I do not believe that time is linear. Instead, I have come to believe that time is in cycles, and that the future is a part of our past and the past is a part of our future. Always, however, we are in new cycles. The cycles omit some pieces and collect other pieces of our stories and our lives."²¹

Ishkwegaabawikwe's proclamation is reminiscent of a personal philosophy LaDuke has expressed in the past. In an interview with the *Multinational Monitor*, she explains that "we have to figure out how to leave things alone, and build an economic system that's not built on a linear model, but instead on a cyclical model, because that's the natural world—it's cyclical and not linear. That is going to take a lot of transformation."²² LaDuke succeeded in transferring this sentiment into an artistic setting. A cyclical foundation is evident not only in unorthodox temporal designs that defy consistency on a linear scale, but also in the repetition of the name *Ishkwegaabawikwe* and the continuation of spiritual practices through the generations. The fight to reclaim land can also be seen as a perpetual cultural duty that necessitates continual resistance in cyclical form. In fact, it is most appropriate to conceptualize the novel's structure as a series of cycles—in the plural—because of its overlapping temporal sequences and intergenerational themes. Nothing, in other words, attaches neatly to anything else; the reader must complete a set of interconnected cycles in the form of flashbacks and flash-forwards before finding cohesion in the multivocal stories presented by the narrator.

Within these cycles, the aforementioned interplay finds ample expression. I will take a look at some of them now in a point-by-point fashion, placing emphasis on various forms of dialogue between the Anishinaabe and American nations.

DISPOSSESSION

The expropriation of Anishinaabe land was a complex and extensive process. Since the Anishinaabe nation once extended from throughout the Great Lakes region to the upper Plains, it is difficult to assess such broad historical dynamics in conjunction with any work of literary fiction. I am concerned with the scope of dispossession LaDuke presents in the text, which is essentially limited to White Earth. This dispossession occurs in a variety of ways, initiated by the ambitions of American expansionism, which, LaDuke indicates, is connected to capitalist voracity. (Dispossession in the novel is also a by-product of neocolonialism and corrupt tribal leadership, which will be treated in the next section.) Two conditions in particular are worth our attention: the encroachment of logging companies and the chicanery of white realtors who operate under the protection of American government officials.

The logging companies are shown to be purveyors of extraordinary destruction. That such a portrayal would appear in a LaDuke novel is hardly surprising since she has often expressed vitriol at their treachery. She notes, for instance, that Anishinaabe "lands were taken primarily by lumber companies. So the foundations of some great fortunes were based on somebody else's worth.... The miracle of America's prosperity was to the detriment of indigenous people."²³ This formulation is fictively illustrated in *Last Standing Woman*. It is explained that in the late 1980s "the tribal government had been lavishly entertained by a number of large corporations interested in logging the land and building a pulp plant expansion on the reservation. Finally,

Potlatch, a British conglomerate, leased almost half of the tribal land from the tribal government and entered an agreement to build a new mill.”²⁴ The expanded corporate involvement comes on the heels of a longstanding logging presence on the reservation: “After years of having trees and land stolen out from underneath their feet, giving away reservation land for logging and milling was the final straw.”²⁵

Readers are thus shown a set of conflicts bound to both biological and environmental factors. While the logging companies are portrayed as negative institutions, they are considered exemplars of ingenuity in the overarching American imagination. In keeping with realism, LaDuke recreates the ascendance of corporate culture into the American identity. In this national axiology, exploitation becomes normalized as a cultural enterprise. This cultural enterprise, however, lies in stark contrast to precontact Anishinaabe forms of egalitarian governance. Interplay, therefore, is rooted in incongruous worldviews and social systems. The result, according to LaDuke in an interview with Tim King, has been devastating: “Our land sustains our spirit.... The loss of our land has resulted in the loss of our traditional values.”²⁶ We can posit reasonably that since LaDuke’s primary concern is the recovery of that land—and, by extension, the accompanying traditional values—her fiction contains an activist aesthetics predicated on transforming commonsensical mores of the dominant culture. The aesthetics, to borrow a term from Edward Said, are contrapuntal insofar as they appropriate colonial discourse and expose its ethical fallacies. The use of an activist aesthetics has long been a fictive technique in Native America; to continue interrogating its underpinnings would help explicate crucial dialectical patterns in the literature arising from various Indian nations.

