
Communities of Grief: Surviving War in the Fiction of Ralph Salisbury¹

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In *That the People Might Live*, Jace Weaver explains that, “[t]he Cherokee can never forget the Trail of Tears—not because of some genetic determinism but because its importance to heritage and identity are passed down through story from generation to generation... Such cultural coding exists finally beyond conscious remembering, so deeply engrained and psychologically embedded as to be capable of being spoken of as ‘in the blood’” (8). Later, he argues that “[i]n the case of Native Americans... grief can never be finally ‘abolished.’ Any Native scholarship or intellectual work must, however, take the ongoing and continual healing of this grief... as both a goal and a starting point. It must expand the definition of liberation to include survival. Natives engaged in literary production participate in this healing process” (Weaver 38). Weaver’s argument draws a powerful connection between historical trauma and the role of literature in documenting, exploring, and resisting that trauma. These claims are easily borne out in many works of Native literature—such as Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* or LeAnne Howe’s *Shell Shaker*—which tell the stories of traumatized characters who, by the end of the novel, have acknowledged and begun to process those traumas through the support of their communities. Silko’s Tayo, for instance, receives guidance from two medicine men, Ku’oosh and Betonie, while Howe’s Auda Billy draws on the strength of her extended family, including her ancestors, to resist Redford McAlester, the greedy and corrupt Chief of the Oklahoma Choctaws.

But it is perhaps more difficult to understand how Weaver’s claims can apply to works of Native literature that seem to tell less uplifting or empowering stories—works

like Cherokee writer Ralph Salisbury's last collection of short stories, *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin*. As the title indicates, these stories focus primarily on the experiences of Native soldiers and veterans; although Salisbury's characters suffer from traumas similar to those in other works of Native literature, very few of them achieve any resolution. Salisbury wrestles with the continual grief that arises not only from the stories of Removal and colonization that have been passed down through generations of Cherokee relatives, but also from the experiences of war shared by those same relatives. This grief, too, lives "in the blood," where it is passed down to the soldiers' children and spread to their wives and widows, ultimately infecting not only the veterans, but also the families who struggle—and often fail—to heal their fathers and sons, their cousins and nephews, their uncles and brothers.

To understand how stories that depict such hopeless cycles of violence might contribute to the project of literary production as a healing process, we might turn to Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice's discussion of Indigenous literatures. Building on Weaver's concept of communitism, Justice argues that Indigenous people's

stories have been integral to [our] survival—more than that, they've been part of our cultural, political, and familial resurgence and our continued efforts to maintain our rights and responsibilities in these contested lands. They are good medicine. They remind us of who we are and where we're going, on our own and in relation to those with whom we share this world. They remind us about the relationships that make a good life possible. (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 5-6)

In Justice's conception, the very existence of the stories, regardless of their content, also serves a purpose. So, while Salisbury rarely offers the kind of roadmap that we find in *Ceremony* or *Shell Shaker*, the stories themselves are a reminder of Cherokee presence, and they are built on a foundation of Cherokee values. Specifically, they

reinforce the importance of community and storytelling. As a result, *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin* works to build relationships and, thus, to construct multiple communities: first, a community of characters who appear and reappear, in slightly varied forms, from one story to the next; second, a community of warriors and veterans whose experiences, shared within and between stories, become the first step in the healing process described by Weaver; and third, taken as a whole, the book joins an ongoing conversation among other Native writers, such as Silko, Jim Northrup, and William Sanders, who tell the stories of Native veterans surviving American wars.

Given that many Native men of Salisbury's generation served in the U.S. military during World War Two, it is unsurprising that the men at the heart of his work are often soldiers and veterans. As Alison Bernstein explains,

When Japan made its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, there were 4,000 American Indians in the military. By war's end, approximately 25,000 Indians had served... These figures represented over one-third of all able bodied Indian men from age 18 to 50, and in some tribes the percentage of men in the military was as high as 70 percent. (40)

These incredible rates of participation necessarily led to equally high rates of impact in Native communities, both during and after the war. Bernstein also notes that "[t]he number of Indian deaths and casualties [in World War Two] easily equaled and probably exceeded those of whites and other minorities as a proportion of the number who fought" (61). Thus, regardless of their geographic and temporal distance from the battlefield, Salisbury's stories are nonetheless shaped by World War Two and the wars that follow—in Korea, Vietnam, and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East—which together form the backbone of modern American history. In *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin*, those wars are completely immersive: although the stories rarely describe

scenes of active duty, each conflict remains alive as the protagonists tell war stories and struggle to return to civilian life.

Stories about wounded veterans are a prominent part of the collection: an early story, "Bathsheba's Bath, Bull Durham Bull, and a Bottle of Old Granddad," introduces Cousin Kenny, a World War Two veteran in his early twenties who "had been sent home missing one eye and missing part of his mind" (Salisbury 16). Later, "A Vanishing American's First Struggles against Vanishing" follows another World War Two veteran, Dirk Dark Cloud, as he fights his war "again and again when memories, buried like land mines, exploded in [his] alcohol-addled mind" (Salisbury 123). Even in stories that are ostensibly about other themes, the aftermath of war looms in the background. "White Snakes and Red, and Stars, Fallen," is the story of eight-year old Seek Ross, told through the disagreement between Seek's white teacher and his father, a Cherokee veteran of World War Two, over how to respond to Seek's story about being chased by three wild dogs. At the beginning of the story, the two adults are already at odds with each other: the teacher has attempted to raise money for a "new, rust-proof flagpole, whose shining height would... show that all she'd endured in this cultural badlands had been for the nation defended by her dad, killed while invading Algeria" (Salisbury 6). Seek's father sees the new flagpole as "useless," an attitude that may contribute to the teacher's refusal to believe Seek's story, as well as her decision to confiscate the pistol that Seek's father allows his older brother to carry for protection (Salisbury 10). Thus, although the story takes place in a rural American town several years after the Second World War has ended, its presence still looms.

