

Stories and Places:

Human Relationship with Land in the Storied Universe

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Coming out from the car after driving winding country roads for three hours, we heard the roaring thunder. We were at the Medicine Wheel on Big Horn Mountains in Wyoming. The weather had been pleasant on the way. In the car, Marya had told us that she was always surprised when she could actually make her way to the place. In fact, there were times when she could not make it because of bad weather. At 9642 feet above sea level, the weather is unpredictable. Rain storms, deep snow, hail, and high winds often prevent people from completing the last leg of the journey. Rangers at the station warned us not to go. "It is a one and half mile walk to the Medicine Wheel, and those rain clouds move very fast," said one of them. We could not make up our mind. We walked around the gate, looking into the vivid yellow color of wild flowers and seeing yellow bellied marmots busily popping in and out from their dens. Raising my head, I saw lightening at eye level. Then the roar of thunder. We tried to measure how far we were from the lightening. The rain clouds were moving eastwards over neighboring mountains, licking the mountain slope. We spoke to a woman who had just come back from the Medicine Wheel. She said, "It wasn't raining up there." We looked at each other. We decided to go.

We walked as fast as we could. Marya and Wilhelmina went ahead, and Yogu and I followed them. I saw Marya and Wilhelmina talking intensely. This was first time Wilhelmina was visiting the Medicine Wheel even though she was not foreign to this region. The history of

her people is enmeshed with the history of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel reflects 10,000 years of Native American culture. Fifty some different tribes had visited the site and offered prayers. We climbed up the last stretch. On the top of the hill, we caught our breathes. Winds blew, telling us about the up-coming rain. Thunder still roared. A couple just ahead of us took a few pictures and quickly left. We were all by ourselves. Walking slowly around the Wheel, each of us offered a bunch of sage and made prayers. A couple of birds were chanting on a tree nearby. This is a place where Heaven meets the Earth. This is a place where time and space become one.

Coming down the hill, the wind was pushing on our back as if it were telling us to hurry up. Back at the station, the rangers greeted us, saying "You made it!" The truth was that we did not "make" it. With the rain clouds, winds, lightening, and thunder, the Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain were showing its true color, and for some reasons, we were allowed to be there. We got into the car, leaving the site behind. After a few miles of driving, we were hit by heavy hail storm. Looking for temporal shelter, we stopped at the Bear Lodge where many of the river fishing folks came in order to get away from the hail. In the noisy steamy diner, holding a cup of coffee in my hands, I was still with a sense of wonder. I could not help feeling honored to having been at the Medicine Wheel.

Each place has power to influence our senses. For instance, in a wide open field, our gaze has more width and depth. Our chests open up, and postures more upright. We sense the quality of the space that has been created by the interactions among the community of beings in the place. David Abram (1996) writes:

Each place has its own dynamism, its own patterns of movement, and these patterns engage the senses and relate them in particular ways, instilling particular moods and modes of awareness, so that unlettered, oral people will rightly say that each place has its own mind, its own personality, its own intelligence. (p. 182)

Indeed, as Abram states, we are influenced by the mind, personality and intelligence of places. Yet, this fact is not well integrated into discussions relating to the humans' relationship with the natural world. The relationship between humans and the non-human is mutual, but this

fact is often forgotten.

We are so accustomed to stories which grant full human agencies that we haven't found alternative stories which enable us to enter into a mutual relationship with the natural world. Perhaps, telling stories of places where we have been and remembering our relationships with those places, we might be able to call upon such alternative stories that enhance mutuality between people and the natural world. This paper explores such possibility by following the principle of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, a new field in literature studies, has been looking into the relationship between narratives and land. It suggests that in addition to race, gender, and class, place become a new critical category. It investigates the possibility of "cross-fertilization between literacy studies and environmental discourses" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xix). With this perspective of ecocriticism in mind, this paper seeks the cross-section between "self-narratives" with which we make sense out of our experiences and "ecological self" with which we situate ourselves in ecological contexts. In order to do so, first I examine the concept of "ecological self" as a way to illuminate some important void in the current discussion of nature-human relationships. Then I propose narrative as a means to revitalize the relationship between people and places that has been neglected by the heroic mobility of modern /postmodern life. With my own experiences of places, I explore the intimate relationship between stories and places.

Issues around ecological self

Deep ecologists have been proposing the concept of an "ecological self" and have used it to advocate for "self-identification with nature." While the "ecological self" brings us an awareness that we are part of nature, the concept falls short in creating space for a mutual relationship between human and non-human beings. When "self-identification" with nature is self-imposing, the non-human world and places are once again made to be the "background" on which human actors play their own scenarios, and the concept of an ecological self cannot be a truly effective catalyst that will transform the human-nature dualism.