The expropriation of Native lands through unscrupulous realtors functions similarly, though without as much subtlety. In *Last Standing Woman*, questionable land sales are conducted mostly by Lucky Waller, who is referred to as a “land stealer.” When Mesabe and his wife, Equayzaince, visit Waller in 1916 to repay a monetary loan granted to Mesabe’s grandmother, Mindemoyen, they are treated to the nuances of American legality. Waller informs them that the money was not used for a loan, but as a land purchase:

“You keep that money,” Waller puffed. “It’s all taken care of.”

Mesabe insisted on paying back the money. He pushed the pile of fifty single dollar bills across the desk to Waller, but the speculator would not touch the money from the Indians.

“No, thank you,” Waller said, as if he was politely refusing an offer. “I bought that land, and I don’t intend to sell it back,” he said, impatiently stating his version of the obvious.²⁷

Mesabe later provides his version of the transaction: “She has not sold the land. She only borrowed money from you. Now we’re here to pay it back.”²⁸ Waller, however, has the legal leverage to retain the land not only because of the jurisprudence of the American legal system within which he works, but also because he tricked the non-English-speaking Mindemoyen into formalizing what she thought was simply a loan with her thumbprint. (The same thing

happened to LaDuke's own great-great-grandmother, who could not read or write English.)

Waller represents a system of ordinances alien to the Anishinaabeg. The concept of "law" is important here. Waller's ability to wrest land legally from the Natives through a ruse that is upheld by the tenets of American legality connotes, first and foremost, a divergence in worldviews.²⁹ This legality is both hierarchical and arbitrary. It is hierarchical because it forges legitimacy based on its ability to assert its hegemony forcefully; it is arbitrary because it works in the service of its own broader political ideology and imposes its will on reluctant subjects. Differences between Anishinaabe and American requirements for landholding often catalyze various conflicts throughout the text. The legal dialectic itself, in other words, is the conflict. It has no resolution based on negotiation as the Americans define it because that definition exists with its own peculiar legal features—legal features that can never be neutral because their creation can feasibly be attributed in part to a desire to expedite the process of land appropriation. And even when they nominally favor the return of land to Natives, state ideology and so-called national interest usually preclude legal obligation. LaDuke, in turn, employs a strategy of cultural and geographical restoration to counter these hegemonic maneuvers of the colonial power. She declines entry into the conceptual boundaries of American governance, preferring instead to empower the Anishinaabeg based on their own national imagination.

An attempt of this nature is never without difficulty. The United States is a reality that continually shapes the daily lives of its Native wards. Sensitive to this fact, LaDuke avoids expressions of nativism; instead, she enters into a textual dialectic with agents of the colonial culture. The cyclical structure of the novel allows her to draw meaningfully from the past in order to contextualize each moment of contestation in the present. The survival of the Anishinaabeg in the novel is thus constantly fluid and transformative. Such poetic strategies intersect with Craig Womack's "Red Stick" approach to Native literature, which assumes that "Indian viewpoints cohere, that Indian resistance can be successful, that Native critical centers are possible, that working from within the nation, rather than looking toward the outside, is a legitimate way of examining literature, that subverting the literary status quo rather than being subverted by it constitutes a meaningful alternative."³⁰

NEOCOLONIALISM

Neocolonialism has become a serious problem for numerous tribes. While certain Indian nations have managed to avoid neocolonialist leanings, others have recently experienced them in various ways as a consequence of their liberation movements. The Anishinaabeg are among the Indian nations to have splintered as a result of a corrupt or autocratic tribal government. The corruption of the Anishinaabe tribal council in the 1970s and 1980s was tied to economic benefits afforded the council by logging companies, against the wishes of the tribe itself.

Neocolonialism is almost always connected to disparate economic privilege, and its creation is a form of mimicry outfitted to whichever local condi-

tions give it definition. As Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman observe, neo-colonialism is a continued incursion of Western influence, even if Western occupiers have been physically removed from the indigenous landscape (which is not the case with any Native tribe). “This continuing Western influence,” they write, “located in flexible combinations of the economic, the political, the military and the ideological (but with an over-riding economic purpose), was named neo-colonialism by Marxists, though the term was quickly taken up by leaders of newly or soon to be independent countries. Although the name apparently privileges the colonial, the process itself can be seen to be yet another manifestation of imperialism.”³¹ The “manifestation of imperialism” evinced by the corrupt tribal government in *Last Standing Woman* arrives primarily in the form of corporate greed. Its pandering to the whims of lumber executives produces an archetypal class division in which members of the tribe lose resources without spiritual or monetary compensation while leaders in the position to make decisions grow disparately wealthy.

