

Untranslatable Timescapes in James Welch's *Fools Crow* and the Deconstruction of Settler Time

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What happens if alternative worldviews on time and temporality expressed in literature circulate on a global literary market? Many scholars like David Harvey, Frederic Jameson, Franco Moretti, or Immanuel Wallerstein have argued that, when literary works circulate beyond their culture of origin, culturally specific viewpoints are reduced in favor of Western hegemony. As Arjun Appadurai has pointed out, this analysis comes into being because global transactions are considered to go hand in hand with social and epistemological exclusions (2). Others, like Jodi Byrd, James Clifford, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing have, however, challenged this position by emphasizing the unpredictable outcomes of globalization processes. This article on untranslatable timescapes in James Welch's *Fools Crow* enters into the debate to explore the ways in which the novel deconstructs the temporal foundation of Euro-Western modernity¹—"settler time," as Mark Rifkin has recently called it. In *Fools Crow*—written by world renowned writer James Welch, himself of Blackfeet and A'aninin origin and part of a literary tradition that has been called the Native American Renaissance (see Lincoln)—Pikuni protagonists are guided by dreams, visions, myths, and prophecies that cannot be integrated into a Euro-Western understanding of time that emerged when the nexus between coloniality, rationality and what has been called modernity was established during the European Renaissance in the sixteenth century c.t. (see Dunbar-Ortiz 32-45; Quijano 168-69). Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed out in *Provincializing Europe* that the globally hegemonic Euro-Western notion of temporality—itsself part and parcel of an assemblage of power aimed to exploit and dominate non-Europeans on a global scale—constructs, enlivens, and enacts time as being disenchanting, secular, continuous, empty, homogeneous, and progressive.

In the following, the untranslatability of *Fools Crow*'s temporal notions will be seen as a marker of cultural difference, Indigenous cultural autonomy, and what Rifkin has called "temporal sovereignty." *Fools Crow*'s Pikuni temporalizations resist settler time and enact temporal notions in which past, present, and future are consistently shaping and shaped by interactions between spiritual, human, and animal entities. The novel thereby harbors a fundamental untranslatability in its heart: its forms of time cannot be integrated, assimilated, or appropriated for the settler-colonial temporalizations of "development, modernization, and

capitalism” (Chakrabarty 71). This is the case because the Euro-Western notion of time established with and alongside colonial modernity/rationality suggests a linear and forward-facing progression distinguished, as Bruno Latour has pointed out, from what is deemed “non-modern”; a “modern” understanding of temporality is of “time that passes as if it were really abolishing the past behind it” (Latour 68). In this version of temporality, progress becomes the motor of a moving history that pushes ever onward, a representation that relies on a spatialization of time. This representation is part of what links the coercive, colonial appropriation of land to concepts of historical, cultural, social, political progress, while such a practice is, on the contrary, violent, murderous, even (historically and contemporaneously) genocidal. Such notions of time, belonging to Euro-Western modernity and to capitalism’s attempt to coordinate and synchronize labor, production, and services globally (see Negri; Galison), cannot conceive of the past remaining or returning, or of enduring orders of time. Temporalities that construct time differently are seen as modernity’s excluded, irrational, othered counterpart. When Welch integrates Pikuni temporalizations into his rendering of Blackfeet history, he therefore challenges modern Euro-Western temporality and its mythical narrative of progress, which is crucial for the all-encompassing social formation called capitalism, too.

Rifkin points out that, in contrast to Euro-Western forms of temporalization that emerged with the paradigmatic epistemological shift called modernity, Indigenous narratives and sensations of time, such as those depicted in Welch’s *Fools Crow*, can include “the presence of ancestors,” “memories of prior dispossessions” and their “material legacies,” “knowledges arising from enduring occupancy in a particular homeland, including attunement to animal and climatic periodicities,” “knowledges arising from present or prior forms of mobility,” “generationally reiterated stories as a basis for engaging with people, places, and nonhuman entities,” “the setting of the significance of events within a much longer time-frame,” “ceremonial periodicities,” “influence and force of prophecy,” and a “palpable set of responsibilities to prior generations and future ones” (19). In the following interpretation, I read the untranslatable temporal notions displayed in *Fools Crow*—that cannot be integrated into Euro-Western understandings of time and are therefore unappropriable—to advance insights into the temporal economies and hegemonies of Euro-Western knowledge-production. I argue that the readerly encounter with notions that are untranslatable to Euro-Western frames of being and understanding—instigated by globally-circulating novels like *Fools Crow*—can eventually provoke important insights.

