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Narrative Mediatics and Environmental Ethics: A Historico-cultural Mise-en-intrigue in Some Native American Docudramas

Rabia Aamir

rabiya.aamir@gmail.com

National University of Modern Languages

Article

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Narrative Mediatics and Environmental Ethics: A Historico-cultural Mise-en-intrigue in Some Native American Docudramas

Abstract

The image of a stereotypical American Indian entity and the sad demise of this noble savage increasingly got normalized in the twentieth century. However, the historical and contemporary facts about American and Canadian First Nations state a different perspective. While the mediatic theoretical model of a vanishing Indian start, roughly speaking, from films like The Indian Wars Refought (1914) and the 1925 movie The Vanishing American, the existence of American Indians helps us understand the implications of these and other narrative mediatics. This paper studies how the auteurs of some docudramas navigate through the mediatics of ecriture with the perspective of environmentally ethical mise-en-intrigue about the Native Americans. Using the theoretical nexus of docudrama, narrative mediatics, and environmental ethics, this paper discusses five docudramas as case studies. Tracing the trajectory of a symbiosis between a conceived idea's writing and its media representation, this research examines how resilience and environmental ethics are recurring patterns in the mise-en-intrigue or story-making of the narrative media in selected Native American documentaries. The invoked environmental ethics in these docudramas may serve as a historically informed environmentalism for other lands and consequently aim for a balanced and sustainable future of all sorts of existence on earth.

Keywords: historico-cultural, Native American, postcolonial docudrama, environmental ethics, narrative mediatics

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Prologue: Tracing the Shared Vision

...palms together/ in a shared prayer…/ you and me and Billy Jack, / a place called the United States of America. / Now we have been here long enough, and soon/ we will stand up, pay our bill, walk out/ the door and leave it all behind us. It's time/ and I've got news for everyone else/ so they won't be surprised when they go to Heaven: God has dark skin.

Silent films of the early twentieth century like *The Indian Wars Refought* (1914), depicted the 1890 Massacre at Wounded Knee as a battle rather than an outright massacre, while *The Vanishing American* (1925), owing to "[b]iological determinism [as] a major underlying theme reflected throughout the film", showed the American Indian identity in a patronizingly pseudo-sympathetic light. And the rest, as they say, is history! A whole generation of people, all across the globe, internalized the concept of a Red Indian and the white man as a messiah for safeguarding the rights and sustenance of the civilized world. Such stories about the already living people before European colonialism, the native inhabitants of this land, not only played a pivotal role in shaping our recent history over the last 500 years but have also considerably changed our world views ever since.

Taking five docudramas and documentaries as case studies, this research offers an exploration how the narratives of these mediatic docudramas relate to the environmental ethics mandatory for our life on this planet. The storytelling of these First Nations or Haudenosaunee Confederacy in the docudramas of the second and third decades of this century offers an informed narrative media technique for decolonizing the dominant tropes that may be adapted in other similar realms. The intersection of private ambition and public action in these docudramas, resulting in public knowledge and memory through their mise-en-intrigues or plots, extends the argument of this project into the theoretical imports of environmental ethics. As Amerindian identities are an integral part of one of the most powerful nations of the contemporary world, studying the environmental ethical dimensions of mise-en-intrigues or plots of these documentaries may be helpful for an informed sustenance of our planet. This paper, therefore, aims to offer a balanced critique by studying the environmental ethics of the American Indian presence on American soil. Despite the oppression they have been withstanding, these natives still have to offer a peaceful foresight for a sustained and all-inclusive life in our world.

A review of research on Native Indian literature makes us come across works like Joseph L. Coulombe's *Reading Native American Literature* (2011), offering "non-Native readers new pathways toward an ethical engagement with Native texts and the tribal cultures from which they stem". For the last forty years, or even more, "Native authors have commanded a large and growing audience," fostering "intersections of thought to educate a predominantly white audience regarding American Indian opinions and experiences". Similarly, A. Lynn Smith's *Memory Wars: Settlers and Natives Remember Washington's Sullivan Expedition of 1779* discusses how "individual elements consistently reproduced narratives of Native elimination and settler-colonist replacement emerged from localized white settler commitments" . A Yale University Professor of History, a Tuscarora (one of the six Haudenosaunee nations), provides a Haudenosaunee perspective on land cessation and Native Indian relations with the government. She debates the Christian missionary presence in the Buffalo Creek region. Some historians and anthropologists argue that it is time Native American story be told before unwittingly commemorating Washington's Sullivan Expedition of 1779. We are reminded that 'George Washington commanded General John Sullivan to attack Six Nations dwellings, crops, and orchards with the stated objective of causing "total destruction and devastation"'. And so, by not telling the Sullivan story, Ganondagan, a State Historic Site located in Victor, NY, dedicated to a Native American theme, 'is able to tell so