LaDuke depicts this economic and philosophical schism in relation to corporate exploitation. Lance Wagosh, the tribal chairman in the late 1980s, is shown to be little more than a lackey. When the tribe opposes the construction of new lumber mills, the tribal council assents nonetheless. The reason soon becomes obvious: “Money and favors for approving the new mill’s permit were already beginning to roll into the council. Lance Wagosh bought a brand spanking new, fully pinstriped, turquoise-colored Chevy extended-cab four-wheel-drive pickup truck, and a new sparkle-finish bass boat with a 150-horsepower Mercury outboard motor appeared on a trailer in the driveway of another representative’s house.”³² These events lead reservation activists to destroy logging equipment and occupy tribal headquarters.

In this sequence, the interplay between colonizer and colonized becomes layered and difficult to explicate as part of any formulaic theory. It is indicative of LaDuke’s sensibilities as a thinker that she chose to avoid simplistic social relationships that dichotomize conflicts into right/wrong binaries based solely on ethnic affiliation. She is more concerned with oppression and exploitation as ideological tools and political realities. Ethnicity, therefore, is never a prescriptive motivation for certain forms of behavior in the text. Since exploitation is made to be dynamic, the Anishinaabeg themselves, although the longstanding recipients of imperialism, are not automatically disqualified as oppressors by mere virtue of their tribal positioning. The loss of egalitarian integrity can be described as one of the more tragic results of colonization. In exposing Anishinaabe neocolonialism, LaDuke attempts to restore that egalitarian integrity by invoking cultural legacies and traditional governance as viable solutions to economic and environmental disarray.

In order to construct such propositions, LaDuke interrogates the assumptions underlying American social norms. Conceptions of “right” and “wrong” are predicated on ethical perceptions from within the colonial culture—it has the power to decide what type of behavior is accepted or censured, and can do so with support based on extensive strategies of citizen socialization. And it has the power to exercise oppression by force because it has been normalized as a commonsensical and necessary form of domestic order in the

American consciousness. For instance, the justifications issued by Wagosh for his behavior in the wake of the tribal offices takeover are premised not on his own actions, but on the perceived intransigence of the activists.³³ When asked by radio deejay Tim Harvala about why his own Anishinaabe subjects might take such drastic action, context is of no consequence to Wagosh, who ignores Harvala's prompts and instead deploys responses he feels will evoke a supportive response among American listeners. "'These people are terrorists. They are destroying federal and tribal property.' He paused. 'They have never clearly presented a grievance, and all we know is that they're violating the law.'"³⁴ Wagosh's testimony is supported by his lawyer, who remarks, "The point is ... they are breaking the law. You can see that for yourself, and you can't expect us to defend them."³⁵

The irony here is most likely intended. The point, of course, has nothing to do with whether or not the activists are breaking the law; it has everything to do, on the other hand, with their receiving adequate representation in momentous decisions made in their name without their support—decisions that benefit only a few at the expense of the environment and the struggle for self-determination. We can see in Wagosh's discourse the power of naming in the American colonial culture, which has evolved over time from a settler discourse into a national consciousness. That is to say, when Whites first arrived on Native land any resistance they met was conceptualized as terrorism; it is apparent in Wagosh's passage how this formula has survived into modernity essentially intact. Those who break the accepted status quo, even when that status quo is visibly unjust, are immediately dubbed *terrorists* or other pejorative designations. This culture is countered by a proactive social mobilization undertaken by the occupiers of the tribal offices. Occupation leader Elaine Mandamin, for instance, tells a different story: "The issues are always too complicated for the media to explain in fifty words or less so they just breeze over them. And the FBI isn't interested in letting our demands get out because public opinion might side with us. They prefer to just paint us as crazed terrorists." She later provides documentation "on how we lost the land and the legislation, the deal with Potlatch, the burial ground desecration, and what we know about the tribal government's collaboration. These are just the highlights."³⁶ The social action, we can see, is located in opposition to the commonplaces of the dominant culture. Even while it draws inspiration from indigenous traditions, then, it is firmly positioned in modernity, indicating the dynamic nature of both culture and cultural recovery.