Untranslatability limns and contours Euro-Western knowledge, shows its limits, and dethrones it from its claims to being self-evident, naturally-given, and universal, instead of limited in scope and hegemonic. Such an encounter with untranslatability has the important effect of relativizing the importance of Euro-Western knowledge, and of bringing the unique achievements of, for instance, Indigenous peoples to the fore.

1. Resisting Erasure Through Untranslatability

James Welch's *Fools Crow* is simultaneously an impressive exercise in revisionist history-writing and an empowering act of decolonialization. Set around the mid-19th century in what is nowadays Montana in the USA, the novel interweaves different narrative genres with each other to establish a panoramic view on the Blackfeet nation's pre-contact way of life and its endangerment through the onslaught of Euro-American settlers and their life-styles. *Fools Crow* tells the story of a young Blackfeet called White Man's Dog (later renamed as Fools Crow) and his tribe, the Lone Eaters. Elements of the coming-of-age-story are brought together with world-views as established in Blackfeet traditions, while the larger narrative frame with its frequent references to historical customs and events qualifies *Fools Crow* as a historical novel, too. Welch's novel establishes an exclusively Indigenous-centered literary world that asks of Euro-Western readers to defer their expectations and to embark instead on a narrative journey told through Blackfeet eyes. Consequently, Euro-Western readers have to renounce their hegemonic understanding of the world, and are specifically challenged in their apprehension of what it means to be modern. The latter is the case because Euro-Western modernity, as Bruno Latour has argued in *We Have Never Been Modern*, relies on a notion of linear and progressive time that allows a distinction from what is deemed non-modern. The timescapes of *Fools Crow* dismantle and resist this epistemology, since the novel brings to the fore the idea that linear, progressive time and Blackfeet temporalizations do not cancel each other out. While the development of the character Fools Crow is told in a linear, progressive fashion, the wisdom that he acquires in his coming-of-age and that he integrates into his life concerns ancestral time. As I will show in the following, Welch's literary timescapes in *Fools Crow* are decolonizing thought, because they bring forms of time together that are mutually exclusive in the Euro-Western modern conception of time. In other words: Welch's timescapes constitute a specific untranslatability in his text that helps to limn and contour the limits of Euro-Western knowledge.

Since my essay centers heavily on a particular notion of untranslatability, I firstly want to delineate the twist I give to this concept, before I embark on a close-reading of the

different forms of time and temporalization displayed in Welch’s novel. In recent years, untranslatability has become a prominent concept in comparative literature and in translation studies. This is the case because untranslatables—words and concepts that often remain untranslated in other languages like the German “Bildung,” or the Nuu-chah-nulth “Potlatch”—highlight the fragility inherent in sense making. Untranslatables make it apparent that translations are risky and difficult since they are threatened by failure, namely to provide (the illusion of) equivalent meanings of linguistic utterances stemming from different cultural contexts. The possible failure and difficulty to make sense reminds listeners or readers of the heterogeneity of languages, textual traditions and practices, cultures, and discourses, and reveals translations to be translations. Therefore, untranslatability can bring about important insights into multiple linguistic and textual epistemologies. According to Lawrence Venuti, the highlighting of the difference interrupts established Euro-Western hegemonies, and is therefore a preferable practice when translating. Untranslatables are remainders of cultural difference that remain unappropriable, but present in target cultures. Readers, when confronted with untranslatables, have to accept the untranslatables’ independence of the target culture’s linguistic, textual, and epistemological values. It is the reader’s task to find sense-making approximations to untranslatables, while they are simultaneously confronted with the impossibility of finding a precise equivalent to the untranslatables’ original meaning. Time and its textual representation through temporalizations are important concepts for organizing individual, social and economic life. If concepts of time remain untranslatable to another culture, it means that important aspects of the source culture’s organization have remained independent of the target culture and can hint at cultural autonomy.