much more' . Subsequently, A. Lynn Smith argues through her book that 'Seneca, Haudenosaunee, and Native American land loss was not limited to one period of time, but has been a long-term process involving more people than just John Sullivan'. In more recent works, a professor and a critic, Michael John Witgen's book, *Seeing Red: Indigenous Land, American Expansion, and the Political Economy of Plunder in North America*, examines "both the expansionist agenda of the United States and Anishinaabe peoples' efforts to resist and survive in a rapidly changing world". Serving as a background for this study, a survey of contemporary Native American literature helps us to contextualize the five-century-old settler colonialism, older than the settler colonialism in the realms of Kashmir and Palestine.[i] Subsequently, the paper contextualizes its argument on some selected docudramas for its inquiry into the American Indian realms.

Besides many other works, the story begins with the narrative of books like Napoleon Chagnon's *The Fierce People* (1968). Chagnon's book comes out in 1968, while record fixing books such as *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969) are relegated back from the mainstream readership. One of *The New York Times Magazine* articles discusses some reasons for Chagnon being perceived as one of the 'most maligned' anthropologists in his article "How Napoleon Chagnon Became Our Most Controversial Anthropologist." This argument is validated by environmental correspondents like Paul Brown who trace the 'astonishing story of genetic research on humans' resulting in declarative narrative about the Yanomami people as *The Fierce People.* Such noxious human experiments (that took around ten years to uncover) carried out on thousands of South American Indians included, but were not limited to infecting them with measles, causing the death of hundreds. US scientists conducted this experiment to prove the Race Theory and to study the effects on primitive societies of natural selection. The scientists gave clear instructions to the paramedics not to give any medicines to the dying Indians but only to record the epidemic .

But we may say that the story of this land and identity appropriation starts from the cinematic depictions. If we jump cut to the 1950s after the decade of the 1920s, we come across the 1951 movie, *Distant Drums,* 'often brilliantly succeed[ing] in perpetuating the centuries-old ignorance of the great ecological and environmental importance of the region.' At one point in the movie, the white male protagonist is shown to have made a magnanimous gesture, the obfuscation of which may be stated as: 'For 1950s audiences, like the 1840s soldiers Wyatt pardons, the true menace is a misguided sense of white privilege' . Therefore, building an argument about the exploitations of the native populations, this paper attempts to theorize about the stereotyping of American Indian identity in contemporary times as an implonialism, a phenomenon that has borrowed some tropes from colonialism but has much more to its constitution. Making use of Stanley Vestal's theorizing of the trope of 'The Hollywooden Indian' in his 1936 article, I further argue that these ideological chronicles about the American Indian identity manifested in the politics of film and narrative media of the twentieth century are post-truths that need to be investigated in order to understand the implicit implonialism in the mediatic encounters of the twentieth century. The selected docudramas for this study may offer an alternate episteme for a balanced point of view.

We need to underscore what Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues in his book, *Decolonising the University: The Challenge of Deep Cognitive Justice*, where he says, 'if we still choose to formulate our problems in the modern Western way, we are bound to conclude that we face modern problems for which there are no modern solutions'. In other words, it may be of avail to aim for social and environmental justice to combat 'the stereotypical representations of the past, and suggest ways we can see American Indians and indigenous peoples more clearly in the twenty-first century'. Instead of accepting the trope of 'the fierce people' as gospel, perhaps we need to look at the alternate narrative of people like Davi

Kopenawa (Bruce Albert, Anglicized name) who writes in his book, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*:

> The Indians begin to realize how the intensification of gold prospecting in the forest is affecting them. The rivers are polluted, game is becoming scarce, and infectious diseases are spreading. Endemic malaria and pneumonia associated with continual flu epidemics are decimating communities located near gold prospecting sites. The Indians now view their demands for clothing, tools, ammunition, and food as necessary compensation for the harm caused by the intruders.

Therefore, this research attempts to decolonize the leitmotifs of Red Indian apologia, which seems to be, advertently or inadvertently, working in collusion with a nascent stereotyping that has its roots in recent history. Since, 'Western knowledge and science are "beneficiaries" of the colonization of indigenous peoples' (Smith 1999, 59), it is mendatory not to buy into the 'doctrine of Manifest Destiny'. Instead of demonstrating that 'we are our own worst enemies', perhaps it is time to move towards a balanced and environmentally ethical understanding of human existence.