Norwegian philosopher and one of the founders of deep ecology, Arne Naess (1988) states:

Traditionally the maturity of the self develops through three stages

—from ego to social self, and from social self to metaphysical self. In this conception of the process, nature —our home, our immediate environment, where we belong as children, and our identification with living human beings— is largely ignored. I therefore tentatively introduce the concept of an ecological self. We may be in, of and for nature from our very beginning. Society and human relations are important, but our self is richer in its constitutive relations. These relations are not only relations we have with humans and the human community, but with the larger community of all living beings. (p. 20).

Naess argues, “Human nature is such that with sufficient all-sided maturity we cannot avoid ‘identifying’ ourselves with all living beings” (1988, p. 20). He rejects the “man-in-environment” image in favor of the “relational, total-field image” and views organisms as “knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations” (1973, p. 95). Questions arise. In what ways does one have experiences of being a knot in the relational, total-field? Can we have such experiences at our own will? If we have such experiences, do they have enough of an impact to induce a new configuration of self such as the ecological self?

Ecologist, Buddhist, and general system thinker Joanna Macy claims, “The way we define and delimit the self is arbitrary” (1991, p. 12). She argues that we can widen our self to include the oxygen-giving trees and plankton as our external lungs and go beyond the skin-enveloped image of the self. John Seed, Director of the Rainforest Information Center in Australia, identifies himself with the rainforest; he speaks not for the rainforest, but as a part of the rainforest:

“I am protecting the rain forest” develops into “I am part of the rain forest protecting myself. I am that part of the rain forest recently emerged into thinking.” What a relief then! The thousands of years of imagined separation are over and we begin to recall our true nature. That is, the change is a spiritual one.... (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 243).

Seed and Macy have originated the Counsel of All Beings workshop in which participants are encouraged to identify themselves with the non-human beings such as insects, birds, deer, trees, rivers, and

mountains and speak from these beings' vantage points. One of the aims of the workshop is, as Aldo Leopold's (1949) famous phrase "Think like a mountain" suggests, to be conscious of the consequences of human actions to the larger community, the interconnected whole.

The ecological self is an important concept that helps those of us, who have lost touch with the reality that we are part of the natural world, to go beyond the anthropocentric worldview. At the same time, I see the concept of an ecological self as having two potential problems. First, the ecological self is often seen as a temporal experience or feeling, and rarely discussed as a part of the everyday operations of the self. According to Australian psychologist Elizabeth Ann Bragg (1996) who conducted research on the effects of the Counsel of All Beings on participants' self-concept:

Interviews and follow-up questioners suggested that participants did have powerful experiences of ecological self during the workshop, but that these experiences were relatively difficult to integrate into daily life and especially hard to explain to friends and family. (p. 104)

Issues such as how to integrate experiences of an ecological self with everyday experiences and how to sustain the feeling of having connections with the natural world remain, and that suggests a lack of personal and social context in which experiences of an ecological self can be grounded.

Another problematic element of the ecological self resides in its ahistorical and acultural stance. Director of Earth Island Institute, Carl Anthony (1995) questions, "Why is it easy for these people (deep ecologists) to think like mountains and not to be able to think like people of color?" (p. 273). Unacknowledged discrepancy between "identification with the natural world" and "identification with other people" stems from a lack of mutual understanding among people. Anthony argues that "harmony between the multicultural self and the ecological self" is essential in order to acknowledge differences in people's experiences of nature and overcome the discrepancy. Simultaneously embracing the multicultural self and the ecological self means to recognize that people's relationship with the natural world is culturally and historically constructed, and therefore, there are diverse ways in which people have dissociated from and related themselves to

the natural world.

The history of places intersects with human histories. In the discussion of ecological self, “nature” is often seen as “untouched” wilderness. “Culture” and “nature” intersect, and we, humans, exist in that intersection. Yet, our understanding of the ecological self is acultural and ahistorical because neither do we see culture as land-based nor do we acknowledge that land embodies human histories. Because we, who live in industrial/post-industrial societies, do not have an adequate context in which we can integrate the experiences of being a part of the natural world into our self-concepts, our experiences of an ecological self tend to be short lived.

Anthony argues that reasons for these discrepancies between identification with nature and identification with people “has nothing to do with color; it has to do with stories” (p. 273). Knowing stories of others is a key to establishing more encompassing ecological selves. Knowing the diversity that resides in stories of people’s connection with and disconnection from “nature” unable us to see the ways in which our relationship with the non-human world has been constructed. And possibly, by telling stories of places, we can participate in the creation of a paradigm in which our relationships of the non-human world can be grounded and explored.

