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"Girl Who Comes Out Fighting": Indigenous Girlhood in Eco-Crisis in Rebecca Roanhorse's Sixth World

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Abstract

This essay explores representations of Indigenous girlhood and ecological crisis in Rebecca Roanhorse's *Sixth World* novel series, consisting of *Trail of Lightning* (2018) and *Storm of Locusts* (2019). Focusing on the work of an Ohkay Owingeh and African American writer of speculative fiction, I argue that *Sixth World* portrays its young female protagonist Maggie's coming-of-age in direct relation to her post-apocalyptic environment, both as a trauma-survivor and an agent of hope, or "Chíníbaá, . . . girl who comes out fighting" (*Trail* 110). By examining Maggie's liminal and ambiguous subject position as a self-isolated young female "monsterslayer"—which complicates the categories among gods, monsters, and humans after the climate apocalypse—I argue that the series explores the continuing presence of settler colonialism, extractive capitalism, and heteropatriarchal structures that have defined and disrupted both girl identities and the nonhuman environment. Through Maggie's journey of reclaiming connection and self-awareness, the narrative also navigates possibilities of decoloniality, kinship, and healing within an agentic nonhuman environment. This discussion employs a decolonial and ecofeminist lens and situates the novel series within the broader contexts of Native Apocalypse and Indigenous futurisms, while highlighting its contributions to contemporary environmental and girlhood scholarship. Ultimately, by examining how two crisis configurations, namely of disrupted girlhoods and environments, intersect with the Indigenous apocalyptic in-between in the series, this essay explores Indigenous futuristic and decolonial ethnospeculative aesthetics in addressing interconnected issues of girlhood and the nonhuman environment in contemporary American speculative literature.[1]

"The first time I met my birth mother," recounts Rebecca Roanhorse, an Ohkay Owingeh and African American author of speculative fiction, "she gave me two things: a VHS tape of *Surviving Columbus: The Story of the Pueblo People* and a CD of the Cree singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie" ("Postcards from the Apocalypse" 131)[2]. Describing these recordings as documentations of Indigenous peoples' resilience and survivance[3]—"of what it means to face the end of the world and survive. And then to keep surviving, even thriving,

[1] I would like to thank Fritz Bommas and Markus Schwarz, whose friendship and encouragement have made this work possible.

[2] This fragmented essay was published several months before the release of Roanhorse's debut novel *Trail of Lightning* (2018).

[3] In *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1994), Gerald Vizenor defines "survivance" as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy" (vii).

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when the world keeps trying to kill you" (131)—Roanhorse draws attention to a particular liminal consciousness that the gifts communicate:

> In a way, my birth mother's gifts were symbolic of Indigenous existence. To be a Native of North America is to exist in a space where the past and the future mix in a delicate swirl of the here-and-now. We stand with one foot always in the darkness that ended our world, and the other in a hope for our future as Indigenous people. It is from this apocalyptic in-between that the Indigenous voices in speculative fiction speak. (131)

Weaving an autobiographical account of her recovering of estranged mother-daughter and ancestral bonds with broader histories and "truth-tellings" (131) of settler-colonial dispossession and Indigenous resurgence, Roanhorse argues that the Indigenous present exists in a complex intertwining with the past and the future, where genocide and sovereignty, destruction and repair, trauma and healing, apocalypse and post-apocalypse exist alongside each other.

Roanhorse's observation of an "apocalyptic in-between" (131), or an ambiguous Indigenous existence across multiple overlapping temporalities, as well as its figurations in contemporary speculative fiction narratives, points to the broader artistic, literary, and intellectual movement referred to as Indigenous futurisms.[4] The past two decades have seen a proliferation of speculative texts that extrapolate on apocalyptic world endings,[5] particularly in the contexts of the Anthropocene and the climate crisis, alongside a significant growing body of Native American writing, both fictional and non-fictional, that articulates Indigenous perspectives on past-future and space-time thinking. According to Grace L. Dillon, authors of Indigenous futurisms interrogate whether science fiction[6] holds "the capacity to envision Native futures, Indigenous hopes, and dreams recovered by

[4] Grace L. Dillon coined the term "Indigenous futurisms" in the early 2000s, in reference to science fiction and inspired by Afrofuturisms. Dillon elaborates on it in *Walking the Clouds* (2012), the first anthology of Indigenous science fiction.

[5] Oxford English Dictionary defines apocalypse as "the end of the current world and associated events" (3.a.) in a theological context, and as "an event resulting in catastrophic damage or irreversible change to human society or the environment, esp. on a global scale; a cataclysm" (3.b.) in a general context. In this essay, I simultaneously engage with both definitions, understanding apocalypse as a large-scale cataclysmic event that disrupts existing world formations.

[6] Definitions among futurist genres are fuzzy and difficult to pin down. Dillon aims to "distinguish science fiction from other speculative writing typically associated with Native thinking, . . . to return the 'science' to sf, which should be recognized as the signature feature of the genre" (7). Throughout this essay, however, I will employ "speculative fiction" as an umbrella term to include all sorts of futuristic writing that asks "what if" and imagines alternate realities that resemble ours.

rethinking the past in a new framework" (2). In an experimental manner and opposing "what 'serious' Native authors are *supposed* to write, they have room to play with setting, character, and dialogue; to stretch boundaries; and, perhaps most significantly, to reenlist the science of indigeneity . . . [as] integral to a refined twenty-first-century sensibility" (3). Indigenous futurisms contest western notions of *linear* time, history, knowledge, place, and progress, by reconfiguring space, "both outer and inner," and time, where "the past . . . is folded into the present, which is folded into the future—a philosophical wormhole that renders the very definitions of time and space fluid in the imagination" (Roanhorse, "Postcards" 132). Thus, these space-time contestations are deeply entangled with Roanhorse's "apocalyptic in-between" as it emerges in Indigenous speculative fiction. As Dillon writes:

> All forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, . . . the process of "returning to ourselves," which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world. This process is often called "decolonization" . . . it requires *changing* rather than *imitating* Eurowestern concepts. (10)

Indigenous futurisms reframe the lived histories of settler-colonial violence and trauma while imagining alternative possibilities and futures outside the dominant narratives. In doing so, they engage critical approaches—including decolonial, ecocritical, and feminist frameworks—and employ aesthetics of survivance to enable wide-ranging possibilities for decolonization, kinship, and healing in the present moment. In this light, Roanhorse acknowledges Dillon's influence on her writing and positions herself among authors of Indigenous futurisms, asserting that "we are rising from the apocalypse, folding the past into our present and writing a future that is decidedly Indigenous" ("Postcards" 136).