In her Harvard Tanner Lecture, entitled "On Resilience: A Capacity to Absorb Disturbances and Shocks," Margaret Redsteer, a former research scientist for the US Department of the Interior and the United States Geological Survey, reiterates resilience as a basis of a balanced human existence. According to her, 'people are seeking resilience as an inherent property of an object or a group to hold up under stress. Resilience is central to the many ways that indigenous knowledge is practiced by native people'. Therefore, when we increasingly come across 'excessive and reckless exploitation of natural resources, the ecological catastrophe, the nuclear threat, the destruction of the ozone layer, and the emergence of biotechnology, of genetic engineering and the consequent conversion of the human body into the ultimate commodity' , we need to be reminded of the words of the medicine men like Mad Bear Anderson: 'I also realized that there was one main principle, one paramount rule, basic to the continuing survival of humankind—basic even, perhaps, to the continuation of a living planet. Do not be competitive. Do not compete for survival. Compete, combat, and die. Cooperate, cultivate, and live' . Otherwise, it will be as the Yanomami Shaman says: 'We warned you about the climate crisis. We asked you to protect the forest. You didn't listen. And now it may be too late'. It may, therefore, be more pragmatic to study the chronicles put forth by some chiefs like Red Cloud (1822-1909), Black Elk (1863-1950), Crazy Horse (1840-1877), and the basic principles of American Indian existence.

Theoretical Bricolage

Taking precedence from 'Indigenous Standpoint Theory' developed in the book, *Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines* while recognizing the importance of 'limits and possibilities' of an Indigenous 'agency' ; or re-examining Indigenous 'relationships to human communities as well as to the natural world' that are 'culturally specific and applicable' ; or Faye D. Ginsburg through her influential concepts of 'embedded aesthetics' ; or as Robert Stam argues in his book, *Indigeneity and the Decolonizing Gaze Transnational Imaginaries, Media Aesthetics, and Social Thought* wherein he states: 'Indigenous thought…can help us reenvision the origins and the antidotes to all these crises'; this research offers an episteme of decoloniality by suggesting a theoretical intervention in a neologized portmanteau, 'implonialism.' I argue that implonialism is a combination of colonial imperialism, fascism, and despotism, and therefore, using a post-implonial lens into the narrative mediatics of some filmic depictions of the twentieth century may be helpful. The stereotypical representation of Amerindians juxtaposed with their narrative in the docudramas selected for this study may

offer an environmentally ethical decolonial understanding of the American Indian realms with an 'epistemic humility'.

To carry out this epistemic inquiry into the mise-en-intrigue of the selected visuals for this research, an overview of the methodology may be stated as follows. To adapt a story (fabula) into some medium of presentation is the 'materiality of media.' This materiality calls for a transversal discipline of 'narrative mediatics' . Dealing with 'questions of intermediality, transécriture, and transmediatization,' narrative mediatics studies the 'encounter of a narrative project [or] a story not yet fixed within a definitive matter of expression' and gives it a suitable medium of expression. Subsequently, coherent story-making or mise-en-intrigue is one of the inherent elements of this narrative mediatics. This mise-en-intrigue is a 'second mimesis' as some may argue. The suggested docudramas may be a good starting point. While 'the processes of fictionalization, the phenomenology of reading, and the modes of participation in the two media are quite different', extending the study of different forms of literature into the genre of docudramas may be helpful to re-create the memories of the past. As Steven L. Lipkin argues in his book, *Docudrama Performs the Past: Arenas of Argument in Films based on True Stories*: 'docudramatic re-creation warrants its representation by performing a memory of the past' . The selected celluloid docudramas serve as primary sources for study in this research, whereas other mediatic depictions are discussed as secondary sources.

Finally, to see the selected five docudramas from the theoretical lens of environmental ethics, it may be of use to familiarize ourselves with certain key terms of this theoretical model. To begin with, we need to understand the difference between environmentalism and environmental ethics. As argued, 'environmentalism is a concern "aimed at protecting the environment." However, its extended meaning is a "theory that environment, as opposed to heredity, has the primary influence on the development of a person or group"' (Aamir 2023, 32-36). Therefore, an 'environmental ethic is an ethical statement of facts about a space invoking a historically informed environmentalism that would aim for a balanced and sustainable future of all sorts of existence on our earth' (Aamir 2023, 5-6). In other words, if an ethicist wants 'to know not only which things are right or wrong, good or bad, but also what makes them that way', an environmental ethicist aims at not only ameliorating the existing environment but also goes into the root cause of the issues and tries to find solutions for all existing beings. When we say all existing beings, it implies that an engagement with the Eastern epistemic tradition (which the American Indians propagate) entails anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric paradigms without jeopardizing the benefit of one for the loss of the other. Therefore, a balanced environmental ethicist will look at the holistic picture rather than its discrete parts.