Narrative knowing and the creation of an ecological context

Social systems in industrial/post-industrial societies are organized in such ways that prohibit us from seeing ourselves as a part of nature. Green psychologists, Ralph Metzner (1995) states:

We have the knowledge of our impact on the environment, we can perceive the pollution and degradation of the land, the waters, the air —but we do not attend to it, we do not connect that knowledge with other aspects of our total experience. Perhaps it would be more accurate, and fair, to say that individuals feel unable to respond to the natural world appropriately, because the political, economic, and educational institutions in which we are involved all have this dissociation built into them. (pp. 64-65)

If we want to alter this condition, we need to have personal, social, and cultural context in which our rather sporadic experiences of being a

part of nature can be woven together and made to be a coherent system that affects our everyday thinking and behavior. Bragg's study on the effect of the Counsel of All Beings supports the importance of such context;

Individuals who had found social support for their experiences (e.g. joining a women's spirituality group or an environmental group) continued to have high scores of 'ecological self' 6 months later, and several described the Council as the 'turning point' in their lives or as a catalyzing event. These results suggest that 'ecological self' is dynamic and highly reactive to individuals' surrounding 'life-space,' necessitating the continuation of Council-like experiences for its maintenance. (p. 104)

Council-like experiences help us to put ourselves in the shoes of other beings. Being in the natural setting, we feel perceptual and other somatic shifts within ourselves. These experiences are valuable for the evocation of the ecological self. At the same time, unless those experiences are given meaning in an adequate context, there won't be any significant change in our view of the self and the world.

We give meaning to our experiences in terms of stories. We make sense out of our experiences through the creation of narratives. Being human means to engage in constant meaning-making processes, and through narratives, we give meaning to the mere passing moments and incorporate them into a larger whole that is the self. Cognitive psychologist, Donald E. Polkinghorne states:

Narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experiences of temporality and personal actions. Narrative meaning functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic events. It provides a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions. (1988, p. 11)

Cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986) identifies narratives as one of the two basic modes of human cognitive functioning, contrasting it with the paradigmatic knowing. According to Bruner, while the paradigmatic mode generates context-free explanations through

abstraction and generalization, the narrative mode locates particular experiences in time and place, and hence narrative understanding is contextual and temporal.

As folk stories often start with an introduction such as “Long, long time ago, there was a village where people lived peacefully...,” we begin our stories by locating time and place that involves events we wish to narrate. We tell stories of our experiences that took place in specific time and specific place, and by doing so, we try to make sense out of our experiences. “Meaning” is not given, but arises in interaction. Our experience has meanings only in relation to its context. Narrative mode of knowing is context sensitive, and its sensitivity to contexts indicates our fundamental cultural and social embeddedness. How about our ecological embeddedness in narrative knowing? After all, “place” is an important component in narrative knowing, and we cannot even begin to tell our stories without indicating where the story takes place. If that is the case, narrative knowing should have naturally addressed our ecological embeddedness, but it hasn’t. Why is that?

The widely accepted notion of independent, self-sufficient, hyper-individualistic view of the modern self is supposed to move freely from one context to the other as if it were context free. This “heroic autonomy” of the modern self makes individuals moving dots and regards place as the stage on which human drama takes place. Human actors are in their own psychological cocoons, and their narratives are not enmeshed with stories of the community of beings in the place. This is one of the reasons why our experiences of self-identification with the natural world cannot be easily integrated into the rest of our experiences.

Qualitatively different experiences cannot be simply added to existing self-narratives. Such experiences require the emergence of a new context. Stories of “having a sense of being a part of nature” do not comfortably fit into the paradigm of the modern self that separates itself from the non-human world and disregards its ecological embeddedness. In order to explore such experiences, we need to have a context that respects our relationship with the natural world and places. “There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place,” says Neil Evernden (1996, p. 103). With the creation of an ecological context, we are able to formulate different kinds of self-narratives that endorse fundamental

mutuality between humans and the non-human world.

When we tell stories, we do not simply recount past events. The act of narration involves the element of "exploration." In telling stories, we examine past events with concerns at the moment, trying to see their implication for the future. Following Augustine and Heidegger, Polkinghorne postulates that self-narrative interweaves "three notions of the present" —the present understanding of the past (memories), of the present (attention), and of the future (expectation) (p. 154). In narrative, the past (memories), the present (attention), and the future (expectation) are brought together, and in telling stories, we test the coherence among the three, seeking the meaning of our experiences for ourselves. In this process, the narrative scheme serves "as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole" (Polkinghorne, p. 36).