Roanhorse's debut novel series, *Sixth World,* consisting of *Trail of Lightning* (2018) and *Storm of Locusts* (2019),[7] can be read as a narrative of "returning to ourselves" in a post-Native Apocalypse world, through which a distinct Indigenous present and

[7] From this point forward, I will refer to these two novels as *Trail* and *Storm*.

presence[8] emerges. As the rising waters of a planetary climate apocalypse called the "Big Water" leaves "two-thirds of the continent underwater" in a fictional North America, the Navajo cosmology is rebirthed (Roanhorse, *Trail* 70). In this essay, I will argue that *Sixth World* engages in a decolonial reconfiguring of Roanhorse's "apocalyptic in-between," stemming from the particularly complex, ambiguous, liminal, and marginalized temporal space of girlhood, as embodied by the series' young female narrator protagonist. Magdalena "Maggie" Hoskie is an apprentice "monsterslayer . . . [t]rained by Naayéé' Neizghání himself" (40).[9] Maggie is caught between the apocalyptic destruction of her past and the vengeful violence of her present—between a disrupted girlhood and a trauma-ridden young adulthood. In envisioning life after a climate apocalypse from Maggie's perspective, *Sixth World* explores two distinct crisis configurations alongside and in direct connection with each other, namely of the nonhuman environment and of Indigenous girlhoods. Maggie's disrupted girlhood—and later Ben's, a younger girl for whom Maggie acts as a guardian in the second installment—not only occurs in the direct aftermath of the ecological crisis of the Big Water but is also deeply entangled with the settler-colonial oppressions that contribute significantly to this crisis itself.

In other words, the multifaceted nature of the Big Water—encompassing historical, cultural, societal, political, economic, and environmental oppressions and devastations—is mirrored in equally complex experiences of (post-)apocalyptic female coming-of-age, intertwining the unfolding ecological crisis with girlhood becomings. While alluding to a broader planetary collapse, the distinctly North American setting further emphasizes how the Big Water poses disproportionate dangers for Indigenous girls, by weaving together histories of the Native Apocalypse with a speculative future that raises new risks for their survival. Throughout *Sixth World*, Maggie is seen confronting the tragic death of her

[8] Vizenor discusses "survivance" together with "presence" in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (2008): "The theories of survivance are elusive . . . but survivance is invariably true and just in native *practice and company*. The nature of survivance is unmistakable in native stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, and customs, and it is clearly observable in *narrative resistance* and personal attributes, such as the native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance creates a sense of native *presence* over absence, nihility, and victimry" (6; my emphasis).

[9] In *Trail*, "monsterslayer" refers to a powerful hunter with supernatural abilities to eliminate monsters. It is particularly associated with Naayéé' Neizghání, a legendary hero figure in Navajo mythology: "the Monsterslayer of legend, an immortal who is the son of two Holy People" (6). As his "apprentice," however, Maggie is "not like Neizghání . . . I'm human, a five-fingered girl" (4, 6).

grandmother and the consequent awakening of her "clan powers"[10] during the Big Water—both of which lead her to believe she has become a danger to her community. As Maggie navigates life after catastrophe as a socially isolated young woman in a devastated environment, struggling to come to terms with her traumatic experiences and newfound supernatural abilities, possibilities for connection, growth, and healing begin to emerge through kinship. Gradually, Maggie becomes a protector for those around her, ultimately reconnecting with her community. Her ultimate decision to "come home" with her chosen family, rather than pursuing further revenge and violence through her clan powers, offers hope for girl futures in the Big Water. In this way, *Sixth World* engages with decolonial ethnospeculative praxis by rewriting Indigenous girlhoods beyond settler-colonial and heteropatriarchal frameworks, offering possibilities for decoloniality, healing, and alternative forms of existence.

Although I am aware that the series has received mixed reviews,[11] which both celebrate and criticize its representation of Navajo culture and cosmology, I choose to work with these texts as works of Indigenous futurisms, focusing on their representations of

[10] In *Trail*, clan powers refer to various supernatural abilities that are bestowed upon individuals and passed down through bloodlines within the Diné clan system: "they are gifts from the Diyin Dine'é. That they come from your first two clans only, mother's first and then father's. That they manifest in times of great need, but not to everyone, and not everyone is blessed equally" (57).