Linda Robyn, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Northern Arizona University, draws our attention to an important phenomenon when she argues 'that environmental policy often ignores or even criminalizes the traditional knowledge of Native peoples.' This, for her, is 'a form of environmental injustice'. Similarly, a bioecologist and ecological economist talks about an important aspect of environmental ethics. In his article, "Sustainable Development: Economic Myths and Ecological Realities," he avers that 'a new model of economics is needed if we are to do justice to environmental values. We must realize that the environment is capital, which is nonrenewable. Then we must learn to live off the interest—not depleting the capital but holding it in perpetuity'. Using traditional knowledge and considering environment as capital may be the starting points to address the mores in the upcoming discussions related to our topic.

Native American Voice and Some Twenty-First Century Docudramas

This section analyses the visual texts of five selected docudramas and documentaries for this paper. *1491: The Untold Story of the Americas Before Columbus* (2017) is a docudrama TV series that was aired in 2017 and is now available as a complete three-hour-long docudrama entitled *The Hidden Mysteries of Ancient Native American Civilizations | 1491: Before Columbus | Timeline* (2023). This docudrama is based on Charles C. Mann's 2005 award-winning book *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus.* For the screen, this docudrama is written by Barbara Hagar and is narrated by Dr. Evan Adams. Besides this docudrama, the other documentaries discussed here are, *America's Great Indian Nations - Full Length Documentary* (2013), *The Indigenous People of America – Documentary* (2019), *Broken Treaties (Full Documentary) | Oregon Experience | OPB* (2020), and *Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding Schools* (2023). Besides these primary texts, several other documentaries are being aired increasingly in the twenty-first century that ratify the mise-en-intrigue of these documentaries and docudramas.

America's Great Indian Nations: An Overview of the Native American Plight

In the 2013 celluloid depiction of Native American experience, *America's Great Indian Nations*, we are told right in the offset of the docudrama that the newfound world that Columbus discovered was, in fact, an ancient place where the 'Indios,' as Columbus would call them, had lived for thousands of years. Their ancestors came here after crossing the 'land bridge from Asia to discover a continent ruled by glaciers and great-horned bison. [And] when the ice melted, nomadic tribes pushed southward into the green heart of the continent, following the stars, the seasons, and the herds.' The Taino Indians of the Caribbean, on their part, thought that Columbus and his sailors were gods who had come from heaven . However, they did not know that their peaceful kingdom would be shattered by disease, slavery, torture, and war. Columbus' perception about these native people is also quoted in Dee Brown's book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970), a book that was banned in the city of Wisconsin in 1974. In a letter to the Queen of Spain, Columbus wrote:

> So tractable, so peaceable, are these people, that I swear to your Majesties there is not in the world a better nation. They love their neighbors as themselves, and their discourse ever sweet and gentle, and accompanied with a smile; and though it is true that they are naked, yet their manners are decorous and praiseworthy. (Brown 1970, 1) (Aamir & Younus, 2018, 40)

Thus, the fate of two million Indians was to endure four centuries of struggle before the sun finally set upon their free dominion. The European settlers came in wave upon wave to occupy Native American lands. In the docudrama, these expeditions are described as: 'In the bellies of their ships, the Europeans carried horses, guns, and disease, and in their hearts, they carried a belief in their destiny to rule the Americas from the Atlantic to the Pacific'. In other words, the 'indios' had to face the implonialism of the invaders, as they displayed all aspects of colonialism, imperialism, despotism, and even fascism towards the Native populations.

Using reenactment and voiceover narrations, the docudramas give a comprehensive overview of the sad plight of different Native American Nations. This patchwork of nomadic tribes with varied languages and customs, but closely connected to the earth spiritually, was spread across the expanse of North America. These people mirror the melting pot of America and are part of American history. The visual text of the docudrama etches the history of the American Indians, for whom, as Mt. Pleasant argues, 'I don't think we can understand how we got to where we are as a nation without an understanding of American Indian history' . This American Indian history is therefore a rich tapestry of human thought, civilization, and advancement that, despite the implonialistic measures of the invaders, offers a perennial source of an environmental ethical human wellbeing that is, perhaps, what the world needs today.