These two characters' personal experiences also highlight the extreme contrast between people living in the same small town. The differences in gender, race, and class that divide Seek's father and his teacher repeat often throughout the collection, largely because Salisbury's characters tend to live away from reservations and outside

of Native communities. This, too, may be attributed to the Second World War, which “reduced the cultural and physical isolation of thousands of Indians from the mainstream” and represented “the first large-scale exodus of Indian men from the reservations since the defeat of their ancestors” (Bernstein 171, 40). Many American Indians had a relatively positive experience during the war, where they were fully integrated into white units and ““found that they could participate with whites on what they considered to be an equal basis”” (Bernstein 136). As a result of those experiences, many Native veterans chose “to seek employment off the reservation after the war” (Bernstein 148). This attempted integration into mainstream American society, though it often failed, is responsible for some of the racial intermarriage that we see in Salisbury’s stories. In many cases, members of the same family are racially and ethnically mixed: in addition to Seek’s Cherokee father and white mother, the Dark Cloud family, who are the focus of nine interconnected stories, includes a Cherokee father and his German-American wife, whose first husband, a fallen soldier, was Lakota; in “Bathsheba’s Bath, Bull Durham Bull, and a Bottle of Old Granddad,” Lack and his cousin Kenny have a Cherokee grandmother and a white grandfather; in “Ival the Terrible, the Red Death,” Ival’s “real father” was a member of the Ioway nation, and his mother is “a half-blood widow” whose second husband is non-Native; in “A Volga River and a Purple Sea,” we learn that Sy, an Arapaho teenager destined to serve in World War Two, will later marry a “blond, hero-worshipping wife” (Salisbury 39, 41, 34).

The fact that these characters live away from and marry outside of Native communities does not suggest that they or their children are any less Native, a theme that is repeated throughout Salisbury’s work. Arnold Krupat’s introduction to *Light From a Bullet Hole*, for instance, cites Salisbury’s own claim that “I am not part Indian, part white, but wholly both” (73). The attitudes of Salisbury’s protagonists reflect this

claim, as they rarely hesitate to identify themselves as "Indian," despite being repeatedly mistaken for members of some other ethnic group. Those who served in World War Two are often mistaken for "the enemy," like the Cherokee narrator of "Some Indian Wars, Some Wounds," who describes "having been despised back home as the supposed son of some Italian immigrated to build railroads, bridges, and cities," or like Dirk Dark Cloud, who is assumed to be Italian by an American sergeant who "wouldn't let me carry my rifle until he'd emptied it" (Salisbury 114, 165). In the much more serious scenario depicted in "A Volga River and a Purple Sea," Sy is shot "by a buddy who'd mistaken Sy's Arapaho face for Japanese" (34). Non-Native veterans also bring their prejudices back home, so that a soldier turned milk truck driver sees a Cherokee child by the side of the road and honks his horn in the "World War Two code 'V' for 'Victory, [the boy's] skin a reminder of Japanese" (34, 3). Perhaps the most unexpected example of mistaken identity occurs in "The New World Invades the Old," which tells the story of Sher, a Nez Perce man working as an Army translator in Greece. He is approached by a Greek woman who asks him to impregnate her because her sterile Greek husband nonetheless expects her to produce a child. As the woman explains to Sher, "'to save my marriage I must have a son, and you are dark like a Greek, dark like my husband'" (57).

In each instance, non-Native people's inability to recognize Native identity reinforces the idea that American Indians are "Vanishing Americans;" though Salisbury wryly suggests that they have "been vanishing for approximately five hundred years" (121). This comment, together with the stories themselves, make it clear that American Indians very much exist in the present—and also throughout American history—but *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin* nonetheless depicts the sense of isolation that individual American Indians experience as they are repeatedly misidentified. Because the Native character in each story is so frequently the only one in a given scene, there

is almost never an opportunity for two Native folks to exchange a wry glance, to laugh at Euro-American ignorance, or to find solidarity in a shared experience. When several of Salisbury's protagonists stand up to the strangers who misidentify them, the non-Native characters simply respond with a different set of insults. The Cherokee narrator of "Some Indian Wars, Some Wounds" explains that he is "not Italian, I'm Indian," to which one of the drunken soldiers harassing him responds, "[a]nd another redskin bit the dust" (116-17). Racist encounters like these are not limited to the military, either. In "Losers and Winners: An Ongoing Indian War," one of the few stories with a female protagonist, a Cherokee poet named Irene has a brief relationship with her older—and married—creative writing instructor. While still in her bed, Irene's professor tells her that, "yours must remain a one-term try at writing [because] you're shy, Irene, like most of the Indian women I've taught" (95-96). Irene's story is an effective reminder that the military is hardly the source of racist attitudes; Native people encounter casual racism in a wide variety of circumstances.

They may first be isolated by these experiences, but most of Salisbury's veteran protagonists also remain trapped within their own grief and suffering due to the trauma experienced during their military service. Most obviously affected are the veterans themselves, who come home mentally and emotionally as well as physically damaged—like Dirk Dark Cloud, who can no longer tour the country as a professional banjo player after losing part of a finger in World War Two. Even this relatively small injury has a huge effect on Dirk's life, but Salisbury also tells the stories of men who have lost far more, like Whippoorwill Willis, who returns home blind in one eye and with a "bullet-shattered foot" (110). Serious as the physical injuries are, they are frequently overshadowed by the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that many of Salisbury's veterans suffer. Dirk, for instance, drinks "kill-all spirits... to drive off spirits

he'd killed in World War Two," while Cousin Kenny drinks to escape the nightmares that keep him awake (122).