It is of great importance that Welch’s novel is situated in a time and a place that is linked to one of the founding narratives of the USA, the frontier narrative, that was forged in the second half of the nineteenth century during the colonialization of the American West. It is paramount to understand that the frontier narrative is a mythscape that bears little resemblance to historical reality. A mythscape is “a discursive realm, constituted by and through temporal and spatial dimensions, in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, reconstructed and negotiated constantly” (Bell 75). The American West is such a mythscape, since it constructs, at the crossroads of geographic location and historical time, an invented national and whitened settler persona that supposedly is “restless, inventive, acquisitive, individualistic, egalitarian, democratic” (Ridge, “Turner” 692, qtd. in Moore 9), and whose “manifest destiny” consists in the taking of land whose Indigenous inhabitants are

seen as “savages” whose lives and forms of life have never existed and/or will perish. In this uttermost violent construction, “the frontier is the outer edge of the wave [of settlement], the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (Limerick, “Frontier” 255, qtd in Moore 10). As David L. Moore (4-13) has shown, “the frontier” erased the past, present and future of Indigenous peoples from its inception, an erasure best captured in the image of the “Vanishing Indian.” This violent ideological construct denies “the death of millions of tribal people from massacres, diseases, and the loneliness of reservations” (Vizenor 4) as well as their resilience and survivance. The violence of settler colonialism is not simply forgotten. Rather, a colonial aphasia takes place, which disconnects events and their discursive remembering; a colonial aphasia which generates “an occlusion of knowledge” (Stoler, no page). Therefore, many Native American writers and scholars, including Joanne Barker (Lenape), Vine Deloria, Jr. (Yankton Sioux) Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Joy Harjo (Muscogee), Stephen Graham Jones (Blackfeet), Simon Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo), Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), James Welch (Blackfeet/A’aninin), Erika T. Wurth (Apache/Chickasaw/Cherokee) advance the circulation of alternative (hi)stories of the conquest and expansion to the American West. They breach against the aphasic rules of the cultural memory of the USA, and enforce a revision of historical events. The removal of Indigenous peoples from their land, treaty violations of the US government, violent warfare, transfer of epidemics, the enforced boarding schooling for Indian children to break the hold of tribal life—these histories are just some of the events that many Native American writers place squarely back on the map of national consciousness by making them central in the stories they tell.

In *Fools Crow*, Welch shows the livability and multiplicity of pre- and decolonial Indigenous ways of life and depicts the resilience and the survivance of the Pikuni in the face of settler encroachment, destruction of livelihoods, ecocide, epidemics, and massacres. Welch’s novel resists the erasure, captured in the image of the “Vanishing Indian,” that is inherent in the settler colonial master narrative of discovery and conquest, and recovers the past, present, and future of the Blackfeet peoples. Therefore, his novel has been lauded as “the most profound act of recovery in American literature” (Owens 166). Welch recovers a point of view that is independent from hegemonically dominant narratives, including their forms of temporalizations. It runs counter to established hierarchies, and recovers knowledges, realities and epistemologies that have been repressed and denied. In this way Welch refutes the master narrative of discovery and conquest that gives the introduction of

new customs, along with their social, political, and cultural instruments, a sense of inevitable temporal direction. Instead, Welch frames events by depicting Indigenous perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of happenings. Furthermore, as Christopher Nelson has pointed out, Welch shows “the multiplicity and uncertainty within a specific Pikuni community and individual” (32) when confronted with changes caused by settler encroachment. These changes, whose consequences are depicted in the novel, include infectious diseases like smallpox, for which traditional Indigenous medicine knows no cure (Indigenous people had never before been exposed to these viruses prior to contact with European settlers). Throughout the novel, different stances and directives on how to deal with encroachment are discussed and enacted. Some Pikuni believe that it is futile to resist, as the white settlers outnumber them; others want to fight them to maintain traditional forms of life. Welch is “opting [...] to explore ethical values and ethical strategies of Natives themselves [...] whose themes assert survivance, renewal, hope, egalitarianism, autonomy, and engagement” (Rader 2). And while Welch does not omit any of the life-threatening characteristics of settler colonialism, he nevertheless ends his novel with the timeless, prophetic image of Indigenous children playing and laughing. The novel’s main character, Fools Crow, watches them during a vision quest at this closing and comes at the very end to the conclusion that “though he was [...] burdened with the knowledge of his people, their lives and the lives of their children, he knew they would survive, for they were the chosen ones” (390).