[11] Saad Bee Hózhǫ́, a Navajo writers' collective of poets and academics, issued an open letter titled "*Trail of Lightning* is an appropriation of Diné cultural beliefs," criticizing the novel for appropriating and inaccurately depicting Navajo/Diné beliefs and rituals. The collective states that "Roanhorse's appropriation, especially as an in-law who married into and lived on the Navajo Nation homeland and as an Indigenous relative, is a betrayal of trust and kinship" (par. 11). They highlight several general issues, such as deities being "turned into 'superheroes,'" and specific violent scenes, including Maggie's use of "sacred corn pollen as weaponry to do violence, which is completely contrary to our belief system" (par. 7). As a non-Indigenous emerging scholar, I acknowledge that it is not my place to comment on these allegations or on Roanhorse's identity. Madelyn Marie Schoonover suggests a constructive approach: reading these concerns "in conversation with Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance and Indigenous Futurism, as well as genre convention and its merits or drawbacks. This is certainly an area in which Indigenous voices must be prioritised above others" (303). In this context, Roanhorse's own perspective is illuminating: "I dislike how marginalized authors are so rarely allowed to be fantastical, to have limitless imaginations and to break boundaries. I recently saw a review complaining that [my novel] *Black Sun* did not meet the reader's understanding of one of the historical cultures it draws from, and I wanted to shake that reviewer and point to the giant corvids and mermaids in the story and ask if they failed to notice the book was fantasy. I don't think white writers have to deal with that expectation" (Sorg par. 13).

Indigenous *ecogirlhoods*.[12] Accordingly, the following sections first unpack the conceptual frameworks guiding my analysis of Roanhorse's *Sixth World* series—namely Indigenous futurisms, decolonial ethnospeculative fiction, and Native Apocalypse, alongside discussions of the Anthropocene through an ecocritical perspective, as well as girlhood through intersectional ecofeminist and girlhood studies lenses. Then, the subsequent sections offer a reading of the two novels' explorations of the apocalyptic in-between, as experienced by the series' protagonist Maggie, and later Ben. My analysis primarily focuses on the distinct ways the series intertwines the ecological crisis of the Big Water with the disrupted girlhoods of Maggie and Ben, while exploring their emerging and empowering possibilities for connection, growth, and healing through building kinship within an agentic nonhuman environment.

Navigating the Native Girl Apocalypse: Decolonial and Ecofeminist Possibilities of Indigenous Futurisms and Ethnospeculative Fiction

In "The Decolonial Virtues of Ethnospeculative Fiction," Paula M. L. Moya and Lesley Larkin argue that authors of Indigenous futurisms engage in ethnospeculative storytelling by juxtaposing the continual presence of the settler-colonial past with alternative past, present or future configurations—a practice that holds crucial decolonial merits (233-234). Moya and Larkin define ethnospeculative fiction broadly as "genre fiction (science fiction, fantasy, gothic, horror) written by and/or about people of color that seeks to create alternative worlds—'elsewheres' and 'elsewhens'—that enable new perceptions and facilitate the development of more racially just and life-affirming selves and ways of living" (228). Thus, aligning with Indigenous futurisms, decolonial ethnospeculative fiction pushes the limits of speculative genre conventions and offers alternative retellings of the past and revisions of the future as subversive counter-narratives. According to Dillon, one Indigenous futuristic strategy to challenge both sci-fi tropes and

[12] "Ecogirlhood(s)," or "ecological girlhood(s)," is my own concept through which I analyze, among other things, the intertwining of ecological crisis and girlhood experiences as portrayed in contemporary speculative fiction. I build on this idea alongside my parallel concept of *"ecolescence,"* or "ecological adolescence," to argue for thinking differently about childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and both boyhood and girlhood in the context of ongoing ecological crises in the twenty-first century. I have been developing this framework since 2021, and it will be explored and elaborated upon in my upcoming monograph, as its full development exceeds the scope of this essay.

western notions of time and space is a re-envisioning of apocalypse: "It is almost commonplace to think that the Native Apocalypse, if contemplated seriously, has already taken place. Many forms of Indigenous futurisms posit the possibility of an optimistic future by imagining a reversal of circumstances, where Natives win or at least are centered in the narrative" (8-9). A radical reversal of apocalypse is what Adam Spry describes as "a counterapocalypse, a visitation of the same kind of cataclysmic death and suffering on the nation that had brought it to them" (57). For Spry, this portrayal of apocalypse is not solely "a world made scattered, diffuse, and fragmentary," but rather "an opportunity for the (Native) world to be made whole" (56). Such visions of renewed Native worlds through apocalypse are important, because, as Sandra Cox reminds, "imaginative work of world-building through Indigenous lenses . . . operates as corrective discourses to more widely proliferated colonialist histories about the myth of a 'vanishing Indian,' locked in a distant past with no future" (65). Thus, even the "very act of imagining First Nations and Peoples as the survivors of an apocalypse works to situate settler culture as a temporary state to be weathered" (65). Finally, Dillon argues that "Native apocalyptic storytelling, then, shows the ruptures, the scars, and the trauma in its effort ultimately to provide healing and a return to bimaadiziwin.[13] This is the path to a sovereignty embedded in self-determination" (9). In other words, decolonial ethnospeculative and Indigenous futuristic narratives that engage survival and life during or after an apocalypse, confront settler-colonial violence on racialized lands and peoples, while imagining present and future possibilities for resurgence and repair. They also raise critical questions about accountability: "apocalypse for whom—whose world ends?" (Ashton 86).

Contemporary speculative narratives that employ an apocalyptic framework often situate large-scale destruction within the context of an anthropogenic ecological crisis, characterized by interconnected factors such as environmental degradation, climate change, and their socio-political consequences. Similar to the concept of the Native Apocalypse, Indigenous futurisms' rhetoric on the Anthropocene and ecological crisis also frames this as a longstanding and ongoing condition—rather than a new phenomenon—deeply rooted in lived histories of settler-colonial violence. Kyle Powys Whyte critiques widespread contemporary portrayals of the Anthropocene in the proliferation of "dystopian

[13] Anishinaabemowin word for "the state of balance" (Dillon 9).