Though Salisbury draws a clear connection between his characters' military service and their alcoholism, Bernstein notes that,

In the absence of reliable statistics, it is difficult to know whether alcoholism among Indian veterans rose as a result of their service experiences. A more likely explanation was offered recently by a former Navajo Code Talker. This veteran admitted that among his thirty buddies, he alone had become an alcoholic, but that several other veterans had taken to drinking only after they failed to find work back on the reservation." (136)

The Code Talker's observation echoes some of Dirk Dark Cloud's experiences: after his banjo-playing career comes to an end, he marries a German-American widow and settles in the border town of Custer, South Dakota, where he works as a factory janitor and "spend[s] his once-a-month disability check to get insanely, violently drunk in Custer's Bottomless Keg, the bar whose topless waitresses would serve Indians" (Salisbury 129).

Dirk's reliance on alcohol is compounded by his feelings of frustration and inadequacy when he is unable to provide for his family. He complains that "[b]anks make a man feel damned small. My word ain't good enough. They got to have this goddamned paper a man can't understand except where to sign it. I'll work, work, work and starve till I drop, and there's nothing I can do about it—NOTHING—not a goddamned thing—NOTHING!" (Salisbury 125). Although Salisbury does not go into detail about Dirk's financial situation, it is likely that his frustration stems from a maddening experience shared by many Native veterans: after World War Two, these men were entitled to loan programs set up by the Veterans' Association (VA), but

most banks did not extend credit to Indian veterans since they assumed that the

government provided support for these 'wards.' As a result, Indians had difficulty securing business loans and could not get credit to purchase livestock, equipment, or lands outside the reservation. (Bernstein 145)

Thus, although Dirk has taken ownership of his wife's small farm—land that presumably belonged to her first husband, a Lakota soldier who died in the war—and although he is entitled to support as a veteran of that same war, inaccurate assumptions about American Indians prevent him from taking advantage of the resources he has rightfully earned. Like the veterans described by the Navajo Code Talker, Dirk uses alcohol to cope not only with his traumatic wartime experiences, but also with the continued systemic racism that he has encountered since returning home.

In both Dirk's and Kenny's stories—as in many others—the veterans' families struggle to care for these men upon their return home. Although Dirk's wife and Kenny's aunts understand that the soldiers' injuries are the result of their experiences in combat, they have a limited capacity to provide for the men's needs or heal their wounds. Concerned about protecting her own children, Kenny's aunt threatens to banish him from her home if he continues to drink, while Dirk's wife, though not a devout church-goer, resorts to asking the local priest to convert her husband "from a once-a-month drunk Indian to a once-a-week Christian Indian" (Salisbury 19, 138). Neither response is particularly effective, but the families have few other resources available and are otherwise trapped in the cycles of violence that the veterans bring into their homes. Ival recalls "drunken whippings he and his half brother had suffered in childhood" at the hands of his step-father, an "old marine" who likely also bullied Ival's dying mother "into not seeing a doctor until it was too late" (Salisbury 40). In "Bathsheba's Bath, Bull Durham Bull, and a Bottle," it emerges that Cousin Kenny, who comes home to find his mother dying of cancer, may have shot her to end her suffering. Although we do not see that scene directly, we follow Kenny's younger

cousins as they discover feathers swirling above the trash-burning barrel; upon closer inspection, the cousins "sift charred pillow-case remnants among subsiding flames. Risen from a bullet hole, centering a blood stain, white ashes had swirled away on shrieking wind" (16). The discovery helps to explain why Kenny spent the night after his mother's funeral lying "'by [her] cold grave, a carryin' on so mournful he set all the hounds to howlin' with him'" (16). In the story of the Dark Cloud family, which is explored extensively in Part Three of *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin*, Dirk terrorizes his son, Juke, when he has been drinking: "Juke and Ann, his sister, would gleefully bleat, 'Baa, Baa, Beah, Beah,' scrambling and gamboling over tobacco tins tacked flat to cover holes that months back, Pa—drunkenly yelling, 'Durned little nigger-skinned Indniun'—had shot around Juke's feet" (Salisbury 122-23). It is here that we also learn about Juke's "first warrior deed:" at nine years old, he intervenes in a fight between his parents and charges his gun-wielding father to prevent him from shooting his mother (127).

The concept of veterans suffering from PTSD is not a new one, of course, but in Salisbury's stories it counterintuitively becomes the framework through which community is established. Weaver argues that "Natives define their identity in terms of community and relate to ultimate reality through that community," an idea echoed by Justice in his discussion of Cherokee nationhood (Weaver 35). According to Justice,

[C]ommunity and its web of social relationships are the structural foundation of Cherokee life... it is in relationship with the tribal nation that the individual Cherokee is defined, whether one is fullblood or mixedblood, raised as an outlander or rooted in the soil of the ancestors, conservative or accommodationist or on any point of the spectrum between. (*Our Fire Survives the Storm*, 23)

Thus, despite these characters' position as "outlanders," estranged from Native and non-Native communities, from their own families, and even from themselves, they are nonetheless defined by their relationship to their tribal nations. Moreover, the arrangement and collection of their stories, literally bound together and symbolically connected through repeated patterns and shared experiences, establishes another kind of community. Not only does Salisbury trace individual characters and multiple generations of the same family across stories; he also builds a community of Native warriors and veterans whose experiences, shared within and between those stories, emphasizes their relationship with and responsibility to one another. As Justice argues,

Disconnection is cause *and* consequence of much of this world's suffering. We are disconnected from one another, from the plants and animals and elements upon which our survival depends, from ourselves and our histories and our legacies. When we don't recognize or respect our interdependencies, we don't have the full context that's necessary for healthy or effective action. (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 4-5)

Through the form of a short story collection, Salisbury allows his characters—and his readers—to reconnect, discovering commonalities and reconsidering individual experiences within their broader historical and cultural contexts.