It would be a mistake to view these interchanges simply as competing forms of discourse, even though in a limited sense they all are that. First of all, since *Last Standing Woman* is an activist treatise as well as work of literary fiction, I find it important to move beyond its vocabulary in analyzing its themes. More important, a discernible value judgment underlies the conflicts presented above. This fact will render untenable any analysis in which truth is relative as an object situated within socially constructed abstractions. In *Last Standing Woman*, a trenchant evaluation of who is acting justly—and whose actions are without justification—is essential to any critical dissemination of the text. If all actions are reduced to relativity, then no implication of the colo-

nial and neocolonial regimes will have enough currency to adequately represent the intentions of the author, which are geared in part toward social transformation. These oppositional but intertwined discourses, in short, are hierarchical throughout the novel. The first hierarchy is attached to power: in America's political culture, colonial discourse supercedes active Anishinaabe voices and has the ability to name and define resistance in negative terms. The more important hierarchy is attached to morality: in the novel's aesthetic structure, Anishinaabe voices are given textual authority and have the ability to rename and redefine colonial discourse based on the inherent strength of their resistance.

SOVEREIGNTY

These conflicts inevitably lead us to the question of sovereignty, perhaps the preeminent and most controversial issue in Native America today. Although the degree of sovereignty afforded each tribe in the United States varies, the Native struggle for sovereignty has generally produced mixed results replete with ironies. When a tribe, for example, wrests jurisdiction of its internal political affairs from American jurisprudence, its members often find that there is little recourse in the event of dishonest leadership because the American polity has been eliminated as a forum of contestation. Conversely, when the American polity plays a direct role in any tribe's internal political affairs, corruption and bureaucratic imposition compel that tribe to seek more self-determination, usually in the form of sovereignty. These issues are all related ultimately to the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, which granted tribal governments certain organizational power but also left the United States Department of the Interior as the responsible federal party for oversight in tribal resource management.

No assessment of dispossession and neocolonialism in *Last Standing Woman* can develop completely without a brief examination of the sovereignty problem. LaDuke, it should be mentioned, does not explicitly approach questions of sovereignty in the novel nor does she discuss them frequently in interviews or political writings. If we are to explore sovereignty in *Last Standing Woman*, then, it will be on the assumption that its unstated existence influences the conflicts among American officials, tribal authorities, and tribal activists. Since dispossession and neocolonialism in Native America are usually bound to the sovereignty question, it seems appropriate to conceptualize the land-reclamation struggle and tribal offices takeover to some degree as byproducts of ambivalence in regard to the utility and limitations of sovereignty at White Earth. This ambivalence has generated a lack of clarity in governmental jurisdiction and a layering in the relationship between Natives and whites.

For the Anishinaabe activists, the tribal offices takeover is the result of unavailable or intractable legal systems. The activists are marginalized in both American and Anishinaabe courts, left without legal recourse to successfully litigate their grievances. Some ironies ensue, the most relevant of which LaDuke makes clear. It is a measure of sovereignty that allows the tribal council to make momentous economic decisions of its own accord; ideally, these

decisions would be made in accordance with traditional Anishinaabe governance, wherein egalitarianism guides a collective decision-making process. However, the onset of neocolonialism, itself an outgrowth of colonization and dispossession, occasioned a mimicry of colonial influence, and thus the survival of colonization despite its changed dynamics. What allowed for the logging contract between the tribal council and the corporations, therefore, also disallows dissenting Anishinaabeg meaningful representation to contest agreements that will harm the tribe and its surrounding environment. Lance Wagosh makes this clear when he explains to the activists, "We have the authority to negotiate and sign leases."³⁷ The activists, lacking the ability to challenge injustice in the colonial or tribal courts, subsequently circumvent standard legal procedures and seek to expand participatory options through direct action rather than acquiesce to the existent social and legal norms. In essence, they attempt to reformulate the institution of sovereignty and strip it of its counterproductive ironies.

In reformulating this institution, sovereignty as a concept and legal procedure comes into question. Judging by the actions and goals of the Protect Our Earth Coalition, LaDuke conceives of sovereignty outside the boundaries of legal interchange. Rather, it exists in the imagination, in memory, and in tradition. In *Last Standing Woman*, sovereignty ceases to remain a complex and often intractable controversy and is instead carried into alternate dimensions. The importance of the sovereignty issue is evident in a statement Warren Wabun issues to reporters during the occupation: "This is our survival." In fact, LaDuke probably avoids the word totally even while dealing explicitly with its reverberations because she is more concerned with self-determination and independence. Both would be inherent in any ideal sovereignty but are rarely realized in actuality among tribes either aspiring to or having acquired sovereign status. The type of self-determination and independence LaDuke advocates includes protection of the environment (flora and fauna), reinvention of Anishinaabe traditions, and education promoting collective Anishinaabe interests.