Attention demanding conditions and concerns make us fetch back in time. Our reflection on past events shed light on present condition and brings new understanding about it. Recalling my relationship with places gives me an insight into how I have been dissociated from the non-human world. Remembering my parents' stories of their childhood brings me a better understanding of how the dissociation have been passed down from one generation to another. Listening to stories of others, I begin to see similarities and differences in human experiences of places.

I was a physically weak child whose regular visit to pediatricians kept my mother busy and worried. My bronchi gave me constant coughs and fever. Through a series of attacks of bronchitis, I learned how to breathe without disturbing my lungs. Because of these conditions, as a child, I could not engage in physical activities with full enthusiasm. I could not run around outside, but in my own quiet way, I explored high-grass fields and bamboo woods in my neighborhood. Some people climb rocky mountains and swim long distance in the ocean. For them, nature may be something to challenge. For me, the natural world has been a place of solitude, silence, and unconditional acceptance. As a child, I saw these neighborhood fields and woods being transformed into flat lands and then buildings. Recovering from the post war depression, the Japanese economy was accelerating during the 60's. The transformation of my neighborhood taking place right in front of my eyes stunned me. I lost the place to be alone where I felt safe. As an extremely

introverted child, I was never good at approaching and talking to people; losing my emotional refuge, I was pushed into the human-social world.

Being in the mountains and being surrounded by woods makes me feel at home. It is important for me to feel being part of nature. My mother does not feel this way, and that relates to how she grew up and what was going on in the country when she was a young girl. During World War II, the city of Nagoya where my mother lived was heavily bombed by B-29s. Since staying in the city was dangerous and food was scarce there, my grandparents sent their children to the country side where their relatives lived. All the siblings were sent to different locations in order not to be a big burden to those relatives. In the country side, nature was rich in green. But my mother was too lonely to appreciate that beauty. Most of all, she wasn't free from the constant fear of being killed by bombs. Even there, people had to be careful not to miss the siren that warned of the approaching enemy bombing attacks. In between those fearful moments, people collected edible leaks, plants, and insects. For my mother, and in the similar way for my father too, "nature" meant a place of survival woven with memories of the war.

When the war ended, my parents, like other children and adults, were baptized by DDT. American GIs brought DDT as an antiseptic. In school, children in their underwear stood in line, being sprayed by the white powder from their heads to toes. The war was over, and there were no more flea bites to deal with. The powered boys and girls hoped that the "sanitation" would improve their miserable conditions and erase the traces of the nightmares of war.

My parents' childhood experiences still overcast their ways of relating to the natural world. "Being in nature" inevitably reminds my parents of their war experiences which they wanted to forget. Now, coming to their old age, they seem to be more willing to talk about their experiences. That might change their perception of nature, or maybe that is too much to expect. Until his recent retirement, for my father "work" was what all his life was about. In his retirement, he has trouble getting used to life without a work schedule. Like many Japanese of his age, my father worked as a part of an "industrial growth society" that has been killing the planet as well as the souls of many people. In 1995, 22,000 people committed suicide in Japan.

Reasons for giving up their lives vary. But one very sure thing is that something is definitely wrong in this society. The society based on an industrial growth model has destroyed not only the “external” natural world, but also nature within people.

These are stories of my family. Other people have different stories of their relation to the land. I remember an Afro-American woman whom I met in a nature-writing workshop. In a group sharing, she read her piece of writing in which she excavated the reason why she was afraid of the wilderness. She grew up and has lived in cities all her life. In her writing, she put herself into the shoes of her grandmother who was from, and never went back to, the American southern states. Seeing the landscape of the South from her grandmother’s eyes, in her writing, she vividly illustrated the image of a lynched man’s body hanging from a tree. Through that writing, she gained an understanding of why she could not relate to the natural world. The intergenerational ecological wounds were acknowledged by her.

Several weeks later, she told me that she joined a trip to do a vision quest in which she spent two days and two nights by herself without food out in a mountain area. When I asked of her experience of the trip, she shared a story of her encounter with a squirrel. When she quietly sat under a tree with her blank mind, one squirrel ran up to her. She noticed a zooming movement, but did not know what it was until it touched her knee. Then, she jumped. The squirrel went away. She said, “Maybe the squirrel mistook me as part of the tree.” Maybe. She felt that she might be the one who would break the family pattern and change the intergenerational disconnection from nature. I agreed with her.

Through the development of modern industrialization, urbanization occurred, and people began to move to cities to be wage laborers. “Nature” has become industrial resources that have been controlled and exploited through colonization and sequential wars, and so have been human “resources.” The established economic system has removed indigenous peoples from their land and prevents them from maintaining their land-based self-sufficient ecological life style. The processes in which people have removed themselves from the rest of nature and how individuals have lost their embodied, ecological wisdom are complex and diverse. Everyone has different personal, social, cultural, and historical background that affects the way she/he relates to the non-human

world.