One clear cause of these characters' isolation is the fact that, in order to survive war, they have had to kill. This fact is sometimes casually acknowledged, as in "A Way Home," when Whipp recalls his friends saying, "'[s]orry 'bout that,'... to joke away the killing they had had to do" (111). Elsewhere, Ival remembers "the first German [he] had killed, [who] had been hunched into bushes beside his truck" (41). In "White Ashes, White Moths, White Stones," twelve-year old "Lack's kind, gentle big brother Wulf [was] killing people in unthinkably distant, unreal Europe" (28). Juke, the son of Dirk Dark Cloud, grows up to become a soldier and is "awarded two medals for killing

strangers" (127). As these details echo across stories, readers can realize what individual characters rarely do: their experiences, however terrible, are also common. And, while their commonality does not make them any less awful, it does offer a path out of isolation. If these experiences are not unique, then it becomes possible to form a community of other veterans who share similar struggles.

In addition to forming a community among veterans, military service has also forced these men to engage with the processes of imperialism and globalization. One certainly unintended consequence of this experience is that many Native soldiers begin to build community with "the enemy." Sher Sheridan, in "The New World Invades the Old," "witnessed the torture of an elderly Filipino tribesman and, sickened by the sight of knives moving over skin as brown as that of his father, wished it was U.S. imperialism's contemporary commander staked to the earth floor of the interrogation tent" (Salisbury 53). Sher acknowledges that his "angry wish was rooted in... knowledge that white invaders had taken his Nez Perce people's homeland, raped women, and mingled their blood with his family's blood" (Salisbury 53). Similarly, in "Laugh Before Breakfast," Dirk Dark Cloud tells his son, Parm, stories about

killing "some of them highfalutin fellers what does the planning, them enemy offysirs." Once, his telescopic sight had found a white-haired man so important, the enemy soldiers had not only saluted but bowed. 'That old colonel or general, he looked," Parm's daddy mused, "like the gentleman you are named for—Parmenter, my old great uncle what always gived me candy when he'd see me." (132)

Dirk is so struck by the man's familial resemblance that he chooses not to kill him. As he explains, "[h]e was lucky he was the spitting image of Uncle Parmenter, so rich and well-dressed and proud and so good to me when I was little" (135). In both stories, the protagonist establishes some relationship, some similarity and sympathy, with the

supposed “enemy,” despite all the training that has encouraged him to dehumanize those men. In this sense, Sher’s and Dirk’s stories serve as a defiant reversal of the earlier story of Sy, the Arapaho soldier who earned a Purple Heart when he was wounded “by a buddy who’d mistaken [his] Arapaho face for Japanese” (34). In that story, the unnamed “buddy” has been so well trained to find the enemy that he sees danger lurking everywhere, while Sher and Dirk are instead able to recognize similarities and build relationships.

A remarkable ability to build community is perhaps one of the best ways to handle the “grief that can never be finally ‘abolished,’” as Weaver describes it (8). Although he refers to the Trail of Tears as one example of that grief, Weaver extends his argument to speak more broadly about the ways in which “[f]ive centuries of ongoing colonialism in America, as in other colonial societies, has led to an erosion of self and community due to the dislocation resulting from cultural denigration, enslavement, forced migration, and fostered dependency” (37). *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin* displays the effects of that ongoing colonialism both in the veterans’ PTSD and in the stories’ expansion to include multiple generations spanning hundreds of years. In “Laugh Before Breakfast,” another story about Dirk Dark Cloud, Salisbury describes Dirk’s habit of getting drunk at a bar called Custer’s Bottomless Keg, where

veterans fought, again, America’s wars—with words, with fists, and sometimes with knives or with guns. Veterans of machine-age war fought the Indian Wars, citing treaties as if they’d read them, or proclaiming Manifest Destiny as inevitable as a weather system moving from ocean inland. Veterans fought the Civil War... Young again, grandfathers fought again the War to End All Wars, a war without end in memories... middle-aged fathers fought again the war that had amputated one of Parm’s father’s banjo-chording fingers, some toes, and part of his mind. (Salisbury 129-30)

The scene weaves together similar threads scattered throughout the collection, emphasizing the all-encompassing role of warfare in American history and its central role in shaping many Native lives. Drawing on memories that extend back as far as the Civil War, it is clear that, for Salisbury's characters, the memories of war exist "in the blood," much like the Trail of Tears in Weaver's account (Weaver 8).

Those memories are passed down within individual families as well as in the larger community of veterans. The grandmother of twelve-year old Lack, the main character of "Bathsheba's Bath, Bull Durham Bull, and a Bottle of Old Granddad," had three sons, "all of whom she raised to manhood, only to lose the eldest in the war Lack's father had survived, the War to End All Wars, called—now that another war had begun—World War One" (Salisbury 15). Here, the narrator quickly highlights the influence of war on each new generation of the family: this is also where we meet Cousin Kenny, who is introduced as "the son of the brother who'd been gassed to death, in a battle that Lack's father and Uncle Clyde had survived" (16). A neighbor further describes Kenny's situation: "'[p]oor boy, he never had him no daddy, account of the one cussed war, and account of this new cussed war, not never no wife to take his mother's place now that she's gone" (16). The extended family has to take Kenny in after his mother's death; in turn, Lack, who must share a bed with his cousin, struggles to understand why Kenny tosses and turns all night, while Lack's mother worries that "her twelve-year-old son might catch the 'Bad-Disease' off sheets 'profaned' by [his] bachelor cousin" (16). By positioning Kenny among his father, uncle, and younger cousins, Salisbury further emphasizes the multigenerational impact of war within Native families.