2. Visions, Myths, and Prophetic Time

Before delving into the particular form of futurity that Welch offers at the end of his novel *Fools Crow*, I want to demonstrate through a close-reading of its fourteenth chapter how the novel’s forms of temporalization remain untranslatable to a hegemonic Euro-Western understanding of time. In Chapter 14, the main protagonist Fools Crow and his wife Red Paint are on a getaway from daily life in the Lone Eaters’ camp. They have retreated into “the backbone” of the world (Rocky Mountains) to clean the mind and renew the spirit (Welch 159). After a hunting excursion, Fools Crow falls asleep and is visited in his dream by Raven, a creature that had earlier on helped him to find his bearings in the world by calling on him in his sleep and sharing secret wisdom with him. In this particular dream, Raven approaches him because there is a Napikwan (white person) living in the backbone’s forest who is wastefully killing animals, shooting them and then leaving them to rot. Raven urges Fools

Crow to stop the slaughter by killing the man, since he threatens the existence of Fools Crow's animal brothers. While initially afraid of the consequences that could arise for killing a white man, Fools Crow ultimately agrees with Raven's argument that he has been chosen for the murderous task by Sun Chief himself, who is, in the Pikuni belief system represented in the novel, the creator of the world. At night, Raven whispers an insinuating dream into the Napikwan's ear. The next day Fools Crow executes the plan, but nearly gets himself and Red Paint killed because he underestimates the wickedness of his adversary.

What does this episode tell us about Blackfeet ways to understand the world, and how does this understanding challenge Euro-Western epistemologies? First of all, it needs to be stressed that, by integrating the trickster Raven into a dreamlike story, Welch refutes notions of linear development and progression. When talking to Fools Crow, Raven frequently points to events that took place a long time ago, his stories span several generations and seem to transport timeless truths. This qualifies Raven's stories as myths. While mythical stories, like other narratives, certainly have a plot, they are often read as transferring timeless transcendent meanings. In the definition of Levi-Strauss, a myth "always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the past as well as the future" (205, qtd. in Barry 3). The social and individual value of myths resides precisely in their ability to guide understandings of the world, to provide cues for the interpretation of events and phenomena, and to give guidance for the ethical conduct in relation to other beings and the world at large. The timelessness of mythical stories is constituted because myths are, among other things, metanarratives. As metanarratives, myths thus do not belong to an order of time. This quality of myths clashes, however, with Euro-Western understandings of time emerging with modernity/coloniality that reflect irreversibility, forward movement, and progress. Latour argues that temporality encompasses numerous interpretations of the passage of time, especially through the persistence of objects and ideas. In the modern Euro-Western conception of time, there is, as already mentioned, a complete break from the past (Latour 69).

When Welch integrates traditional myths into his rendering of Blackfeet history, he thereby challenges Euro-Western modern temporality, since it is a time immemorial that informs present decisions and actions. Sioux, Laguna, and Lebanese scholar Paula Gunn Allen reads Welch's novels, including *Fools Crow*, as dream/vision rituals that are "structured along the lines of the vision rather than on the chronological lines of mundane or

organizational life, and the structure of the works holds the major clue to the nature of the novels as primarily tribal documents” (93, qtd in Barry 10). Furthermore, time is, in Welch’s account, not the homogeneous, empty, objective time of Euro-Western industrialization as diagnosed by Walter Benjamin (252), nor the world-wide synchronized clock time introduced globally in the nineteenth century to facilitate shipping and global trade (West-Pavlov 14/15). Time is dynamic and performative, it inheres in processes of becoming and is derived from close observation of natural processes. *Fools Crow*, for instance, perceives the passage of time in the following manner:

They had been in the mountains for eighteen sleeps, and now the moon was approaching the time of the first frost on the plains. In the mountains, the quaking-leaf-trees were already turning a faint yellow. Cold Maker would soon be stirring in the Always Winter Land. (160)

In this description, the approach of the winter, personified by Cold Maker, is predicted with the help of a moon calendar, and through the perceiving and reading of variable signs like the foliage. Furthermore, the existence of a divine Cold Maker gives a dynamic aspect to a season. A time with a certain quality—winter—can directly interfere in the lives of humans and animals alike. The unpredictability of Time Maker’s actions influences how time is perceived, namely as performative and interactive, as it is paramount to attune one’s actions to him. This is a time that one inhabits, that is part of the fabric of one’s life, while it also exceeds the human scale. This local, interactive, participatory, performative, embodied and personified time is very different to the “coordinated universal time” of Euro-Western modernity: The latter “tends to suppress local differences as it draws the entire globe into a single unitary temporal system” that serves capitalism’s global trade (West-Pavlov 22). Ultimately, the instruments available for representing the “coordinated universal time” exist because they support a smooth workflow on a global scale, while human beings are cogs in a much bigger capitalist production machine. The notion of time displayed in Welch’s *Fools Crow* is inimical and untranslatable to the rigid, objectified, disembodied clock-time of Euro-Western modernity.