To attain self-determination and independence, three things must be challenged and ultimately eliminated: 1) sovereignty that privileges certain tribal demographics at the expense of others, to the detriment of tribal peoples as a whole; 2) the continued existence of neocolonialists who are given credence in the colonial culture as tribal voices but act in reality as mouthpieces for that culture's interests; and 3) the degradation of "bones of the past" and the lack of human voices to recite life-bearing stories out of slumber and into existence. In the novel, the dialogue between colonizer and Native is invariably rerouted along this path by Native characters who tacitly reinforce Anishinaabe worldviews by defining those worldviews in opposition to foreign philosophies forced on them by agents of American imperialism.

ANTHROPOLOGY

LaDuke's writing is generally forthright, but complex enough to furnish the realistic tone with a poetic counterpoint to social commentary. In one area,

however, the tone lapses into heavy-handed realism. The section that introduces anthropologist Dr. Ales Hrdlicka is replete with blunt commentary ridiculing the early anthropological enterprise.³⁸

It is no surprise that LaDuke forfeits subtlety in discussing early twentieth-century anthropology. What can be described as disdain often marks opinions of anthropology among Indians of all tribes. Even Anishinaabe author, poet, and scholar Gerald Vizenor, usually playful and sardonic, speaks of anthropologists with scorn. When asked by A. Robert Lee “Why have you been so fierce in the views you have entertained about anthropology?,” Vizenor replies,

I have not been fierce enough about anthropology. There are no measures of fierceness that could be reparations for the theft of native irony, humor, and original stories. There’s not enough time to be critical of the academic enterprise of cultural anthropology. This work that plagues every native in the universe is despicable; it’s only in the interests of profits and power that these studies and simulations of culture are given institutional authority. Cultural anthropologists pose with their booty, and universities honor these academic predators with advanced degrees, and then they go out to create even more anthropologists to study natives and others around the world. Imagine that injustice in the name of higher education and academic ethics. Consider the arrogance of a culture that believes in outside experts, the experts who create simulations, and consider a culture that believes in such experts over natives, over the wit and wisdom of native stories, and the cultural predators who reduce the original, mythic, and ironic perceptions of natives to mere material evidence.³⁹

We can consider this passage broadly representative of the way western anthropology is received in the field of Native American Studies.

LaDuke’s fictive representation of Hrdlicka and his anthropologic theories is no less scornful. The Natives themselves, many of whom were issued threats to their livelihood if they refused to cooperate with Hrdlicka’s research, consider him a charlatan whose methodology approaches outright insanity. One Indian summarizes Hrdlicka’s findings with a mixture of shock and amusement: “The doctor man says I am a full blood and my brother is a mixed blood.”⁴⁰ Mindemoyen, a full blood, is given a similar diagnosis: “You will be happy to know that you are of mixed blood descent.”⁴¹ Her response is typical of other Anishinaabeg who are offended by the doctor’s physical violations: “‘*Chimookomaan geveenadis,*’ she gasped. ‘The white man is crazy.’”⁴²

The introduction of anthropology at White Earth is a scientific counterpart to the ascendance of American law. Both were foreign to the Anishinaabeg but managed nevertheless to impose themselves on the tribe. The anthropological complex is easier to analyze than either neocolonialism or American legalism because its foundations are mired in racist notions of biological determinism; it is therefore unethical by mere virtue of its pseudo-scientific manifestations. More crucial, though, the emergence of anthropol-

ogists signaled the depredation of sacred ground, including the theft of tribal relics and skeletal remains. The interaction of anthropologists with Indians in *Last Standing Woman* traverses legalism, discourse, and culture and forces readers to consider also the corporeal effects of colonization. These interactions apply to the living and the deceased.

In the novel, the appearance of Hrdlicka and his racist methodologies not only represents actual history, but is also symbolic of a physical violation that compromised the spatial integrity of the Anishinaabeg (the same can be said of diseases such as smallpox and tuberculosis). His foreign inscriptions on the indigenous body are characteristic of an altered landscape—both geographically and bodily. The removal of bones from the landscape is also relevant to this point. This type of desecration is related to western scientific inquiry, which has a long history of physical violation well beyond Native America. (It played out gruesomely during the Holocaust, for instance.) Years after his visit Hrdlicka is exposed as a fraud, and in the 1990s Moose Hansford, a reservation activist working in response to the 1990 Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act, volunteers to transport ancestors' bones from the Smithsonian back to White Earth for ceremonial reburial. In this case, the resistance outlasts injustice and LaDuke manages to impose resolution on the conflict.

Colonial and indigenous interplay, then, is less complicated in this instance. Anthropological science is heavy-handed and un-nuanced, and the ridicule of that science is equally forthright. Readers are consequently presented with a binary in which ethical sensibilities are mobilized to reject unjust scientific inquiry. In the battle of moral integrity, as in the battle for the physical relics and bones themselves, the Anishinaabe narrative prevails.