Salisbury's narrative technique of collapsing time—particularly in the first section of the book, "Coming to Manhood: Some Initiations"—further emphasizes those intergenerational experiences. The section's four stories all depict boys too young to

enlist or be drafted; nonetheless, all four include the protagonists' experiences in combat, thus defining these characters by the wars that lie in their futures. "A Volga River and a Purple Sea" opens with the clause, "[w]ar three years in his future" (31). This is the story of Sy, the Arapaho boy who will later be wounded by a buddy who mistakes him for Japanese. But before that trauma, Sy will break his ankle ice skating, spend the summer learning to swim in order to rebuild strength, and try to touch his best friends' older sister's breasts while playing in the river. The omniscient narrator reframes otherwise commonplace events in terms of their future effects—noting, for example, how Sy's "somewhat improved... awkward dog paddle... would, in three years, save his life" (32). By juxtaposing Sy's "sex-and guilt-ridden" behavior at age fifteen with his ability to "escape drowning with half of his squad" a few years in the future, Salisbury underscores the incredible youth of soldiers whose pre- and post-war lives will be defined by their military experiences (33, 34).

The connections between past and future are driven home in another story from Part One, "White Snakes and Red, and Stars, Fallen." In focusing on nine-year old Seek and his fifteen-year old brother, the story offers another unexpected glimpse into the future: "[h]is brother killed in the Korean War a few years later, Seek would remember... the exchange as close as he and his brother would ever come to saying, 'I love you'" (9). Because Salisbury establishes the future importance of an ostensibly minor event as it happens, we are further reminded of the connections across time that may only become visible at a later date. At the end of this story, too, the narrator highlights the intergenerational relationships built by imperial warfare: "Seek would watch as the flag from his brother's coffin was folded as small as a blanket wrapped around a new-born baby and placed in their combat-veteran father's trembling hands" (14). We see the father lose his son in a mirroring and reversal of Cousin Kenny's relationship to his dead father. Following the description of the son's funeral, the story zooms out to make a

larger claim and, once again, to remind readers of the patterns that unite all humans: "Seek became, like millions of others, a soldier, a killer. Then... he watched over children, his own and those in an Indian school... nine months of school leading to graduation—nine months of pregnancy leading to birth—life—death" (14). Through the stories in this section, Salisbury ultimately creates the impression that time is both cyclical and inescapable. While this may not be a particularly comforting thought, it once again serves to offer community among the otherwise isolated characters in each story.

Emphasizing patterns that resonate across time also allows Salisbury to make larger connections between modern wars and the history of American colonialism. Although their experiences of war may build connections between men who feel estranged from their families, their communities, and themselves, Salisbury nonetheless condemns the imperialist system that is responsible for fragmenting those identities and communities in the first place. The book does not dwell on explicit connections, instead trusting readers to weave together the threads of distinct stories. When Dirk Dark Cloud feels frustrated by his inability to earn enough money to feed his family, Salisbury refers to him as "an Indian Adam" who "accuse[s] his stolen rib's Christian people of stealing land, after murdering Indians" (126). The "stolen rib" here refers to Dirk's German-American wife, implicating the larger history of colonialism in this individual relationship. In another brief critique of the U.S., Salisbury notes that "Sy had missed his history class's trip to see the heads of Indian-plundering Heads of State, carved into Jim, Joe, and Jeanine's Sioux ancestors' sacred mountain, whose new name mandated the conquerors' mode of life, Rush More" (33). The sentence is almost a throwaway, unnecessary in terms of the story's plot. Thematically, however, it is an important reminder once again of the resonance of the United States' imperialist policies in the present.

Those critiques, and especially the paradoxical position of Cherokee soldiers serving in the U.S. military, become sharper and more explicit in "A Way Home." Here, the narrator explains that Whipp, son of a Cherokee mother and a white father, got his "Indian name, Whippoorwill," from a neighbor woman who "told stories that had created a role model, a father figure, a hero, Chief John Ross, Guwisguwi, a mixed-blood who'd sacrificed his wealth and risked his life to do what he could for his Cherokee people" (110). Although Salisbury does not go into any additional detail here, readers who are familiar with Cherokee history will understand that Ross "risked his life" to defy the American government—that is, the very government for whom Whipp has now risked his own life. Where Ross made sacrifices on behalf of the Cherokee people, Whipp has sacrificed his own health on behalf of the country responsible for the violent removal of his people from their homelands. Notably, Whipp did not make those sacrifices willingly, having spent a year protesting the Vietnam War before being drafted—a fact that casts further doubt on the United States' narrative of righteous patriotism and imperialism.

Perhaps the clearest critique of American imperialism appears in "Some Indian Wars, Some Wounds," an at least partially autobiographical story about a Cherokee soldier assigned to guard duty at an airbase. Salisbury's obituary notes that, although he enlisted in the Air Force at age seventeen, "he never engaged in active duty," going on to explain that "the only killing he did during his military service was the rabid skunk he shot, while on guard duty one night, at an airbase near McCook, Nebraska" ("Ralph Salisbury, Obituary"). This story, told by a first-person narrator rather than the third-person more common to this collection, tells a similar story of a guard who shoots a rabid skunk. In this version, however, the narrator also shoots a decorated sergeant in the thigh. The sergeant, heavily inebriated, refers to the narrator as a "redskin" and threatens him with a broken bottle, leading the narrator to shoot his superior officer in

self-defense (Salisbury 117). The incident is officially declared an "accidental discharge," which, according to the narrator, "added to my and to my warrior forebears' long-ago humiliation, but I'd won some sort of Cherokee victory in the only history that really matters, the one in one's own head" (117). Salisbury's positioning of this incident as a "Cherokee victory" allows him to reclaim a potentially humiliating story about being bullied and insulted—instead suggesting that, because the narrator (like Salisbury) is able to leave the military without killing or serving on active duty, he has triumphed over American imperialism.