Through our personal and cultural narratives in which we acknowledge our unique histories of separation from the non-human world, we might be able to find our way back to being in harmony with the rest of the planetary community and reconnect with other people with great respect for each other's unique and distinctive struggle. Developmental and humanistic psychologist Eric H. Erikson (1968) states:

[W]e cannot separate personal growth and communal change, nor can we separate the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crisis in historical development because the two help to define each other and are truly relative to each other. (p. 23)

As Erikson argues, the identity crisis that people experience and the historical/ecological crisis that we face today are not separate events. We need to rediscover the ecologically rooted self and at the same time, generate an ecologically sound culture of which values, ethics, and aesthetics are in unity with those of the rest of the Earth community. In that sense, it can be said that the process of crafting life-histories based on our relationship with places can be one of the practices that would lead the creation of ecologically sound cultural context.

In reality, not many people mind paying attention to such self-narratives. In modern/post-modern self-narratives, much emphasis is given to human agency. We regard human agency so highly that our narratives are constituted by our decisions and actions and do not have much space for mutual relationship with other people and the non-human world. In extreme cases, some postmodernists regard identities as masks, cities as "theater, a series of stages upon which individuals could work their own distinctive magic while performing a multiplicity of roles" (Harvey, 1990, p. 5). Perhaps, by creating life-history based on our relationship with places, we begin to realize the superficial aspects of the modern/post-modern narratives.

Intimate relationship between story and place

We left Sydney early in the morning and headed for Melbourne. Five of us, Yogu, Theva, Olly, Chun, and I were piled up in the car. This was the first time Yogu and I visited Australia where many of his relatives live. They migrated from Sri Lanka in order to escape the

on-going civil war. There was so much they had to catch up that this long driving trip turned out to be a perfect story telling session. In the car, their stories went on one after another. Back in the car, sitting in between Yogu and Chun, I asked about one of their relatives whom we were going to meet in Melbourne. "Naula is the third oldest brother's wife. Do you remember the story of Nage? She is his wife. He died in 1983 when the whole thing started. When the war broke out, Naula and their kids escaped from Colombo, and he was somewhere else. He tried to find them, but couldn't, and he got a heart attack because of so much stress," said Yogu. "Oh, it was really bad! I had to hide myself in one of my neighbors' houses," Chun carried on, "because the Singhalies tried to capture and kill all the Tamils in Colombo. So, we all packed ourselves in a van and drove to our mother's property on the East coast." Theva's voice joined the story from the front, "It is a very pretty place. The Eastern province. The village has smooth sand beaches. When we were small, we went there. The water was warm, so it was very nice to swim there."

Listening to their stories, I tried to imagine the beach with houses with coconut leaf roofs on the East coast of Sri Lanka. Looking out from the window, all I saw was endless flat grass land with eucalyptus trees, an Australian landscape. What I was hearing did not match with what I was seeing. Cognitive dissonance. I felt dizzy.

Barry Lopez (1989) discusses relationship between the external landscape that we see and the internal landscape that exists within ourselves and responds to the character and subtlety of an external landscape. He argues, "The purpose of story telling is to achieve harmony between the two landscapes, to use all the elements of story – syntax, mood, figures of speech – in a harmonious way to reproduce harmony of the land in the individuals' interior" (p. 68) Based on memories of landscape that was once intimate to us, we tell stories and try to evoke the half-forgotten harmony of the place. However, once we are away from the place, it is extremely difficult to achieve harmony between the external and the internal landscape, if it is not impossible.

On-going wars and terrorism all over the globe are relentlessly generating more refugees and immigrants who cannot be in their homeland. Oliva M. Espin who escaped from Cuba after the political turn-over by Fidel Castro in 1959 discusses her first trip back to Cuba in twenty-three years:

[M]y trip to Cuba made me realize that for years I had felt as if my memories had no geography. But that, in fact, what I remembered had actually happened in a definite physical space that continues to exist in reality and not only in my memory. That Cuba exists beyond what I think or feel or remember about her. This realization, which may seem all too obvious, was the more powerful because before my return I never knew that I felt as if Cuba did not have a real existence beyond my memory. (1992, p. 16, emphasis original)

Espin's return to Cuba reassured her that the memory had its physical reality. That reassurance, in return, assured the roots of her existence. My childhood playground, bamboo bush, and high grass land in Japan are gone. They were the places where I had my primordial experiences of the natural world. They now exist only in my memory, but do not possess physical reality. If I want to assure my memory of those places, I need to find someone who knows what those places used to be like. In the case of Yogu and his family, it might not be easy for them to visit the East coast beaches in Sri Lanka since the Eastern province has been in the control of guerrillas. Their stories cannot meet the presence of place.