The critique presented above is relatively simplistic, illustrating opposing ethical axioms and explicating LaDuke's either/or challenge to readers, in which she impels those readers into a proactive stance based on the moral strength of the Anishinaabe position. This interpretation is offered in the spirit of LaDuke's aesthetic peculiarities in that section of the novel. To make the reading more interesting, one might explore LaDuke's own role as an author vis-à-vis anthropology. Her history as an expatriate who decided to return to White Earth and become active in its political affairs can place her own authority in question with political opponents and skeptical critics alike. Such a critique is not offered in order to further obfuscate academic debates about authority and identity; rather, it reflects an issue LaDuke herself explores subtly in the text.

One scene in particular captures the ambivalence of LaDuke's positioning as a simultaneous insider and outsider to Anishinaabe culture. After FBI agents fire upon Alanis Nordstrom during the occupation, the following scene transpires:

Willie [Schneider] picked her up, and she stammered at him, half angry, half hysterical, telling him what had just happened as if he did not know. "Why did they shoot at me?" she demanded of Willie, who looked blankly back at her and saw a face flushed with fury and fear.

“Why did they shoot at me? I am not...” she almost said *I am not one of you*, and then caught herself [emphasis in original].⁴³

Alanis, through a gradual process of reassimilation, eventually realizes that she is, in fact, an Anishinaabe, and ultimately integrates herself into White Earth culture, during which her self-professed outsider perspective diminishes over time. She marries Willie and, in a rather heavy-handed exposition of LaDuke’s sentiments regarding her own belonging at White Earth, gives birth to the third Ishkwegaabawiikwe, the narrator/storyteller of *Last Standing Woman*.

While this sequence provides the novel with a necessary plot resolution, the type of transformation Alanis undergoes is never so simple in actuality for diasporic Natives. Whereas the White Earth Anishinaabeg readily accept Alanis in the book, most tribes across the United States employ more stringent, albeit unofficial (i.e., grassroots) standards in bestowing insider status on those who grew up removed from the tribe and its primary landbase. The particulars of this phenomenon, of course, depend on each tribe and its social habits, but it is not inaccurate to suggest that in general a large number of Indians are tacitly wary of those who grew up in diaspora or in urban centers. One’s position of enunciation and one’s ability to speak for the group are in great debate in all aspects of modern Native studies.

The controversy about insider status is broadly connected to the history of anthropologists on reservations. The racist presuppositions anthropologists brought to and extracted from Indian country continue to reverberate both on and off the reservation. They have largely become normalized as common knowledge in America’s popular culture, consigned to continual dialogue with the resistant voices arising from Native America. Moreover, early anthropological paradigms have been sporadically internalized—either deliberately or unwittingly—by a number of Natives themselves, resulting in something of an unconscious anthropology, a mimicry of colonial knowledge under the guise of authenticity that is given credence in the dominant society but rejected as inauthentic on the reservation. LaDuke’s political opponents on and off White Earth can surely use this phenomenon to damage her authorial credibility, and any Native author is aware of the often contentious dynamics that mark popular and scholarly receptions of Indian literature. Given all these factors, LaDuke’s position is worth attention, not simply because the field of Native studies places emphasis on these matters, but because it is something LaDuke herself incorporates into the structure of *Last Standing Woman*.

We can see that LaDuke, particularly in the case of Alanis, contests the standard perceptions of authenticity in Native America and attempts to preempt any accusation that she is an interloper. Because she understands the sensitivity to external epistemological impositions on the reservation, she avoids playing the role of unconscious anthropologist by providing the narrative with layered voices that supplement the recitation of Ishkwegaabawiikwe’s story. She thus creates a novel whose philosophical underpinnings are given to the narrator and the characters for articulation. Because of the novel’s structural nuance, LaDuke manages to position herself as an observer who

endeavors to chronicle and not lecture. Textual authority is relegated to Ishkwegaabawiikwe, and the tribe, by virtue of LaDuke's recreation of actual events, retains the capacity to disseminate its history on its own terms. The current dearth of criticism, even among Anishinaabe scholars, makes it difficult to discern whether LaDuke succeeded in diminishing her authority by producing a communal text, for judgment of this attempt can come only when numerous Anishinaabe readers speak about them. It is notable, however, that LaDuke deliberately avoids expressions of unconscious anthropology, preferring instead to recapitulate, with aesthetic markers, the unfolding of Indian-white relations in overlapping patterns.