Ultimately, these conflicting notions of America as both noble and violent are at the heart of *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin*. The paradox is best summed up in the story of the Dark Cloud family. In "Laugh Before Breakfast," after Dirk tells the story of how he spared the life of the high-ranking enemy officer who looked like his Great Uncle Parm, Salisbury suggests that, "[l]ike America itself, Parm had two fathers—one loving, one not" (136). Much later, when Parm has been wounded in Vietnam and is recovering in a hospital bed, he tells a visiting priest that, "I was raised by two fathers, Father—one sober and kind and good, one so crazy drunk he'd shoot around his children and scare hell out of them" (152). Parm's father, both white and Cherokee and suffering from PTSD after serving in World War Two, is undeniably both good and bad. As Salisbury compares Dirk to America itself, he acknowledges the United States' dual nature: a combination of the heroics and patriotism that are supposed to come with protecting one's country paired with the imperialist structures and racist individuals responsible for carrying out that work. Salisbury's Native veterans see both positions; so do the families who are left to cope with the fallout. Sher, the Nez Perce army translator, explains that he "had learned to hide his feelings... from racist soldiers fighting for the army of democracy" (53). Here again we see that the damage done to

Native peoples through official U.S. policies such as Removal is repeated through the wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The patterns that Salisbury establishes throughout *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin* build relationships not only between individual protagonists, but also between generations of veterans and their families, and among all American Indians who have felt attacked and invisible in the mainstream United States. Beyond the book's relationships, then, Salisbury's stories also situate him within a larger community of Native writers telling the stories of American Indian warriors and veterans. That community includes authors like Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), whose novel *Ceremony* follows a World War Two veteran suffering from PTSD; Anishinaabe writer and veteran Jim Northrup, whose poems and short stories often focus on Vietnam veterans; and William Sanders (Cherokee), whose novel *The Ballad of Billy Badass and the Rose of Turkestan* follows a veteran of the first Iraq War.

As in Salisbury's stories, each of these texts highlights the patterns of imperialism that war makes manifest. Another Cherokee writer, William Sanders, also draws specific connections between the history of Cherokee Removal and the United States' continued ethical violations. While Salisbury's Whippoorwill Willis looks to John Ross as a role model, Sanders's protagonist Billy Badass takes the comparison a step further when describing his experience of working with Kurdish rebels during his time in the U.S. Army (Salisbury 110). Billy explains that the American soldiers worked with those rebels until they were no longer useful, and then "left them to starve or be massacred" (Sanders 43). Watching their struggle, it occurs to Billy that

"this is what the Trail of Tears must have looked like. Another bunch of people, like us, who made the mistake of counting on the honor of the American government... Because we made the same mistake, you know. The Cherokees helped Andrew Jackson fight the Creeks, figured that would get us better

treatment, and the son of a bitch double-crossed us the same way." (Sanders 44)

Though Sanders's comparison is more direct than Salisbury's, both writers draw connections between the history of Cherokee removal and modern American wars in order to identify the patterns and effects of American imperialism, casting doubt on the righteousness of the American cause.

Jim Northrup's poem "Ogichidag"—the Ojibwe word for "Warriors"—offers a more succinct critique of militarization: in just twenty-one lines, the speaker describes old men's stories of World War One, his uncles' return from World War Two, his cousins' time in Korea, and his own experiences in Vietnam (164). The poem ends by looking to the future: "My son is now a warrior/Will I listen to his war stories/or cry into his open grave?" (Northrup 164). His question is reminiscent of the stories Dirk Dark Cloud tells his young sons. After describing his father's service in World War One and his own service in World War Two, for instance, Dirk adds, "and just in time for you, Parm, and you, Juke, [the government will] get us into another ruckus, as sure as God made little Green Apples" (Salisbury 124). Through such specific and personal examples, Salisbury and Northrup critique the never-ending wars that have shaped their families' lives.

Though both writers identify the same problem, their stories imagine quite different outcomes: Northrup's characters often begin to heal when they return to and find support in their own communities, while Salisbury's veterans are more likely to remain isolated and "war-damaged" (145). In "Veteran's Dance," for instance, Northrup tells the story of Lug, an Anishinaabe veteran who, "ever since the war... [had] felt disconnected from the things that made people happy" (22). The story begins as Lug returns home to attend a powwow where he reunites with his sister, Judy. With her help, Lug visits a spiritual leader in the community and checks into an in-patient

program to treat his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Although Judy is his primary source of support, much of that support comes from her ability to locate and access resources within the larger community: she calls the Vet Center and talks to a counselor who recommends the in-patient program; she visits the spiritual leader on her brother's behalf; and, at the end of the story, she takes Lug to a powwow where he can connect with other Native vets. Although the treatment program helps him, Lug "was anxious to rejoin his community. He wanted to go home" (Northrup 32). At the powwow, then, he jokes with a cousin who is also a vet before dancing the veteran's honor song (34). Lug's ability to heal is clearly connected to his ability to integrate back into his Anishinaabe community, and, although his sister initiates the process, they both draw on a variety of resources along the way.

This story stands in stark contrast to *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin*, where veterans frequently struggle because they have access to so few resources beyond their families. For the stories set during and after World War Two, at least, that difference may be based on the limited medical understanding of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder at the time, as opposed to the more complex definitions of PTSD that developed in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. In fact, we know that Lug's story takes place in the 1980s or later because he tells Judy about visiting the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, D.C., which was not completed until 1982 (Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund). By this point, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* was in its third edition (*DSM-III*), which included an entry for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that had been missing from *DSM-II*, published in 1968 (Andreasen 69, 68). On the other hand, Dirk Dark Cloud returned from World War Two in the 1940s, before the first edition of the *DSM* had even been published. The *DSM-I*, published in 1952, did include a diagnosis for "gross stress reaction," which "was defined as a stress syndrome that is a response to an exceptional physical or mental

stress, such as a natural catastrophe or battle" (Andreasen 68). Notably, this definition requires that the condition "must subside in days to weeks," a requirement that would have excluded the experiences of many veterans (Andreasen 68). Despite the existence of this category in *DSM-I*, its removal from *DSM-II* in 1968 indicates the lack of attention paid to veterans' experiences—and, presumably, the lack of resources available to treat a disorder that could not be formally diagnosed between 1968 and 1980.