The docudrama, *America's Great Indian Nations* (2013), begins with the story of the five Indian nations who were often at war with each other until, by the 14th century, their killing threatened to destroy them all. Therefore, they made a powerful confederacy of six Indian nations, the Iroquois of upstate New York. They were a model democracy of five separate Indian nations most feared warriors of North America. Comprising Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, the Seneca, and later joined by the Tuscarora, Iroquois exhibited a great law of peace that attracted the attention of some of the most far-sighted American colonists like 'Benjamin Franklin, who worked as British envoy to the Indians, [and] was deeply impressed with the Iroquois form of government'. The narrator tells us that Franklin's contributions to the US Constitution may have come from the Iroquois principles. Similar fact is mentioned in *The Indigenous People of America – Documentary* (2019). However, the Iroquois fought Iroquois in the American Revolution of 1779 (as four of these nations sided with the Americans and two with the British), but 'when the English finally fell in 1783, the new United States of America treated the entire Iroquois confederacy as a conquered nation, forcing the Iroquois to surrender most of their territory'.

The fate of Seminoles in Florida was no different, but, as the meaning of the word Seminole suggests, a runaway or wild, Seminoles were a melting pot of 'Indians and black slaves fleeing the northern lands.' Therefore, it 'took three wars, half the US army, and over $30 million to subdue the proud and defiant Seminole. To this day, the Seminoles remain the only Indian nation that never signed a document of surrender with the US government'. This speaks for the unwavering resistance and resilience of the indigenous people of Florida that the US government had to face, despite its ferocious measures of annihilating the Indians.

The Southwestern Navajo Nation had 'a unique culture based on raising crops, herding livestock, weaving, and crafting jewelry. Navajo had been fighting Spanish-speaking intruders for 250 years.' However, the Navajo were subdued with the US government's several war expeditions, where the 'soldiers burned hogans (houses), slaughtered livestock, destroyed cornfields, took women and children captive.' The narration ends with the story of 'Lakota Sioux Nations, the defiant warriors of the west who united with the Cheyenne to hold back the tide of western expansion for 50 years. Cheyenne were fiercely independent and were among the most feared warriors in the west'. The pattern of destruction was similar, burning of villages with the standing orders to 'kill Cheyennes wherever and whenever found.' Though their chief, Black Kettle, believed in peaceful resistance and vowed never to harm any settlers, and he had even 'once shook the hand of President Lincoln in Washington, ... Custer's elite Seventh Cavalry attacked a sleeping Cheyenne village south of the Arkansas River, where Black Kettle and his people were camped. In a matter of minutes, 103 Cheyennes lay dead, including the great Black Kettle and his wife'. Lakota chief Red Cloud was likewise killed, while Crazy Horse was backstabbed by a soldier after he signed a treaty. Similarly, another Lakota chief, Sitting Bull, and his nation fell prey to Custer at the place of Little Bighorn, and finally, the Wounded Knee Massacre happened in 1890. Thus, the Indigenous 'agency' was shaken to the core by the colonialists, or the implonialists (if we may say so), for carrying out colonial measures for the Spanish imperialists of the time, with brutal channels of despotism and fascism.

The Indigenous People of America – Documentary (2019): Human Communities & the Natural World

The documentary offers a re-examination of Indigenous peoples and their 'relationships to human communities as well as to the natural world'. The omniscient narrator's voice fills the mise-en-scène (all that is visible on the screen) and weaves a strong mise-en-intrigue (storyline) of the indigenous presence before the arrival of Europeans. The documentary shows

how the Native Americans inhabited every region from the Arctic to the tip of South America for as long as 20,000 years ago. The documentary theorizes the belief about the first men to cross into the Americas across a stretch of land called the Bering Land Bridge. This visual comes into the category of a documentary since it mostly uses still pictures in its narratology. Talking about the Swan Lake as an archaeological site in east central Alaska, the narrator tells the viewers that it contains evidence of inhabitants as early as 14,500 years ago. There is 'evidence of fire pits, . . . artifacts, . . . remains [of] elk bison mammoth and moose, . . . [and] stone tools'.

One thing that runs through the mise-en-intrigue of all the docudramas and documentaries selected here is that America was a 'land of ethnically diverse people, . . . some 500 nations of natives, each culturally unique.' Though 'they were a war-mongering expansionist culture. Their cultivation of corn, beans, and squash, [however], allowed them to support a large population. And with this population, they could [wage] war at a scale that their rivals could not match'.The Grand Iroquois Council was made up of 56 Chiefs from the five nations, and the mother of the Iroquois Nation represented the mothers of each clan. For any law to pass, it had to 'have support from 75% of both the Grand Council and the mother of the nation'.