Last, but not least, Chapter 14 attests to a strong connectedness between humans, animals, and spiritual beings, which are all part of creation. This depiction is very different from Judeo-Christian understandings of human beings’ place in creation that have developed since the European Renaissance. One of the most striking passages in the Judeo-Christian

creation story is the Creation Mandate that invites the first human beings to fill the Earth, and to master it and to rule over everything that is alive:

Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (King James Bible, Genesis I, 28)

In *Green Exegesis and Theology*, Richard Bauckham argues that a careful exegesis of this passage demonstrates that it could and should be read in the light of the responsibility of human beings towards creation, the role of humanity's stewardship, ordered by divine will, towards the plenitude of life on this planet. However, contemporary global warming, large-scale livestock farming, and the imminent Sixth Extinction highlight, in contrast to human stewardship, the language of global capitalism's necropolitical exploitation of life. It would be shortsighted to see religious beliefs alone as responsible for the ecological catastrophe that human beings have brought upon this planet; this is much more the outcome of "the modern ideology of progress [...] modern individualism and materialism, industrialization and consumerization, the money economy and globalization—in short the whole network of factors that characterize modernity" (Bauckham 19). However, as Bauckham also points out, Christianity has been complicit in an hierarchical, anthropocentric view on life that evinces domination and that is thoroughly enmeshed in the idea of modern time as irreversible progress. "[I]t remains significant," he writes, "that much Christian thought in the modern period went along with major aspects of these developments in modernity and itself gave them a Christian justification" (Bauckham 19). This cannot be said about Indigenous belief-systems that have historically been, and continue to be, employed to defend the environment.² When Welch shows the interconnectedness of spiritual, animal, and human actors, he ties them in with long-existent traditions of Indigenous thought and belief-systems that Sioux and Laguna writer and scholar Paula Gunn Allen has described as "a place in creation that is dynamic, creative, and responsive" (83). Building up on this observation, it is also striking to notice that Fools Crow sees the killing of the white hunter as justifiable on the grounds that the latter threatens to extinguish different animal species when he kills them, out of bloodlust and without any need. Killing the white hunter means to live in accordance with a divine order, testified by Raven and Fools Crow's belief that this action is the wish of the divine Sun Chief. The story by the Lone Eaters' council supports the position that Fools Crow has acted in the right way. After some deliberation, the council agrees that Fools Crow has done "a brave and good thing, for surely this Napikwan was possessed of evil spirits," and they state,

“As Sun Chief honors you, so do your people” (177). In the interpretation of Nora Barry, the description of the white man as an evil presence, alongside the fact Fools Crow kills him out of spiritual, not political reasons, attests to the novel’s status as a “survival myth” (3), since “Fools Crow’s actions are closer to those of a mythic culture hero’s killing of a monster than to a Blackfeet warrior’s killing of an enemy” (10). The whole dreamlike quality of the story told in Chapter 14 supports this analysis.

In general, Chapter 14 shows that the shared ecosystem, in Welch’s depiction of the Pikunis’ belief system, is of as much importance as an individual life. Its protection is paramount for all species’ survival, since it guarantees ecological equilibrium, maintains biodiversity, and ensures lasting food security, as the Lone Eaters’ council observes, too. “To most of them it was a good and just act,” Welch writes, “for the white man had been killing off all the animals, thus depriving the Pikunis of their food and skins” (176). This larger context comprises the spiritual world, personified by the Sun Chief and the biosphere on which human beings depend as much as plants or animals. Ancestors and ancestral knowledge are as much a part of this assemblage as considerations of the future, for Raven, as he talks to Fools Crow, also shares his reminiscences of the dreamer’s grandfather and argues that he needs to think about his unborn child too. Raven’s argument places Fools Crow within a dense network in which past and future actors and actresses take part. When the Lone Eaters hold council, it is of great importance for everyone to draw conclusions from past events and insights as well.