Beyond medical and popular understandings of PTSD, however, there is a second important distinction between Dirk's experience and Lug's: Lug has a community to which he can return, while Dirk seems to be entirely isolated. Before the war, Dirk makes a living as a traveling musician. When he meets his wife afterwards, he simply stays with her in South Dakota. Although he tells stories of his childhood in Appalachia and names one of his sons after his great uncle Parmenter, he does not seem to have a relationship with any living relatives (Salisbury 132). This disconnection can be blamed, at least partially, on the long history of Cherokee removal, which Salisbury hints at when he describes Dirk's "outgunned Cherokee forebears," who "fled to wooded hills and into that flimsy sanctuary, memory" (123). In the first introduction to the Dark Cloud family, Salisbury sums up the history of Indian genocide that defines the United States:

Whole tribes had disappeared into the smoke of cannons, the only memory left of them descendants of enemies' memories. Indian hunting grounds had been cut into half- or quarter-mile-wide farms, the Sacred Earth drawn and quartered, as were bodies of pigs that Juke would help butcher—as were human bodies in history books. The Indian heritage of Juke's father, Dirk Dark Cloud, had been drawn—that of his children, Parm, Ann, and Juke, quartered. (121-22)

Salisbury is clear that individual Native people continue to exist, but his stories highlight the ways that American Indian policy has left tribal nations fragmented and tribal lands drastically reduced. Although the Cherokee Removal took place more than a hundred years earlier, its effects continue to shape Cherokee lives in the twentieth century. We never learn the full story of Dirk's childhood, but the fact that he grew up in Kentucky rather than North Carolina or Oklahoma, coupled with his lack of family connections, suggests that Dirk, unlike Lug, has never been part of a larger Native community.

The history of Euro-Americans stealing Cherokee land, which was already well underway in the nineteenth century, must also be considered in the context of Termination, which became official federal policy in the wake of World War Two. As Bernstein explains, "[t]he rapid integration of Indian citizens into white America became the goal of federal policy" in the 1940s, paving the way for House Concurrent Resolution 108, passed in 1953, which "redirect[ed] the federal effort away from tribal development and towards tribal assimilation" (159). Ironically, Native peoples' exemplary service in World War Two was used as a justification for Termination in the 1950s. According to Bernstein,

Given white America's perception that individual Indians had proven that they were capable of exercising their citizenship responsibilities during the war, it seemed only fair that federal guardianship over the tribes and their lands be eliminated when the emergency passed. (159-60)

Although Dirk's Cherokee land and community had been disrupted long before Termination, the policy might nonetheless have affected him as the new owner of land in South Dakota that had belonged to his wife's first husband, a Lakota soldier who died in the war. More broadly, Termination sent a clear message to all American

Indians about the value of their military service and the U.S. government's continued disregard for treaty responsibilities and the sovereignty of Native nations.

Within this context, we might better understand why Salisbury's veterans are so often isolated and why their stories so frequently have unhappy endings. Northrup's veterans benefit from the advances made by the American Indian Movement and other Native activists during the 1960s and 70s, which led to the reclamation and preservation of land, as well as a cultural revival that may have made way for the presence of a spiritual leader in Lug's community, in addition to the mental health resources available to veterans, both Native and non. Although Salisbury's stories are rarely as hopeful as Northrup's "Veteran's Dance," there is some sense that younger generations, the veterans of Vietnam rather than World War Two, might have more success: in the last story about the Dark Cloud family, we follow Dirk's youngest son, Juke. As his father predicted, the American government has started another war—this one in Vietnam—in time for his son to become a veteran, too. After returning to the U.S., he seems to be trapped by his PTSD and survivor's guilt, unable to leave his dead-end job as a hospital janitor and equally unable to make a serious commitment to his girlfriend, who is eager to leave town and "make a decent living someplace else—maybe have kids of our own" (Salisbury 187). By the end of the story, however, Juke has professed his love to his girlfriend and quit his job, as the "veterans counselor" recommended he do (190). These small victories suggest that there is still hope for Juke: the existence of a veterans counselor indicates that he is receiving professional support—more like Northrup's Lug than Salisbury's other protagonists—and his decision to commit to his girlfriend hints at a source of emotional support. It is that much more encouraging that his girlfriend, Alita, is also Native, and that she imagines starting a family with Juke, so that the "Vanishing Americans," to use Salisbury's tongue-in-cheek term, might resist vanishing for another generation. The story ends

with Juke saying to Alita, “Leave here? I will. I really will” (Salisbury 190). While this is not as explicitly triumphant as Lug’s decision to dance a veteran’s honor song with his sister, it does imply that Juke still has the potential to break the intergenerational cycle of trauma and thus begin to envision a future for himself.

Beyond Juke’s relationship with Alita, Salisbury also points to the importance of building community among Indigenous peoples as a way of healing. Those relationships are casually scattered throughout Salisbury’s work: in “The New World Invades the Old,” Sher Sheridan has a brief encounter with a Russian woman who declares “that Czarist Russia had oppressed her own people, from a Siberian population,” which leads her to profess “hatred for what America had done to Indians;” in “Two Wars, Two Loves, Two Shores,” the merchant-marine seaman Ayun encounters a Sami woman who explains that “[w]e are reindeer herders, overwhelmed by Europeans centuries ago, just as your Indian people were. Now, ours is a nation within other nations. I work for the Russians, but I haven’t forgotten that they burned our ceremonial drums and burned our priests” (56, 63). Similarly, Sanders’s Billy Badass enters into a relationship with Janna, a Kazakh woman whose description of her people’s experiences of forcible resettlement sounds much like the Cherokees’ experience of removal (46). In each case, individual relationships serve as a reminder that Indigenous peoples exist around the globe and that they are united in their experiences of colonialism—and, most importantly, in their survival of genocide. As the unnamed Sami woman tells Ayun, “we Sami survived, and we will outlast the Nazis, too” (Salisbury 63).