The unique perspective of this documentary of paralleling the lands of indigenous tribes with the present-day names of those places, helps the viewer visualize and internalize the information provided. With this 'culturally specific and applicable' narrative about the Sioux residing in North Dakota region, the Lakota, living around 'Lake Superior in what is now known as Minnesota,' the author and the narrator of this visual narrative tells us that 'the stereotypes of natives riding horses and living in teepees is mainly from this nation'. The women of this nation were skilled at 'porcupine quill and bead embroidery, favoring geometric designs.' Religion was a crucial part of Sioux culture, [exhibited in their] annual Sun Dance. However, 'continual warfare with the Ojibwe tribes eventually drove the Sioux into the Great Plains.' The mise-en-intrigue of this documentary informs that though there may be wars among tribes, their ways of living are depicted as very close to nature. The narrator concludes his documentary with an account of how these 'nomadic tribes moved throughout this region in parts of what are now Montana and Wyoming to fish, hunt, and trade.' Not only in this documentary, but all the other selected works for this research give us a peep into an environmentally balanced way of life of the indigenous people. He narrates that 'the Americas are a very large landmass home to just as much cultural diversity as Europe and Asia'.

***Broken Treaties (Full Documentary) | Oregon Experience | OPB* (2020):**

Broken Treaties (2020) is a documentary cum docudrama. I give it this distinction because it is a documentary featuring the original testimonies of the people whose families are directly impacted by the treaties broken by the US government. It offers a decolonial perspective the way Stam argues in his book, *Indigeneity and the Decolonizing Gaze: Transnational Imaginaries, Media Aesthetics, and Social Thought* (2023). The 'narrative mediatics' of *Broken Treaties* features an account of 'dozens of different tribes who once lived in hundreds of villages in a diverse environment of natural abundance' .

Robert J Miller, Law professor and writer at Arizona State University, says, 'The big picture of American Indian policy was stated by George Washington in 1783: The Indians are going to go extinct, and the United States is going to get all their lands'. *Broken Treaties* informs that 'the Indians' seasonal mobility also meant that they were often away and unable to defend their property when the settlers arrived and claimed it as their own'. According to Miller, 'Tribes are sovereign governments. The United States Constitution recognizes them as sovereign governments. But part of the Doctrine of Discovery claims the newly arrived United

States or European country has an overriding sovereignty over the sovereignty of the indigenous groups, tribes, nations—call it what you will. In time, that policy would take on a new name—Manifest Destiny'. While manifest destiny translates as the 'right under God that they should be able to have these lands. And so the United States used the Doctrine of Discovery, as other European powers had used it, in order to get the land from the tribal people out here'.

The 'Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny' may look ridiculous today, but we witness an implonialism when we see that the Oregon Donation Land Act passed in 1850, offered '320-acre parcels to thousands of white immigrants, . . . killing hundreds of Native people, sometimes with the government's approval, and then even submitted an invoice for their expenses for ammunition, travel costs, etc.' . The massacres and the introduction of diseases are manifestations of implonialism with its multipronged policies of colonizing the people with an iron hand. The United States government never ratified any treaties like the Coast Treaty, to cite only one example, to compensate the Indians, but it did keep the Indians' land. This documentary, a production of Oregon Public Broadcasting, cites mostly the broken treaties of the State of Oregon, stating how 'the federal policy has always been to diminish the tribal land base [resulting in a] checkerboard reservation' phenomenon. Witgen, sees this phenomenon as 'New World political imaginary.' He avers that 'the United States [ ] had been established with a settler colonial ideology that envisioned citizens of the Republic eliminating the Indigenous population, replacing or supplanting the Natives with its own settlers'.

Under the stated goal of U.S. Indian policy of 'Assimilation,' the Native people were to be 'better off if they could lose their Indianness, quit speaking their Native languages, learn English, dress in modern clothes, and convert to Western religion. The federal government encouraged various denominations to establish churches and schools on Indian reservations'. Resultantly, there are the Grand Ronde Reservation, Siletz Reservation, and Malheur Reservation, to name a few. The documentary evidence of the testimonies in this visual narrative informs how 'the laws were touted as an effort to liberate the Native people from government oversight. So the responsibilities that the federal government committed to the Natives by treaty, the health, education, and other benefits, just went away. . . . Eventually, many tribes drifted into poverty'. Historians like Witgen state in clear terms that 'Thomas Jefferson advocating "amalgamation," or the assimilation of Native peoples into American society once they became "civilized" soon gave way to Indian nations' dissolution, and vanishing from history. By 1836 the idea became Indian removal, a call for the immediate elimination of Native peoples' .