The appearance of Ales Hrdlicka, then, mitigates any impulse to implicate the Anishinaabe characters who evince latent tendencies to appropriate American discourse as a moral stimulus. So heavy-handed is Hrdlicka's methodology that he acts as the center from which subsequent cultural conflicts emanate. The interplay is, in the end, multivalent: rather than existing as a linear arena for binaristic exchange, Indian-white dialogue is perpetually fluid, cyclical like the text from which it derives its layered expression.

CONCLUSION: COLONIAL AND INDIGENOUS INTERPLAY

The lament of every traditional critic is the lack of space with which to work. As a result, important poetic and political features are inevitably omitted in the explication of literary works. These omissions are true here as well. One is able to approach *Last Standing Woman* from any number of perspectives. I have focused mainly on the interplay between Natives and whites at the expense of other textual elements. The main reason for this methodology is because cultural and political interaction is featured prominently in the novel. Moreover, it is crucial for critics of indigenous literatures to continue unearthing relevant colonial patterns as they are articulated in creative forums. Finding these patterns not only helps us better understand the texts themselves, but also elicits important sociopolitical knowledge and offers the possibility of international dialogue among indigenous groups.

As the above analysis indicates to some degree, in a communitist novel like *Last Standing Woman* the act of creating fiction conditions the history incorporated into that fiction, while the history allows the fiction to be located in a particular space and time. LaDuke's approach, then, complicates distinctions between myth, legend, and history. Every theme, no matter its primary intent, serves to dissolve the social categories so prevalent in Euro-America. The result is a rich depiction of Anishinaabe life that incorporates individual components of existence into the communal whole. Furthermore, we can see in *Last Standing Woman* that conflicting political, social, and cultural narratives foreground much of the action, a realistic strategy often employed in Native fiction. LaDuke, however, avoids using negotiation as the catalyst for resolution. Rather, she creates ethical boundaries that also act as the groundwork of respective national imaginations. The conflict between Natives and whites, in other words, is presented as a struggle between two nations, and LaDuke is interested in assisting the Anishinaabeg in the full

restoration of their self-determination. She constructs persuasive ethical markers throughout the novel to assist in this task. These are not, it should be mentioned, ethno-ethical markers; when Native characters collaborate either physically or philosophically with colonizers, the same type of condemnation is applied to them. In fact, neocolonialism is an area of Native literary criticism that has received little attention, despite the fact that Indian collaborators fill the pages of Native fiction. Other aspects of cultural and political interplay also remain attenuated in certain areas. Ultimately, applying focused criticism to interchange rooted in conflict can greatly assist the desire among critics worldwide to fully demarcate and understand the scope and effects of imperialism and garrison occupation.

Although *Last Standing Woman*, like all novels, is unique, the motivations underpinning much of the narrative are not. Much literature produced by writers of color explores and questions the conventional dichotomy between fiction and history. I have situated some of my criticism in a postcolonial framework, but a more appropriate site of analysis remains what is usually dubbed ethnic studies, disciplines that explore the history, politics, and literature of particular ethnic groups with emphasis on internally constructed critical paradigms. In the African American, Asian American, and Arab American traditions, novelists commonly employ historical aesthetics in order to dissolve the boundaries between sociology and creative expression. A reading of Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* or Toni Cade Bambara's *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, for instance, will show that the authors raise similar questions about the relationships among the novel, the oral tradition, and the historical text. In Native America, various novels also raise those questions, among them Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon*, and Leanne Howe's *Shell Shaker*. We are thus able to situate *Last Standing Woman* in a particular tradition of narrative fiction found in the canons of other ethnic groups.

Most important, we are able to learn about respect, survival, and preservation from a nation still struggling for full independence. LaDuke herself puts it best:

"In our case, we're a forced culture. The Creator gave the Anishinaabeg people an immensely biodiverse forest. And he said, 'Within this forest you will find all of your medicines. All the things you need to make your houses. All the foods you will need to sustain your families. The materials for all the baskets and other objects of amazing beauty that you can make. You can fashion all of those things from this land, upon which I'm putting you. Your job, though, is to take care of that which I gave you. You have a good life. You have to take care of those responsibilities yourself, because I gave you the ability to think.' That is in essence our teaching."⁴⁴

NOTES

1. LaDuke receives frequent mention in more marginal publications such as *Ms.* and *The Progressive* but has also been profiled in mainstream giants like *Time* and *People*.

2. Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999).