or post-apocalyptic narratives of climate crises that *will* leave humans in horrific science-fiction scenarios" ("Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene" 225; my emphasis). According to Whyte, such narratives of impending crises "can erase Indigenous peoples' perspectives on the connections between climate change and colonial violence" (225). In other words, Indigenous perspectives on the climate change confront this as "having already passed through environmental and climate crises arising from the impacts of colonialism," rather than focusing on anticipating and preventing "a dreaded future movement from stability to crisis" (226-227). "In the Anthropocene, then," as Whyte contends, "some indigenous peoples already inhabit what our ancestors would have likely characterized as a dystopian future" ("Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now" 207). Again, Indigenous futuristic and decolonial ethnospeculative narratives can challenge such notions of ecological linearity and stability by re-conceptualizing time and space as spiraling. By drawing attention to the longstanding and ongoing ecological traumas while imagining futures still shaped by ecological crises, these narratives engage in a decolonial reconfiguring that foregrounds healing through ethical relations with the land and its more-than-human inhabitants. In doing so, they also approach the Anthropocene as a complex spiral. Emily Ashton argues that the Anthropocene as a "watchword . . . condenses immensely complex happenings under a single word. It blurs geologic time with human lifespan; it mixes planetary capacity with individualized responsibility" (6). These narratives interrogate and unpack the universalizing condensity of the Anthropocene; they address eco-anxieties, emphasize a fair redistribution of responsibility, and encourage collective action.

Along with this understanding of the apocalypse and the Anthropocene as enduring processes, Indigenous perspectives that emphasize the connections between settler-colonial and heteropatriarchal oppression of women and the nonhuman environment have been central to intersectional ecofeminist[14] scholarship. As Maile Arvin et al. observe, "the

[14] See Karen Warren's "Introduction" to ecofeminism in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (1993): "there are important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to feminism, environmentalism, and environmental philosophy (Warren). A main project of ecofeminism is to make visible these 'woman-nature connections' and, where harmful to women and nature, to dismantle them" (256). Within settler-colonial contexts, the gendering of land as female becomes a strategy of extractive exploitation, framing both women and the nonhuman environment as commodities.

United States is a settler colonial nation-state and that settler colonialism has been and continues to be a gendered process" (8). Consequently, the effects of this gendered oppression on the nonhuman environment and Indigenous peoples, as Lucía López-Serrano points out, "cannot be detangled without an Indigenous feminist perspective" (85). Building on this, López-Serrano argues that "ecocritical readings of Indigenous texts will help displace anthropocentric thinking and re-imagine new systems of relations with the natural world" (88)—a critical practice that foregrounds "intersections between feminism, decolonization, and nonhuman ecological thinking that might develop into a potential Indigenous ecofeminism that truly recognizes Indigenous epistemologies in their full context" (85). Indigenous ecofeminist thought is crucial for understanding the traumas inflicted upon Indigenous lands and peoples, as Sandrina de Finney highlights that settler-colonialism has particularly designated "women and girls as prime targets" (19) of its systemic violence:

> Indigenous girls and women have been treated very differently than boys and men by colonial institutions, in part because they were essential to the intergenerational transmission of culture and thus to First Peoples' sovereignty and continuity. . . . Indigenous girls and women have been seen as property while being degraded and sexualized to justify colonial violence. (27)

As a result, alongside these intersecting perspectives of gender, ethnicity, and the nonhuman environment, age emerges as another complex and challenging category. Young women, or girls,[15] occupying an ambiguous liminal space that resists clear age categorizations between childhood and adult womanhood, are positioned as guarantors of the future—both through cultural associations linking childhood with futurity and through their impending reproductive capacity. Owing to this liminality, they have historically been

[15] For a definition of "girls," see Anita Harris' *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (2003): "[T]he category of girl is constantly shifting and cannot be linked to a fixed age or developmental stage in life. However, there are some parameters to our shared understandings of the period of contemporary Western young womanhood. . . . Although there is tremendous fluidity in the application of the title 'girl,' normative ideas about appropriate female adolescence that serve a wider social purpose have been simultaneously imposed on young women in an homogenizing fashion" (185). For "girlhood studies," see Allen and Green-Barteet's "Girls Who Persist and Resist": "Girlhood studies, then, accounts for the experiences and circumstances of young women, while taking care to acknowledge that there is no universal experience of girlhood. . . . [T]he field increasingly considers girls and girlhood through an intersectional lens, accounting for (or trying to account for) diversity among girls and their experiences of being in the world. Current scholars are also more invested in considering an expanded notion of 'girl' as a cultural construct rather than as a biological- or necessarily age-determined identity" (615-616).

relegated to the margins, with their lives, experiences, and needs rendered invisible. In the last decades, girls have not only gained increasing cultural and scholarly visibility through "what emerged in the 1990s as the assertion of 'girl power' and the notion of a new, active, powerful and agentic femininity" (Gonick 306) and the concurrent rise of girlhood studies as an academic field, but have also take on leading and front-line roles in contemporary climate activism, exemplified by figures such as Greta Thunberg. However, Claudia Mitchell and Carrie Rentschler argue that "indigenous and racialized girls . . . are still routinely portrayed as 'exploitable and expendable' (Downe 2005: 3), appearing far less frequently in media and policy discourse as significant girl citizens than do girls identified with and within white settler colonialism" (5). An Indigenous ecofeminist approach to make visible these intersecting histories of girlhood and settler-colonial violence can be through an attentiveness to "how girlhood is produced and lived in the context of a colonial state" as well as to "Indigenous girls' everyday processes of resurgence and presencing" (de Finney 19-20). Therefore, I argue that Indigenous futuristic and decolonial ethnospeculative narratives featuring girl protagonists and major characters can similarly provide a meaningful avenue to explore textual representations of girls' presence and kinship. A narrative attentiveness to how these girls reassert themselves and form meaningful connections is crucial for understanding their embodied girlhoods, because, as de Finney observes, "girlhood is a situated, collective, relational event, intimately connected to place, to other forces, and to beyond-human relations; it involves intensities of place, affect, spirit, healing, embodied contestation, political struggle for sovereignty, and community building" (29-30).