As the visual narrative draws to its close, the restoration measures enumerated in it become emblematic of what Stam avers as an 'Indigenous thought [that] can help us reenvision the origins and the antidotes to all these crises'. Their legal efforts for their rights finally paid off, and 'Social Darwinism didn't happen'. Indian cultures resonate with the forests, the rivers, the coastline, and the mountains they live in. One of the testimonies is of the view that 'Indigenous people have very much to offer the contemporary world'. These people have an inherent nature to care about the land and one another.

Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding Schools

The documentary *Unspoken* is divided into Acts like a dramatic presentation. The Acts are entitled, 'The Winds of Change,' 'Assimilation,' 'Perseverance,' and 'Epilogue: They Overcame.' We are told at the outset of the documentary:

> The Native American boarding school era is a dark chapter of American history. The policy was known as assimilation. Everything native was to be stripped away. The

> thought was to kill the Indian and save the man. . . . It was, more accurately, should be called ethnic cleansing than assimilation. . . . Native peoples have experienced many trails of tears, which were movements, violent movements, to remove indigenous people from their homelands because white settlers desired their lands.

Historians like Witgen, reiterate this fact by calling it a 'violent expansion of the U.S. Republic [and a] political imaginary […which] called for western expansion at the expense of Native peoples'.

Mentioning the treaties, the docudrama cites the 1868 treaty with the Navajo, which included a mandatory provision for their children to attend school. Similarly, the 1887 Dawes Act reinforced the reservation system and encouraged assimilation. The 1892 words of Richard Henry Pratt tell the extent of erasure policies for the Indian Nations when he writes: 'A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one'. Through many personal testimonies, the documentary gives several examples of students dying of disease, at times torture, sexual and emotional abuse, and prison. Recently discovered handcuffs to fit a child's wrists and unmarked graves near Haskel are disturbing facts that this mise-en-intrigue documents. Some conscientious officials like the Commissioner of indian affairs, John Collier, writes in 1923: 'The administration of Indian affairs is a disgrace-a policy designed to rob Indians of their property, destroy their culture, and eventually exterminate them'. Witgen calls it 'a rapacious appetite for Indigenous land'. Likewise, Robert Kennedy, who was Attorney General at that time, advocated only for day schools where students can be bused to their homes. In his opinion, if you take the child away from their environment, you kill the spirit. He believed that we cannot expect a child to learn when you kill the spirit .

We come to understand that 'the United States saw itself as a postcolonial republic, but it was, in reality, an ambitiously expansive settler colonial state that offered an even bleaker future for Native peoples than the one Head envisioned for Native peoples in British Canada'. For generations, the Indians were taught to believe that they were savages, primitive, less human because they were redskins. It was only after 'the indian Civil Rights Act was passed in 1968 and other significant political events like Alcatraz and Wounded Knee that brought Native issues to public attention'. Books like *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969), *God is Red* (1973), *Red Earth White Lies* (1995) by Vine Deloria Jr., and *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970) by Dee Brown were the curtain raisers for the atrocities committed against the Natives. Finally, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act in 1975. The docudrama ends with this note that some 'apologies have been made for the policies of assimilation. But many native people seek more'. The remnants of this dark chapter in US history, their implonialism against the Natives, is etched across the continent.

1491: The Untold Story of the Americas Before Columbus

Finally, based on Charles C. Mann's 2005 award-winning book, the selected docudrama, *1491: The Untold Story of the Americas Before Columbus* (2017, 2023), shows the trajectory and plight of the Native people of the Americas and provides an environmentally ethical decolonial understanding of the American Indian realms with an 'epistemic humility' as Hallaq would argue. Quite deftly, the narrative mediatics of this docudrama gives a historical viewpoint about the Native Americans, followed by the different worldviews to show the depth of knowledge, art, culture, science, societal norms, and much more that these societies of antiquity had to offer to the world. In other words, the mise-en-intrigue of this docudrama presents an ecumenical mode of thinking, which is what the world needs today for its survival and sustenance.

The docudrama's mise-en-intrigue or the 'second mimesis' , as some critics may call it, gives a decolonial perspective by citing the accomplishments of the world's different civilizations before 1491. Providing a vivid picture of ancient trade routes, ceremonies, traditional medicines, writing systems, counting devices, calendars, metalwork, pictographs, pottery, masks, and, in fact, all aspects of life, the docudrama effectively translates the history onto the celluloid screen. 'In many ways their laws rituals and beliefs continue to influence our world' as the narrator of this docudrama reminds us. Though these 'processes of fictionalization, the phenomenology of reading, and the modes of participation in the two media are quite different', the screen writer of this docudrama, Barbara Hagar, does a tremendous work of dramatizing Mann's 2005 book, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. Looking at only the oldest of these accomplishments of different civilizations around the world makes us acutely aware of the fact that it is not fair to commemorate only the times that we live in but appreciate and acknowledge the achievements of yester civilizations.