In today's world, the fundamental connection between narrative and landscape has been violated in various ways. People have been either voluntarily or forced to move from their places. Even if people do not move, their surrounding landscape has been altered due to urbanization, development of mass agricultural industry, deforestation, industrialization, tourism, etc. Leslie Marmon Silko claims, "[T]he continuity and accuracy of the oral narratives are reinforced by the landscape" (1996, p. 271). If the landscape is drastically altered, the place will lose its integrity. As a result, oral narratives that correspond to the landscape cannot be intact, and historical cohesion that was preserved in the stories would be lost. Traditional worldview that has given people a sense of location in the world would be shattered, and people's sense of being would be fragmented. "[N]arrative are rooted in the local landscape. To violate that connection is to call the narrative itself into question," (p. 68) says Lopez.

Today, we rely more on written texts than oral narratives in our knowing, and the act of narration is not as much valued as the narratives produced. Abram sees this tendency as an inevitable result of

humans' separation from the land. Discussing the Hebrews as the first truly alphabetic culture of which elements have been preserved through written text, he states:

While the visible landscape provides an oral, tribal culture with a necessary mnemonic, or memory trigger, for remembering its ancestral stories, alphabetic writing enabled the Hebrew tribes to preserve their cultural stories intact even when the people were cut off, for many generations, from the actual lands where those stories had taken place. By carrying on its lettered surface the vital stories earlier carried by the terrain itself, the written text became a kind of portable homeland for the Hebrew people. (p. 195)

If the written text works as a sort of "portable homeland" for people, through written texts, we might be able to imagine once existed landscape where the stories were originated. Written texts might help the enhancement of the memories of homeland. Yet, as Espin mentions about her memories of and her return to Cuba, it is very important to feel that our memories are based on some form of physical reality. When our memories have no geography, the roots of our existence would be more fragile. In order for us to situate ourselves in an ecological context, our narratives have to meet the reality of the world in some ways.

To keep the integrity of land-based cultures requires the preservation of the integrity of their land. This is especially the case of our time when the integrity of the whole Earth community has been damaged, and people with land-based cultures have been removed from their land due to economic development. By telling stories, we can re-enter into mutual relationships with land. What I mean by land here is not the "ground," or a "territory," or a piece of "property," but "place" on which relationships among the community of beings take place. In the words of Lopez:

Draw on the smell of creosote bush, or clack stones together in the dry air. Feel how light is the desiccated dropping of the kangaroo rat. Study an animal track obscured by the wind. These are all elements of the land, and what makes the landscape comprehensible are the relationships between them. One learns a landscape finally not by

knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationship in it. (p. 64)

Silko states that the English term “landscape” which means “a portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings” (p. 265). “The land, the sky, and all that is within them—landscape— includes human beings” (p. 267), she argues. We are a part of the land, and we are in a relationship that permeates the land, and telling stories about the place, we participate in the activity of the land.

Landscapes include humans. So, when we say that our stories are evoked by places, that means that a part of the land is speaking to the rest of the land. It is not that we tell stories, but places tell stories through humans. We tell stories, like birds chatter around at day break, and like wolves howl at the moon. Gary Snyder views performances such as story telling and dance in native cultures as “currency in the deep world’s gift economy” (1990, p. 75). In this sense, the act of narrating stories of a place is an offering to the community of beings in the place. Abram states, “The vitality of each place... is rejuvenated by the human enactment, and en-chant-ment of the storied events that crouch within it” (p. 193). That can be the case for places in which ecological integrity is relatively intact. How about the cases of urban dwellings? Do people who live in cities, like myself, still have such close connection with places?

I think that we still do. I see our acknowledgment to the place that we know as almost innate. For instance, whenever Yogu drives down Powel street in Emeryville, he points his chin towards a building between the warehouses, saying, “That’s where my old office used to be.” My usual response is “I know. You told me that before.” It does not really matter to him if I know that or not. He cannot help making that remark when he passes the place. He has to acknowledge the place that was once an important part of his life. I do a similar thing whenever I drive up highway 101 north to Santa Rosa. When the car passes the exit near where I used to live, I may not say anything, but I have to look out from the window and look towards the direction. Somehow, I feel that a part of me is still living there, looking the gentle slopes of hills on the edge of the town.