All things considered, I read Roanhorse's *Sixth World* series as a narrative of Indigenous futurisms imbued with a decolonial and ecofeminist ethnospeculative ethos. The series envisions a post-apocalyptic Native future where the experiences of Indigenous girls amidst the ecological crisis are foregrounded. *Sixth World* offers an imaginative exploration of how Diné girls reclaim agency, connection, presence, and healing through building kinship after a climate apocalypse that dismantles settler colonial states and recovers Indigenous sovereignty. However, neither for the girls nor for the environment is decoloniality an automatic or natural outcome of the mere absence of settler-colonial hegemony. Neither the environment nor Maggie's disrupted girlhood can be instantly

"fixed." For Maggie, the path to healing seems as challenging as surviving in the Big Water and hunting monsters, if not more. It is only through her building connections with herself, her community, and the nonhuman environment, that the possibility of healing begins to take shape.

"This wasn't our end. This was our rebirth": Apocalypse and Ecological Crisis in Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning* and *Storm of Locusts*

Roanhorse's *Sixth World* envisions a near-future North America, geologically and politically reshaped by the Big Water: "It had been a combination of fire, earth, and ultimately water that had taken the West Coast. . . . By then, the East coast had been suffering through a record hurricane season and there was no help to be had" (Roanhorse, *Storm* 209). The massive scale and simultaneity of these climate disasters—ranging from droughts, wildfires, and earthquakes to hurricanes and floods—collapse the U.S. government, leaving much of the North American land mass uninhabitable. However, the ancestral land of Dinétah, "the land within the embrace of the Four Sacred Mountains," survives due to its high altitude, and rises as a fully sovereign nation (Roanhorse, *Trail* 22). Although the apocalyptic mode already sets the stage for Maggie's post-catastrophe life and monsterslayer adventures within, and later beyond, Dinétah's borders, her first-person narration immediately revisits the Big Water's causes and the profound transformations that follow. Notably, she emphasizes the "Energy Wars"—a series of conflicts between global powers and multinational corporations over the Earth's dwindling energy resources—and the resulting extractive devastation as the decisive factors that trigger the great flooding. The Big Water is thus profoundly anthropogenic, echoing the Anthropocene itself. As Andrew Revkin observes, "Anthropocene has become the closest thing there is to common shorthand for this turbulent, momentous, unpredictable, hopeless, hopeful time—duration and scope still unknown" (par. 5). Similarly, the Big Water emerges in the series as an equally ambiguous, complex, and enduring turbulence, marking humanity's transformative impact on Earth's geology, ecology, and societies.

However, contrary to the Anthropocene, the Big Water pulls the focus away from the Anthropos in the ecological crisis, by figuring as an independent character in the narrative. While the Anthropocene is often engaged to imply a "complementary pan-

humanity, of the we-are-all-in-this-together sort, that does not always acknowledge differential distributions of safety and harm that accompany climate crisis" (Ashton 6), the Big Water, in contrast, centers the nonhuman environment to emphasize the hegemonic violence that has marginalized, displaced, and isolated its human and other-than-human inhabitants. The very invocation of "the Big Water," that describes the vast body of flood waters as an agentic being in capital letters, demands accountability from settler-colonial and extractive-capitalist systems that instigated and perpetuated this fragmentation even prior to the flooding. The United States, however, fails to provide any reparations to its citizens under risk. As Maggie recalls, in the period leading to the Big Water, "[t]he federal government had long given up on helping anyone, the message clear that we were all on our own. And on our own, we would die" (Roanhorse, *Storm* 209).

Yet, the Diné reclaim this abandonment and forced isolation as a subversive tool of resurgence by building "the Wall," a protective barrier ensuring their survival during the Big Water. This event concludes the "Fifth World" and instigates the "Sixth World,"[16] where Navajo gods, witches, and monsters[17] return to co-inhabit the land alongside humans, all within the Wall's protection:

> The Tribal Council approved it back when the Energy Wars first started. Most Diné supported the Wall. We all grew up with stories that taught us that our place was on our ancestral land. . . . Others call the Wall absurd, saying it's some paranoid attempt at border control that's destined to fail, just like the wall the doomed American government tried to build along its southern border a few years before the Big Water. (Roanhorse, *Trail* 22)

Maggie's account not only weaves the Diné's fictional future with the reader's present by situating the Wall within broader U.S. histories of westward expansion and immigration, but it also shows the Diné's interrogation of the Wall's purpose. Rather than readily accepting disconnection from the "outside" world, the Diné first question if this

[16] According to Navajo mythology, and in *Trail*, multiple worlds have existed since before humanity, as explained by Ma'ii, or Coyote the trickster, "and in them all the worlds have come to an end in a great flood. . . . This last flood, the one you call the Big Water, ended the Fifth World and began the Sixth World. It opened the passage for those like myself to return to the world" (101).

[17] In *Trail*, witches refer to "powerful, men and women who trade their souls for dark magic, who take the shape of night creatures to travel under the cover of darkness, who dress in jewelry raided from freshly dug graves" (34), whereas monsters designate creatures of supernatural and evil origin, whether born or created. Neizghání distinguishes between "monsters" and evil humans, or "Bad Men", asserting that the latter "are still five-fingereds. To call them monsters is to misname them" (75). Maggie disagrees, claiming "there are plenty of human monsters too, just as twisted and evil as anything supernatural" (75).

isolationism imitates settler-colonial exclusion tactics. In Lorena Bickert's words, however, "as a memorial of failed communication and trust in the face of ecological threats, the Wall is also the physical representation of the boundaries created by colonialist narratives locking Native American perspectives away" (12). Seen this way, the Wall prompts a decolonial critique of imperialistic, anti-immigration, and isolationist politics.