In her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples,* Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us how 'numerous oral stories which tell of what it means, what it feels like, to be present while history is erased before your eyes, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as lunatic ravings of drunken old people'. The docudrama shows how art and culture, stories, songs, and dances, and visible reminders of ceramic, wood, and woven materials, were an integral part of the indigenous culture of the Americas. This speaks for their 'embedded aesthetics' (Stam 2023, viii) in their craftsmanships.

Every episode of this docudrama reiterates these words in its intro and outro:

> We have been here from the beginning. Our ancestors navigated by the wind and Stars. Crossing vast oceans and mountain ranges, searching for new lands over thousands of years, our ancestors became astronomers, architects, philosophers and scientists, artists, and inventors. We created distinct societies and built vast trade systems that covered two continents. In 1492, our world was changed forever. But we did not disappear. Today, the languages and teachings of our ancestors remain, and these are the Untold Stories of the Americas before Columbus.

Bringing the untold history of the Americas, the docudrama, therefore, pays tribute to the countless contributions that the people of antiquity have been making, and yet have been put under severe erasure.

The facts narrated in this docudrama collectively negate the myths created for the Native Americans as stereotypes. It provides a subtle decolonial aspect without holding the perpetrators accountable for their misdeeds. Many historians have reminded us time and again how 'the U.S. government began to focus on Indian removal, a strategy that literally eliminated Native peoples from the territory of the Republic and constituted an aggressive form of settler colonialism'. The docudrama does not document how

> this transfer of wealth from Native peoples to U.S. citizens was not a mutually beneficial, market-based transaction. It was theft, a plundering of Native land and Native wealth, orchestrated by the federal government of the United States. The plunder economy not only stripped Native peoples of their homelands, their most valuable resource, but also deprived them of just compensation for this loss.

This docudrama, based on historical documented evidence, presents a rather nuanced and balanced approach to relay the facts about the indigenous peoples of these mighty continents of America.

Providing a counter history that has long been put under erasure from the mainstream human understanding, these docudramas therefore present a historically informed

environmentalism for their lands applicable to other parts of the world with similar cases of settler colonialism and fractured histories. In other words, their narratives 'connect to a unifying principle without personal or cultural boundaries [to] heal their fractured selves' . Their narrative mediatics consequently aim for a balanced and sustainable future of all sorts of existence on our earth. Consequently, for the constructed trope of the twentieth-century Hollywooden Indian, these docudramas offer an alternate history with an epistemic humility in the twenty-first century. With their mise-en-intrigues, these docudramas are emblematic of an ethical dimension of the environment for a shared vision of an all-inclusive, balanced life in American Indian realms and beyond.

A Parthian Thought

Though not strictly speaking a docudrama, a documentary by David Adams can be a good starting point for creating some docudramas with a decolonial gaze, to borrow Robert Stam's words, about the northernmost parts of Pakistan. Places like the modern-day Shangri-la of the Hunza Valley in the Northern Areas of today's Pakistan may offer a rich subject matter for some docudramas. Some places, like forts in the Hunza Valley,[ii] may be considered a sort of paradise or Shangri-la, a utopian place where everyone would like to go and attain peace and tranquility. Adams, a travel journalist, explores this place before he finds his Shangri-la at the farthest heights in Hunza Valley. He thinks that it might be the place for the inspiration of James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon,* 'an escapist fantasy about a utopia hidden somewhere in the Himalayas, a modern-day utopia, a haven of peace and harmony, a place where people live to be over 200 years old'. However, the custodian of the Fort at one of the highest points in Hunza Valley has some different views about the place. He tells Adams that 'before the arrival of the British, this was an independent Kingdom. Finally, the British feared a possible Russian movement through this valley down to India. That is why we (the native people) had a battle with British troops in December 1891'. So perhaps, like the novelist, going to this place was a fantastical idea; Adams' quest for Shangri-la was likewise a fantasy that got fulfilled to a great extent in the Northern parts of Pakistan. However, this quest needs to be zoomed in on our imaginations with a decolonial environmental ethics.

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[i] For details, see, Rabia Aamir, *Environmental Ethics: Life Narratives from Kashmir & Palestine*, (Vanguard Books: Lahore, 2023).

[ii] There are many similar forts in the Skardu and Gilgit Valleys in Northern Pakistan as I have personally visited some in the Skardu Valley.