This, however, is very different from hegemonic, anthropocentric and future-oriented understandings of life in the Euro-Western history of ideas. According to Bauckham, the early European humanist movement that instigated the Renaissance, influenced by Greek and Roman philosophical traditions, and the coeval changes in scientific and religious understanding are crucial for the idea that “human dominion becomes an historical task, to be progressively accomplished” (49). Historians like Thomas Kuhn, who researched the transition to modernity in the sciences that took place during the European Renaissance, corroborate this position. Kuhn describes the Copernican Revolution as a paradigm shift in scientific practice, in which individual observations suddenly became central, superseding the idea of godly creation whose immensity cannot be adequately understood. Bruno Latour’s research critiques modern temporality as a construction that wants to abandon the past as much as nature (nature being seen as belonging to the past that humans need to leave behind) (Latour 71). Reinhart Koselleck analyzes how the concept of history as the German epoch

“Neuzeit” [literarily “new time,” i.e. modernity] was coined in the 19th century to signify a specific understanding of time and history, in which time becomes “an agent in its own right” (Lim 80): “Time is no longer simply the medium in which all histories take place,” he writes. “History no longer occurs in, but through, time” (Koselleck 235). This means that by the 19th century, the Euro-Western idea of time consists of a one-directional line that runs from the past, to the present, into the future. It is a line in which history and nature belong irrevocably to a past that needs to be abandoned. As Bliss Cua Lim has pointed out in *Translating Time*, the “socially objectivated” (10) Euro-Western notion of time cannot be reconciled with temporalities that conceive of duration—that is of being in time, in which remembrances of the past, the lived present and the anticipated future are constantly interchanging with each other. While modern “homogenous time translates noncoinciding temporalities into its own secular code” (12), this translation can be incomplete and has been met with social, political, cultural, and temporal opposition. Welch’s insistence on reconstructing, portraying, and fleshing out a Pikuni form of time is an example of such a resistance which points to the existence of temporal understandings prior to, during, after and independent of Euro-Western epistemologies in modernity/coloniality. His employment of timeless, mythical characters like Raven, his engagement with Blackfeet spiritual understandings about the interconnectedness of all living beings escape empty, homogeneous, progressive time.

One must stress, however, that the resistance displayed in Welch’s *Fools Crow* is not one that antagonizes its readers. As the German translator of *Fools Crow*, Andrea Opitz, has pointed out, the novel sets up a dominant precolonial Indigenous space to which Euro-Western readers need to adapt by revising preconceived and hegemonic ideas about Indigenous peoples (137). The novel can achieve this when Euro-Western readers are willing to endure epistemologies that are different to their own, of which Blackfeet understandings of time constitute just one example. Andrea Opitz names the book’s specific use of descriptive names for animals, seasons, and characters, specific forms of spatialization, and untranslatable cultural notions that readers themselves might bring to the text. For Opitz, who grew up in Germany, these are ideas she acquired by reading Karl May’s novels about an entirely invented 19th Century American West and by watching their film adaptations. By establishing an intradiegetic world solely based on Indigenous perceptions, *Fools Crow* asks Euro-Western readers to become foreigners to the depicted space, which cannot be owned or appropriated by them because knowledge about it belongs to those native peoples who have lived there all along.

3. Concluding with a Vision of Hope

Before the character Fools Crow comes to the conclusion that the Pikuni will survive, he returns from a vision quest that reveals events in the future of his Pikuni nation to him. By good fortune in this vision quest, he stumbles upon the entrance to the land of eternal summer, in which the mythical ancestor of his tribe Feather Woman lives. On a hide whose paintings come to life when he takes a closer look, she reveals what will become of his people. There and then, he sees how his people lose their land, their customs, their religion, their health, their language, are forced into boarding schools, are put into strange clothes, are coerced to become Christians, but nevertheless survive. “As he sat in his hopeless resignation, he heard the sound of children laughing and he recognized the sound he had heard since entering this world” (Welch 357). The hide also reveals that the buffalo will vanish. “It was as if the earth had swallowed up the animals,” Welch writes. “Where once there were rivers of dark blackhorns [buffalos], now there were none” (356). However, the last sentences of the novel render a vision in which the buffalo return:

Far from the fires of the camps, out on the rain dark prairies, in the swales and washes, on the rolling hills, the rivers of the great animals moved. Their backs were dark with rain and the rain gathered and trickled down their shaggy heads. Some grazed, some slept. Some had begun to molt. Their dark horns glistened in the rain as they stood guard over the sleeping calves. The blackhorns had returned and, all around, it was as it should be. (Welch 392)