The necessity of the Wall becomes even clearer as Maggie recounts the environmental threats Dinétah faced during the Energy Wars:

> The Slaughter had ushered in a heyday of energy grabs, the oil companies ripping up sacred grounds for their pipelines, the natural gas companies buying up fee land for fracking when they could get it, literally shaking the bedrock with their greed. Plus the Feds had outlined some plan to dissolve reservation trust land that would open up Indian Country to prospectors just like they had during Termination. This time the prospectors were multinationals with private armies a thousand times more powerful than the original bilagáana settlers. (Roanhorse, *Trail* 22-23)

These events leading to the construction of the Wall reveal a complex web of associations that spiral time and place, intertwining the Diné's past to lived histories of settler-colonial dispossession. Fictionalized references to the Slaughter on the Plains[18] and the Termination Era[19] not only echo the cataclysmic histories of U.S. extractive capitalist policies across centuries but also extend these as ongoing oppressions into a fictional future shaped by the Energy Wars, foregrounding the continuity of the ecological violence against Indigenous lands and existence. Maggie recalls: "if we wanted to remain Diné, if we wanted to protect our homes, we had to build that wall" (23). The Wall reasserts Dinétah's ancestral and ecological borders, protecting Indigenous life and land from further colonial violence and dispossession; it seeks connection rather than disconnection. Like the Big Water, the Wall also figures as an agentic character, "[taking] on a life of its own" (23). Its foundations consist of "rock from each sacred mountain" and are accompanied by healing ceremonies: "for every brick that was laid, a song was sung. Every lath, a blessing given" (23). Embodying a storied life, the Wall emerges as a nonhuman agent. Rather than confining or excluding those on either side, it merges with the environment as a natural border to protect

[18] Slaughter on the Plains refers to a series of violent events during Westward Expansion and Indian Removal, including the Sand Creek (1864) and Wounded Knee (1890) massacres and the slaughter of millions of bison.
[19] The Termination Era of the 1950s–1960s refers to a period of federal policy aimed at assimilating Indigenous peoples by terminating tribal sovereignty, dismantling tribal governments, and redistributing communal lands.

the land and its relatives from further ecological violence, or a new Native Apocalypse: "I had expected something dull and featureless. A fifty-foot-high mountain of gray concrete, barbed wire lining the top like in some apocalyptic movie. But I had forgotten that the Diné had already suffered their apocalypse over a century before. This wasn't our end. This was our rebirth" (23). Contrary to Maggie's expectations, the Wall is vibrant and magical—a living manifestation of the Diné's reunion with their cosmology.

This seemingly utopian restart that *Trail*'s apocalyptic mode initiates, also invites critical examination. As Spry notes, the cultural restoration enabled by the Big Water might suggest that "decolonization is a natural outcome of imbalances (ecological, technical or otherwise) inherent in settler-colonialism itself" while reproducing the settler-colonial notion that "the essence constituting indigenous identity lies outside of secular, modern time" (62). Spry warns against the oversimplification of the immense labor required for decolonization, arguing that "the idea that traditional Diné culture simply needs the right apocalyptic circumstance to reassert itself disregards the hard work of real Diné fighting to preserve it. . . . Centuries of colonial violence have left a mark on indigenous people so indelible that it may take more than a cataclysmic flood to wash it away" (63). While I agree with Spry's concerns, *Trail* demonstrates a potential for decoloniality beyond its apocalypse. Maggie cynically observes that the climate apocalypse has not changed much in day-to-day life, asserting, "generally Dinétah is just as isolated and insular as it was before the Big Water, and most locals don't seem to notice either way" (Roanhorse, *Trail* 22). This is further reinforced in *Storm*: "Strange that our isolation made the transition to a post Big Water world easier when before I'd only ever seen it as a punishment" (210). Thus, while the narrative reclaims forced isolation as a subversive power, it also shows its lingering effects on the people. The Diné also continue to struggle with the destruction caused by the global climate catastrophe: "I mean, climate change was Florida flooding and California drought. Not two-thirds of the continent underwater" (Roanhorse, *Trail* 70). Moreover, the Big Water introduces paradoxical and extreme climate realities for the Diné, as Maggie teases, "the great joke of the Big Water. The rest of the world may have drowned, but Dinétah withers under a record-breaking drought" (37). Resources are scarce too, with monthly water rations, limited trade, and rare luxuries like coffee or sugar: "I can't remember what coffee with sugar tastes like" (28). Therefore, the speculative

apocalyptic history Maggie recounts echoes lived experiences, challenges the Western sci-fi trope of an ecological apocalypse emerging without context, and rejects it as a mere narrative reset while calling for accountability.

Although the Wall shields Dinétah from external threats, Maggie warns that "sometimes the worst monsters are the ones within," pointing to the continuing fragility of life in the Sixth World (23). Indeed, even though Dinétah survives and thrives after the apocalypse, life within the Wall is far from utopian, as Maggie grapples with newly emerging internal conflicts. The reawakening of Diné cosmology brings back gods, witches, and monsters as well as clan powers in humans—all of which carry inherent dangers. Maggie's supernatural speed and aptitude for killing, triggered by the Big Water, make her both a powerful monsterslayer and a social outcast. She fights supernatural threats both within and beyond the Wall to earn a living and restore balance in the Sixth World, all while grappling with these powers and the trauma that led to their emergence. Consequently, even a magical re-birth of Dinétah does not automatically heal the land nor undo the generational traumatic history of settler-colonial occupation. On the contrary, for Maggie, the Big Water intensifies the need to reconcile her disrupted girlhood and clan powers—two facets of her identity she believes align her with the monsters she hunts. Like Dinétah, "isolated from the rest of the world," Maggie also seeks connection, healing, and balance within the Wall (22).