3. The most notable critical study to date has been Jean Strandness, "When the Windigo Spirit Swept Across the Plains...: Ojibway Perceptions of the Settlement of the Midwest," *Midamerica: The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature* 25 (1998).

4. James Ruppert, "Mediation in Contemporary Native American Writing," in *Native American Perspectives on Literature and History*, ed. Alan R. Velie and Gerald Vizenor (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 7–24.

5. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*, 10.

6. Sonya Paul and Robert Perkinson, "The *Progressive* Interview: Winona LaDuke," *The Progressive*, October 1995, 39.

7. Melissa L. Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 3.

8. *Ibid.*, 36–37.

9. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*, 102.

10. Meyer, *White Earth Tragedy*, 2.

11. According to historians Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, the causes of war extended beyond "cultural conflict" and can be largely attributed to government treachery. They write, "Added to the problems growing out of cultural conflict was the failure of reservation administrators to meet the obligations incurred in government treaties. Too few schools were built or teachers provided, and instruction in farming was insufficient. Goods intended for allotments turned up for sale at exorbitant prices in traders' stores where desperate Indians purchased them on credit, thereby creating yet another trader's claim against annuities. A corrupt Office of Indian Affairs did nothing; on the contrary, by allowing inflated claims to be assessed against the annuities earmarked for a whole band, the Office made matters worse." See Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 19.

12. The Nelson Act laid the groundwork for the creation of the White Earth Reservation.

13. Basil Johnston, *The Manitous* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), xx.

14. See Margaret Nelson and Marjorie Rosen, "Friend of the Earth," *People*, 28 November 1994, 149.

15. Paul and Perkinson, "The *Progressive* Interview," 37.

16. Weaver notes that communitism "is formed by a combination of the words 'community' and 'activism.' Literature is communitist to the extent that it has a proactive commitment to Native community, including what I term the 'wider community' of Creation itself. In communities that have too often been fractured and rendered dysfunctional by the effects of more than 500 years of colonialism, to promote communitist values means to participate in the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them," Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xiii.

17. Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995), 123.
18. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*, 126.
19. *Ibid.*, 126.
20. *Ibid.*, 137.
21. *Ibid.*, 299.
22. "Native Struggles for Land and Life: An Interview with Winona LaDuke," *Multinational Monitor*, 23 December 1999.
23. *Ibid.*, 20.
24. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*, 147.
25. *Ibid.*, 147.
26. Tim King, "Native Americans Take Back Land," *The Progressive*, 14 August 1994.
27. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*, 89.
28. *Ibid.*, 89.
29. In her interview with *The Progressive*, LaDuke forthrightly calls the difference in worldviews to our attention. When speaking of the battles waged by the White Earth Land Recovery Project to reclaim stolen land, she invokes the hierarchy of legal privilege: "We have fought for a long time to get back our land and have not had that much success in the legal system. To be honest with you, I think that's because we're kind of in the court of the thief." In fact, the land reclamation struggle has had only limited success: "We haven't had success in getting [the government] to return much land. They have returned 10,000 of the 250,000 acres which they have."
30. Craig Womack, *Red on Red* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12.
31. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, "Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 3.
32. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*, 149.
33. LaDuke does not employ imaginative artistic license in depicting a takeover of tribal headquarters. It actually happened at White Earth in 1986, for reasons nearly identical to those presented in the novel. During that time, more than five hundred people were arrested.
34. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*, 169.
35. *Ibid.*, 169.
36. *Ibid.*, 179.
37. *Ibid.*, 219.
38. Like other characters in the novel, Dr. Ales Hrdlicka was an actual person whose real name is used in the novel. Melissa Meyer recounts some of Hrdlicka's undertakings on the reservation: "In 1916, Dr. Hrdlicka traveled to the White Earth Reservation with Commissioner Robert C. Bell to gather further evidence for his anthropometric inquiry [a theory that claimed to distinguish scientifically full-bloods from mixed-bloods]. They drove from home to home to examine individual Indians whose status was in question, directing special attention to 'the skin of the body, especially that of the chest, to the hair and eyes, physiognomy and a number of other features, such as the nails, gums and teeth.' One test Hrdlicka employed 'consisted of drawing with some force the nail of the fore-finger over the chest' which created a 'reddening, or hyperaemia, along the lines drawn.' Supposedly, mixed bloods' skin reacted more vividly—unless they were anemic" (168).

39. Gerald Vizenor and A. Robert Lee, *Postindian Conversations* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 90.
40. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*, 64.
41. *Ibid.*, 65.
42. *Ibid.*, 65.
43. *Ibid.*, 186.
44. "Native Struggles for Land and Life," 23.