This vision concludes the novel on a note of great hope and image of survivance, for here the means of livelihood on which all Indigenous nations of North America’s plains and Great Basin depend have returned, accompanied by an ethical affirmation that this outcome is desirable. The return of the buffalo indicate ways for Indigenous traditions and culture to return once the conditions that made traditional customs possible are restored, while the ethical judgment points to the survivance of the Pikuni protagonist’s life ethics. It is also noteworthy that Welch, by employing the image of the returning buffalo, alludes to a powerful Indigenous prophesy by the Lakota leader and healer Black Elk, who said that when the buffalo return the “Sacred Hoop” will be mended and the Indigenous nations will regain strength (Neihardt). In the interpretation of Paula Gunn Allen, the Sacred Hoop represents, in the belief system of Plain Indians, the harmonious interconnectedness of all things that exist

in the world and the universe at large. In this vision, the buffalo is much more than a consumable creature; it is a relative to human beings that cannot be owned and has its own proper place in creation that must be respected and cherished. The return of the buffalo in the ultimate vision of Welch's *Fools Crow* has therefore a deeper sense than biological restoration of a species that nearly became extinct because of large-scale commercial hunting, which decimated its numbers from an estimated 25-30 million to less than one hundred by the 20th century (see Taylor). It is the restoration of a world in which the connections between the sun, the rain, earth, animals, and humans are reestablished; these elements are again in harmony with each other, "as it should be" (Welch 392), while it demonstrates that ethical consciousness passing this judgement will endure.

It is noteworthy that the ultimate vision in *Fools Crow* differs from foresights that the novel's main protagonist Fools Crow received during a vision quest when he had seen revelations about the future of his tribe on Feather Woman's hide. The leather tapestry did not show a world "as it should be" (Welch 392), but rather a world deprived of direction and dignity; however, Feather Woman teaches Fools Crow another lesson when he visits her, and this teaching is crucial for the novel's ending. Feather Woman has endured harsh punishment for a transgression against divine rules: the supreme powers expelled her from the house of the Sun, the Moon, and her husband Morning Star, and separated from her son Star Boy, who also goes by the name Poia. Her exile has caused her great grief, and at every new dawn, she begs her husband Morning Star to take her back. But when the protagonist Fools Crow asks why she still beseeches Morning Star to allow her passage across the sky so she can reunite with her son and him, Feather Woman tells him that, "One day I will rejoin my husband and son. I will return with them to their lodge and we will be happy again—and your people will suffer no more" (352). And while nothing in the story suggests that Feather Woman has reason to believe she will finally be united with her family, she does not give up hope. It is this hope that keeps her going, a hope that even makes "her eyes bright again, the eyes of a young one" (352). I would like to suggest that the novel's ending performs this sustaining hope too. For hope brings a radical futurity into being. It is a force to be reckoned with, a power that rallies against all odds, that helps the body and soul to endure, that buoys the spirit and makes way for the impossible to happen. José Esteban Muñoz has eloquently described this kind of hope when chronicling the political striving and will of LGBTTIQ people, a longing and a desire that "allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The

here and now is a prison house,” he writes. “We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*” (Muñoz 1).

Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia* captures the possibilities inherent in hope and the longing for a future that is not yet in the present, which cannot be deduced from the signs of the past and present conditions in which one is trapped. This futurity requires a collective, capable of feeling and thinking beyond existing restrictions, for it to be realized. A certain discontent with the present, a belief that possibilities inherent within the present are not yet exhausted, must exist to propel this collective Utopian longing forward. The limitations imposed on people with non-heteronormative sexualities and nonconformist genders can lead to this longing for a different future, for which no blueprint exists. It might also entail the longing for different forms of sociality and economies as well, since neither gender nor sexuality can be separated from socio-economic reality. As Joanne Barker has pointed out, Euro-Western ideas about sexuality and gender became hegemonic through imperialism and colonialism and affect Indigenous peoples strongly since they require “Indigenous peoples to fit within heteronormative archetypes [...] culturally and legally vacated” (3). In the case of Indigenous peoples, the cultural, political, and economic processes led to a dispossession of their land; the destruction of livelihood, ecocide, epidemics, and massacres effected genocide in the Americas. Indigenous (and) LGBTTIQ people, have been the target of colonial forms of oppression and imaginaries “that justify hierarchies of subjectivity, economical and political as well as epistemic orders associated with these subjectivities” (Schiwy 272). As an alternative to oppression, a desire for a different organization of personal, social, political, economic life to the current settler colonial and capitalist one are evoked, for whose invention the ideas and traditions of Indigenous peoples remain crucial. As Kahnawá:ke activist and scholar Taiaiake Alfred puts it when arguing for the need to recover “indigenous culture, spirituality, and government” (4):