"Chíníbaá', . . . girl who comes out fighting": Girlhood, (Eco-)Disrupted

Against the backdrop of the ecological crisis of the Big Water, it is the crisis of girlhood that comes to the foreground in the series. Although Dinétah is shielded from outer threats, inside its borders are various monsters, militant gangs, and people with clan powers at large. Young Diné women, in particular, seem to be the most precarious subjects to these threats within the Wall. Throughout *Trail* and *Storm*, Maggie is seen dealing with her disrupted girlhood in flashbacks, while progressively becoming a protector for other girls that she encounters. On a more immediate level, these first-person flashbacks serve as a common speculative strategy, teleporting the reader back to the Big Water, gradually revealing its history and effects. Perhaps more importantly, they symbolize Maggie's fragmented identity, and highlight her struggles with her transforming personality, grief, and post-traumatic stress. Maggie's self-imposed isolation from her community after the

Big Water thus closely parallel Dinétah's isolation and internal issues. It is only by learning to trust and building kinship that Maggie recovers her sense of belonging. In this section, I will argue that while *Trail* explores Maggie's shift from patriarchal isolation and disruption of girlhood toward building healthier connections with the male figures around her, in *Storm* this focus shifts to female kinship and healing through chosen sisterhoods.

At the beginning of *Trail*, Maggie is unsure of her place within her community, having lost her grandmother to a violent death during the Big Water several years earlier and recently being abruptly deserted by her mentor and celebrated Diné hero, Neizghání the Monsterslayer. As a young woman in her early twenties and now a solo monsterslayer, Maggie inhabits an ambiguous space on the verge of adulthood—caught between girlhood and womanhood, humans and monsters, trauma and healing, being an insider and an outsider. Her life is irreversibly altered by the Big Water, not only in an ecological sense as the previous subsection argues, but also via loss of family and childhood—a shift that figures as an apocalypse of a personal scale. Thus, her interactions with people from her community are characterized by guarded caution and lack of trust, as well as emotional and physical distance. When commissioned by a family to rescue their young daughter who has been kidnapped by a monster, Maggie feels uncomfortable and defensive as she enters their house: "I'm no hero. I'm more of a last resort, a scorched-earth policy. I'm the person you hire when the heroes have already come home in body bags. . . . My reputation obviously precedes me, and not all of the looks are friendly" (2). She quickly distances herself from the idea of being people's champion, arguing that summoning her is more of a desperate measure. Maggie is convinced that others perceive her monsterslayer services negatively, interpreting her own presence as an unsettling sight. Although she uses her powers inherited from her clans, "Honágháanii, born for K'aahanáanii,"[20] to eliminate supernatural threats against humans, she views herself more as a killer than a protector. When the mother asks if Maggie can save her daughter, Maggie reflects, "Can I? That's the real question, isn't it. What good are my skills, my clan powers, if I can't save her? 'I can find her,' I say. And I can, no doubt. But saving and finding are two different things" (2). Despite her confidence, it is clear that Maggie deeply struggles with the purpose and responsibility of her clan powers, partly because they were triggered by her witnessing the death of her

[20] In *Trail*, Honágháanii translates to "Walks-Around" and K'aahanáanii to "Living Arrow" (58).

grandmother, whom she was unable to save. The resulting guilt creates a tension between her talent in tracking and killing monsters and her failure to help loved ones, ultimately alienating Maggie from her community in a "self-imposed isolation" (4).

Aside from guilt, Maggie's emerging adult womanhood, combined with her mentor's mysterious departure, significantly contribute to her feelings of loneliness and shame. Observing the family's skepticism regarding her clan powers and their reluctance to pay for her services, Maggie wonders if they hoped to reach Neizghání through her, reflecting, "Maybe they don't want to pay because I'm a woman. Maybe because I'm not Him" (4). Without her teacher, Maggie is also uncertain about the significance of her powers and her identity as an apprentice monsterslayer, feeling like an impostor. Her trauma-induced guilt and self-doubt drive her to seek Neizghání's approval and affection—romantically as well—with whom she finds a new sense of purpose in hunting monsters, saying, "Neizghání was the only thing that I had that makes me worth anything at all" (234). These feelings are further complicated by the confusion and rejection surrounding his announced departure, which surface when a young boy tells Maggie that she is famous: "I snort. 'Famous, huh?' 'The girlfriend of the Monsterslayer.' My mouth turns down in a hard frown. 'I am not his girlfriend.' He looks at me, disappointed. *You and me both*" (18). Implicitly, both Maggie and her community believe that it is her proximity to the Monsterslayer himself, as an older male hero figure, that legitimizes her ambiguous standing as a young female monsterslayer. Thus, without any connection to Neizghání, Maggie identifies less as a hero and more as a social outcast. According to Siepak, this mythological framework of the novel—where a strong female protagonist is apprenticed by a deity to fight supernatural monsters—does not offer a utopian vision for women; on the contrary, she asserts, "being a woman is precarious" (69). Siepak argues that Maggie's memories of abandonment and abuse illustrate how "[v]iolence is then strongly identified with masculinity, which creates a sense of a brutal affirmation of patriarchal structures" (70). In turn, the narrative "attempts to restore the position of women in Indigenous communities, as well as emphasize the importance of including women's issues in the decolonial struggle" (69). Given the emphasis on youth, femininity, and similarity of experiences with patriarchal violence throughout the narrative, I would add to Siepak's observation that being a "girl" in the Big Water is even more precarious.