Silko’s *Ceremony* similarly highlights patterns of imperialism and the importance of building community in order to resist and reverse those patterns. Just as Sher sees his father in “the torture of an elderly Filipino tribesman,” Silko’s protagonist, Tayo, sees his uncle Josiah’s death in the execution of the Japanese soldiers he is ordered to

shoot (Salisbury 53, Silko 7). Many of Salisbury's stories also echo Silko's depiction of PTSD, which includes veterans dealing with alcohol addiction, getting into fights, and reminiscing about their popularity with white women, a phenomenon that Robert Dale Parker describes in his discussion of "restless young men" in Native American literature. According to Parker, these young men

live amid the often misogynist cultural mythology that contact with Euro-Americans (even long after such contact is routine) has deprived Indian men of their traditional roles... Moreover, their world has not managed to construct an Indian, unassimilating way to adapt masculine roles to the dominant, business-saturated culture's expectation of 9-5 breadwinning. (3)

Because Parker traces this phenomenon through earlier texts, like John Joseph Mathews's *Sundown* and D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*, before turning to a discussion of *Ceremony*, his "restless young men" are not necessarily veterans, which suggests a larger phenomenon at work. Even in *Ceremony*, where the protagonist is a veteran, his experiences of isolation and disconnection from his family and community predate his service in World War Two.

Many of Salisbury's protagonists might also be described as "restless young men," but, for these men, their behavior is explicitly connected to their military service. The children and teenagers who are the protagonists of the early stories do not suffer from the same symptoms, and Salisbury seems particularly interested in the contrast. We see this most starkly in the story of fifteen-year old Sy, whose single-minded goal is to impress the young women around him. While telling the story of Sy's hijinks, Salisbury interjects stark reminders of Sy's future as a soldier: Sy was "unable to foresee his being awarded a Purple Heart medal," and he had "[n]o way to know that in breaking his ankle bones and thus learning to swim, he'd escape drowning with half of his squad" (34). Through these glimpses into the future, which have the effect of

presenting Sy's present experiences and concerns as frivolous, Salisbury seems to suggest that his combat experience will be at the root of Sy's future unhappiness. Beyond dealing with the physical injuries and trauma borne of combat, however, Bernstein emphasizes that American Indian veterans' "sudden and unprecedented exposure to the white world contributed to a new consciousness of what it meant to be an American Indian, and a sharpened awareness of the gap between the standard of living on most reservations and in the rest of American society" (171). In this case, perhaps Salisbury's protagonists, unlike Silko's, are unaffected by this phenomenon before the war precisely because so many of them are already disconnected from Native communities. Although they encounter constant racism, these young men have grown up assimilated into mainstream American culture in ways that Tayo does not experience until he enlists.

While this experience may lead to greater dissatisfaction after the war, having grown up in a Native community also enables Tayo, like Lug, to return to that community for support. Some members of his community, like Emo and Auntie, continue to inflict damage on Tayo, but the resources he needs to heal can also be found at home. Echoing Justice's claims about the importance of community, Salisbury's stories point to the importance of building connections. As Justice argues, "even those who are to varying degrees detribalized assert a relationship through perceived absence, and retribalization depends upon reestablishing those bonds of kinship" (*Our Fire Survives the Storm*, 23). For Silko, "kinship" refers not only to other people, but also to the world at large. Tayo must see the similarities between Josiah and the Japanese soldiers; he must understand how human behavior can affect a drought; and he must learn to see how witchery has shaped the world. For Salisbury's protagonists, on the other hand, the goal is often simply to establish kinship with another person. The stories that come closest to happy endings conclude with the

beginnings of new relationships: in addition to Juke and Alita, we see Whipp profess his love for Ann, a young woman he met on the plane home from Japan, in "A Way Home;" in "Losers and Winners: An Ongoing Indian War," American Indian veteran Raymond asks his Cherokee classmate Irene on a date; in "Some Vanishing American Military Histories," Juke Dark Cloud, now a wounded veteran like his father, admits that "yes, Dad, you had some right to your own craziness, and I forgive you for getting drunk and shooting around my little feet a few times, and past my head" (Salisbury 170). Although Juke's relationship with his father remains complicated—more so because Dirk is already dead by the time Juke is able to forgive him—their shared experiences also allow for a kind of relationship that was impossible earlier in Juke's life.

In each of these texts, it becomes imperative that we recognize the impact humans have on one another and on the world at large. The narrator of Salisbury's titular story concludes that "I can't restore men's, women's, and children's lives, but I can try to make my own life, and those of others, somewhat better—can still try to change injustice to justice, still try to keep our species' suicidal tantrums from rendering us all extinct" (206). In his own obituary, published eight years later, Salisbury is quoted as saying, "[m]y work is offered to the spirit of human goodness, which unites all people in the eternal struggle against evil, a struggle to prevail against global extinction." By acknowledging humans' responsibility to one another and the necessity of building community, both within and beyond the stories themselves, Salisbury's fiction offers a way to participate in the healing process—a roadmap offering myriad paths toward "the healing of this grief" and a way to maintain "the relational system that keeps the people in balance with one another, with other people and realities, and with the world (Weaver 38; *Justice, Our Fire Survives the Storm*, 24).

Notes

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