Acknowledging places that we intimately know and telling about what had happened there, we reassure our relationship with the place. With our mind's eye, we see how we spent time in the place. Memory of the place is revitalized. Or more accurately, through telling stories of the place, we re-experience time when our relationship with the place was vital. When Yogu acknowledges his old office in Emeryville, he acknowledges the time when the company he works for was much smaller and had a family-like climate. The place triggers memories of his early working days and his close relationships with his colleagues at the time. The place envelopes a specific time for him.

According to Abram, space and time were not always distinguishable dimensions of experiences, but "the very differentiation of 'space' from 'time' was itself born of the same perceptual and linguistic changes (from oral to written forms)" (p. 188). A place triggers stories, and in the act of narrating the place-induced stories, we experience time differently. Those of us who live in modern/postmodern society are trained to experience time as a linear flow whereas oral native cultures often express their experiences of time as cyclical. Pete Gunther (1985) argues, "Man lives in a progressive, expressive, non-repetitive time; ecology is the science of cyclical repetition" (p. 112). In telling stories of places, these opposing movements, linear time of humans and cyclical time of the natural world, can be temporarily reconciled. Lopez sees the purpose of story telling as a realignment of internal and external landscapes. In a similar manner, story-telling brings realignment between human experiences of time and nature's expression of time.

In Polkinghorne's words:

Although narrative moves inescapably backwards in its concern with the understanding of the past-in-the-present, the view of development that derives from it can retain a focus on the forward movement that is rendered in the texts provided. Thus, perhaps, paradoxically, it is out of retrospection that a project, an approximation toward desired ends can be revealed. (p. 118)

Polkinghorne states that the past is not over because we can retrieve it in our memory (p. 133). The past is not over because what we remember would determine what is real to us in the present. "Going back into the past is not a mechanical reproduction of what has been;

rather, it is a fetching back of the possibilities that have passed by in order to make them real again in the present” (p. 133) says Polkinghorne. In this sense, through speculating our past, we harvest our lost possibilities as a person and as a human species. I agree with Polkinghorne’s statement, “Through the transmission of past possibilities to present hearers, the tradition of a historical community’s common destiny is repeated or retrieved” (p. 134). We cannot find fruitful new stories for our future without the recognition and understanding of the “historical community’s common destiny” that is a co-creation between people and land. Recounting our primordial experiences of the natural world and recalling memories of places is one of the ways by which we rediscover what has been forgotten in the process of the development of hyper-individualistic modern self and harvest our lost possibilities.

Bringing stories back to the land

Driving at 80 miles an hour for three hours on a straight road from Alice Spring further south, I have noticed that the scenery hasn’t changed much. Central Australia is red sand desert. On this flat land, there are not many places where you can get away from the mercilessly hot sun; you are exposed to the heat and vicious flies that constantly try to get into your mouth, nose, and eyes, demanding every ounce of moisture. Then, in the distance, you will see Uluru, Ayers Rock. Its circumference about 5.5 miles and its height 1142 feet above the surrounding plain. It consists of sandstone and conglomerate strata steeply tilted by earth movements. It looks like a gigantic whale on the ground. It is so obviously sacred. Once, Uluru was Aboriginal people’s home. It was where people danced, told stories, painted, and did rituals and ceremonies. Now, Uluru is a part of the Uluru Kita Tjuta National Park. Like the Opera House in Sydney, Ayers Rock has become one of the most celebrated landmarks in Australia where many tourists flock. People used to live with Uluru, but not any more. Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, and Maruku aboriginal people still live near by, and their art, craft, stories, and dance are available to tourists at the “cultural center” in the park. Aboriginal cultural practices were removed from Uluru. “Nature” and “culture” were divided. Stories were removed from the land.

People are a part of nature, and culture is a people’s place-specific

way of living with the rest of the natural world. In other words, people co-evolve with their surrounding through their culture, and stories take an important role in the co-evolution process. By telling stories, people reassure their connection with their places. Hearing stories of the land, people make themselves a part of the history of the place. The same stories are retold because in that manner, people continuously realign themselves with the orders of the land. Yet, where stories are concerned, they are frequently treated as a purely human inventions, and the kinship between the land and the people that constitute stories is dismissed. In the case of Australian aboriginal people, while their stories of “dream time,” dot art, and didgeridoos (musical instruments) that are extracted from the land are commodified and internationally recognized, their traditional ways of living close to the land have been denied. This is happening to many of the tribal people all over the world. The strangeness and irony of this condition cannot be adequately understood without examining the common practice that tries to preserve “culture” and “nature” separately.