In fact, it is one of the strongest themes within Native American cultures that the modern colonial state could not only build a framework for coexistence but cure many of its own ills by understanding and respecting traditional Native teachings. Pre-contact indigenous societies developed regimes of conscience and justice that promoted harmonious coexistence of humans and nature for hundreds of generations. As we move into a post-imperial age, the values central to those traditional cultures are the indigenous contribution to the reconstruction of a just and harmonious world. (6)

As I have shown, Welch establishes a narrative world in his novel *Fools Crow* that effectively disrupts the master narrative of discovery and conquest, with its innate assumptions of temporalization best captured in the irreversible progress narrative that underlies contemporary capitalism. By offering alternative visions of the future in which Indigenous people are crucial for restoring justice and harmony, he counters the violence of settler times and points towards Indigenous principles of persistence and resistance that have been there all along.

As I have pointed out elsewhere, disruptive narrative elements in novels of the Native American Renaissance serve the important function of reminding Euro-Western readers “of the survivance of American Indian nations in general and of their distinct storytelling traditions in particular” (Wiese 88). Euro-Western readers confronted with novels written by Indigenous authors, as these traverse the globe through translations and by electronic availability, have to acknowledge their “undeniable presence within what is considered the center and the periphery,” as well as the importance of Indigenous knowledge present in society, which testifies to “indigenous persistence, resilience and creativity” (Wiese 88). Literary discourse is therefore a powerful tool to re-signify indigeneity and to overcome what the Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerard Vizenor has called “the static reduction of native identities” (142). In textbooks and in popular culture, the depiction of Indigenous people as backward and primitive continues, a form of representation that constitutes violence because it prevents the carving out of temporal spaces in which the multi-layeredness of physical, natural, social, historical, and individual time can emerge. In this regard, Mark Rifkin’s recent research into settler time brings a long-neglected question to the fore: how can Indigenous peoples claim temporal sovereignty if common representations construct them as vanishing, and therefore as belonging to the past? How can they claim to be present within historical and contemporary state formations if the cultural hegemony of the modern, nationalist, capitalist narrative denies them contemporaneity and futurity? Settler time fiercely excludes traditions and visions that undermine Euro-Western modernity’s foundation, yet Euro-Western modernity’s exclusions, inhibitions, and definitions are not all-encompassing. Indigenous cultural autonomy and resistance has been there all along and makes itself felt in the temporalities shaped, enacted, incorporated, made sensual and constructed in James Welch’s novel *Fools Crow*. When Welch shows Indigenous change, continuity, and survivance alongside an ongoing settler colonialism, when he demonstrates that the present cannot be separated from the past, he does more than posit an alternative

model of time. By employing Indigenous peoples’ notions of time and temporalizations, he inserts untranslatable elements into his novel. These untranslatable elements, while being present in the texts, cannot be transposed into Euro-Western temporal epistemologies that rely on the idea that the present is severed from nature as well as from the past. He thereby demonstrates that Euro-Western understandings of time are historical, not eternal or naturally-given, that they are possibly globally hegemonic, but not universal and all-encompassing. By undermining settler time, Welch undermines and resists the very foundations of Euro-Western modernity, pointing towards an Indigenous cultural autonomy and being-in-time that have been there all along.

Notes

¹ I use the term Euro-Western instead of Euro-American to acknowledge that the assemblage called modernity is nowadays, through its nexus with capitalism and (neo-)colonialism, a global force. Furthermore, as Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice has argued, the term Euro-American is “another appropriation by the colonizers of Indigenous presence” (xvi) that I would like to avoid, specifically because the novel I deal with takes place in North America, but circulates on other continents, too, through its translations into languages like French and German.

² The United Nation Division for Social Policy and Development of Indigenous Peoples (DESA) has pointed out on their website (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/>) that, according to Front Line Defenders, “281 human rights defenders were killed in 25 countries in 2016 [...] Most of the cases were related to land, indigenous and environmental rights.” Because Indigenous peoples often live on land that is rich in natural resources, their lives, cultures, and belief systems are threatened by corrupt state and non-state actors alike looking to profit through “land grabbing, natural resource extraction, mega projects and deforestation activities on their land and territories.” <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2016/08/Indigenous-Human-Rights-Defenders.pdf> (last visit: March 21, 2018).

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