The old story within the Enlightenment project that is largely responsible for the nature-culture dualism is disintegrating. Some still cling onto the story of “exponential growth” of the modern industrial age, but we know that it is a destructive fantasy rather than a life enhancing story. We cannot live in the old story, but we haven’t found a new story yet. In this time called the postmodern era, we find ourselves in a void of stories. According to Mair (1988):

Stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart. We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are lived by the stories of our race and place. It is this enveloping and constituting function of stories that is especially important to sense more fully. We are, each of us, locations where the stories of our place and time become partially tellable. (p. 127)

If Mair is right, we who cannot find stories of our time are homeless. Under such circumstances, the temptation to appropriate the stories of “indigenous people” for our own benefit is great. Surely the wisdom of people who still possess land-based cultures is invaluable for those of us

who have lost such cultures long ago. Yet, I believe, we should not solely rely upon their work in the process of recovering our ecological selves. We have to do our portion of work and contribute to the process of creating a new context in which our experiences of being a part of nature are granted and strong ecologically sound ethics can be established.

Today's political, educational, and social systems are set up in such ways that make us to believe that the land is something we appropriate, but those systems do not encourage us to appropriate ourselves as a part of the community of the place. We still experience the strong connection with places, but those experiences of ours tend to be fragmented because of the lack of an ecological context in which those experiences can be integrated. Those of us who have lost a cosmology that helps us to form healthy relationship with the natural world look for a new story and a new context in which we can re-situate ourselves as a part of the Earth community. In order to make the creation of such ecologically sound context and cultures, we need to begin to see the "ecological self" as a communal project rather than a personal enterprise. In this point, Naess' "ecological self" is more like a "myth," and not the reality of the majority of people's everyday life. Yet, at the same time, the notion of an ecological self grasps some essence of our fundamental connection with the non-human world. Perhaps, the "ecological self" is a myth that has to be further cherished with our efforts and attention and made to be a story which we live by.

"Keeping myth alive requires a lively appreciation of the depths of metaphor, of ceremony, and the need for stories," (p. 57) says Snyder. Telling stories is one of the ways of keeping myth alive. Telling stories of places, myth, metaphor, symbols that we are used to become real to us again. By attending to the natural world with great tentativeness, we will find that myth, metaphor, and symbols are grounded in the physical reality of the land and its activities. We cannot preserve land-based metaphors and stories when the land itself is constantly and forcefully transformed for human uses. We cannot preserve "culture" and "nature" separately. In some ways, our stories have to meet the presence of the places where they were originated. In that way, our stories can be offered to the land and rejuvenate the place. In that receptacle relationship with the land, stories can nurture our ecological selves and give us a sense of some historical coherence. Through telling

and hearing stories, we establish mutual understanding among people as well as between humans and the non-humans. Most importantly, by telling stories, we develop sensitivity to listen to stories of the land.

We live in a contradictory world. For instance, we would most likely need to get out from the city if we wanted to listen to the land and its community speak. In order to feel and sense our kinship with the natural world, we need to rely on our mobility that has caused our disembeddedness. I was in the Uluru Kita Tjuta National Park as a tourist and completely disgusted by tourism. That was my contradiction. The majesty of Uluru have fed the souls of the Aboriginal from the beginning of their time. The oxidation of iron on the rock has given it its red coloring. Water and wind have produced the gullies and scars in the vertically stood strata. Uluru consists of layers of history of the place, and the Aboriginal people have added paintings of their stories to it. The rock and people used to co-create the text, but not any more. While Uluru and the Aboriginal cultures have become widely known, the place and its culture cannot meet each other. That is a deeper layer of the contradiction. Seeing lines of people climbing up and down the sacred Uluru, it felt impossible to sense the presence of the place.

A couple weeks after coming back from the Australia trip, I dreamt of the place. In the dream, I saw a pond, but there was no sight of Uluru. In the pool of clear water, there were a countless number of bodies of Aboriginal men with white painting on their skin. As I attempted to ask a young Aboriginal man who sat on a rock near the water about what had happened, I woke up from the dream. Later, I found that there was a mythical story of Uluru that resembled my dream. According to the story, there was a battle that involved three tribes; the Kunia — the Carpet Snake people, the Mala — the Hare-wallaby people, and the Windulka — the Mulga Seed people. Many of them were killed. After the battle, the survivors of the Kunia gathered around the body of their leader, Ungata. They sang in great anguish, and sang to death. Then the earth itself rose up against all the death and became the great rock that we now call Uluru, Ayers Rock (Cowan, 1992, cited in Marshall 1993, p.53).

Perhaps, I should not analyze this dream and keep it as a gift from the land. Snyder says that we have become ignorant of our own nature and forgotten the wild within us. But despite cultural changes and our tremendous ignorance, places still directly speak to our psyche without

a language. The grammar of the land is real, and that is wild. And the wild speech of the land keeps inviting us to be a part of its story.

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