In other words, the Indigenous apocalyptic in-between in *Sixth World*—caught between dystopian and utopian impulses, destruction and survival, oppression and sovereignty, trauma and healing—is particularly explored through the marginalized figure of the girl. Through Maggie's in-betweenness, the narrative foregrounds issues of Indigenous girlhood and girl voices in the ecological crisis from a decolonial lens. Maggie encounters several girls throughout her journey, both her age and younger than she is, and in all of these encounters, she recognizes the parallels between her own memories of violence and loss and those of the girls. In *Trail*, Maggie is skeptical about a future in which girls, like herself and the family's kidnapped daughter, can survive violence inflicted by monsters. When she eventually locates the girl, who "can't be more than twelve years old" (14), her youth and vulnerability are immediately juxtaposed with patriarchal oppression that erases girl bodies: "The monster looks like a man. . . . The bulk of his body hides the girl from view, but I can hear her. A low whimpering mewing as his mouth works at her neck and she begs him to stop" (9). Witnessing this cannibalistic act, Maggie is reminded of the traumatic memory from her sixteenth birthday during the Big Water, when "a witch who led the pack of monsters" (34) broke into her grandmother's house: "The remembered feel of a man's weight holding my own body down, blood thick and choking in my mouth as powerful fingers grip my skull and slam my head into the floor. A strong smell of wrongness in my nose" (9). Even in a rebirthed Dinétah, Indigenous girls, marginalized across age and gender, remain vulnerable to patriarchal violence that assumes a monstrous form.

When Maggie approaches the girl—"the same dark hair, the same brown skin and broad angular face" (14)—it is almost as if she talks to her younger self: "'Even if you survive, the infection is only going to get worse. You'll have to fight it all your life. It will dig into you, take you over. . . . It'll make you . . .' *Something monstrous*, I want to say" (15-16). Maggie speaks from experience, implying that she has been fighting her "infection" ever since that encounter with the witch's evil: "Neizghání once told me that evil was a sickness. . . . It was real, *physical*, more like an infectious disease. And you could catch evil if something evil got *inside* you. . . . And if that happened, you ran the *risk* of becoming just another monster" (14; my emphasis). Here, evil as body-penetrating and corrupting monstrosity is juxtaposed with the vulnerability of the adolescent female body,

and emerges as a gendered process. The girl body holds an ambiguous space between childhood and emerging womanhood, and being touched by monsters and witches, who resemble men, both Maggie and the girl step into an added liminal existence between humanity and monstrosity. According to Neizghání, Maggie never survived her encounter with the witch: "He told me I had some of that evil in me, that I'd been touched by what happened the night he had found me" (14). Her mentor's underlying lesson is that girls cannot physically or spiritually survive violence at the hands of monsters, and they pose a threat to others.

Consequently, both Maggie and the girl are "[s]imultaneously pathologized and criminalized for colonial violence" (de Finney 28). Their trauma is represented as ungrievable, which "engenders Indigenous girl bodies as 'ruined for life'" (27). Maggie feels shame for surviving the attack without saving her grandmother and the following changes in her body, both due to her clan powers. Her avoidance of company is directly related to this process of marginalization, leading to her inability to separate herself from her trauma: "A braver girl, a smarter girl, would fight. . . . Find a way to kill them all and save her grandmother. Be a hero. But I'm not that girl" (Roanhorse, *Trail* 108). Neizghání's unsympathetic and detached attitude toward Maggie also further isolates her from her community and humanity, informing most of her opinions on herself, the primary one being that her clan powers pose a danger to others as they manifested through evil: "He tells me . . . he is honored to have been there at my rebirth. He calls me 'Chíníbaá',' a traditional Diné name that means 'girl who comes out fighting.' . . . He explains to me that I am touched by death now and that it's changed me" (110). In this sense, although Dinétah has survived the apocalypse, survival might not be an option for Diné girls, as their monsters lurk within. Maggie neither believes that she can control her powers nor that she can use them to help others. Maggie perceives Neizghání's departure as a direct confirmation of her growing monstrosity, reflecting "your mentor turn[s] from you in disgust, your bloodlust so terrible that even he, a warrior of legend, cannot fathom what drives you" (59).

The ecological backdrop of the Big Water is always present in these violent encounters; it is the extractive violence of the Energy Wars that triggers the Big Water, awakening gods, witches, monsters, and clan powers in humans. Similar to the restart that the Big Water enables, Maggie's personal apocalypse also becomes a rebirth, marked by

the emergence of a new girlhood, "Chíníbaá'"—one that is "born out of violence and blood" (110). Maggie refuses to return home for healing ceremonies, thinking she has no home left, instead, she chooses to fight monsters to suppress her trauma: "as long as I don't pick at the memories, as long as I use them to fuel my savagery and lock them away in the dark places inside me when I am done, I am okay" (110). Although cutting all contact with the outside world initially seems like the safer option, Maggie truly faces her trauma and isolation after her mentor leaves: "I am left alone to hunt the monsters by myself, both the visible kind that steal away little girls to eat their flesh, and the invisible kind that live under the skin, eating at the little girl from inside" (111). Monster then stands in for the various forms of lingering settler-colonial violence that Indigenous girls continue to face: "epistemic and ontological violence; territorial, geographic, and spatial violence; embodied/material, affective, cognitive, and spiritual violence; and political, economic, and sociocultural violence" (de Finney 20).

In a way, isolation itself becomes Maggie's monster, whose power she can overcome by recovering kinship with human and more-than-human others. As Maggie's only friend, Grandpa Tah, counsels her, "'Diné way is to find the connections—between yourself and your relatives, yourself and the world. Diné way of life is k'é, kinship, like this'—he weaves his fingers in and out, bringing his hands together, . . . 'but you, your life is all separate'" (Roanhorse *Trail* 30). After Neizghání's departure, Maggie starts noticing other possibilities for connection, both with herself and with those around her. These moments arise even as she hunts monsters and navigates various environments, but Maggie's perspective begins to shift toward her relationship with these surroundings. When on the hunt, Maggie even notes, "I forget I am here to kill something":

> Pine trees scent the air, their fallen needles crunching softly under my feet. Insects drone happily in the cooling evening, buzzing near my ears, attracted to my sweat. There is a beauty here, a calmness that I savor. I will savor the bloodshed, too, no doubt, but this balance between earth and animals and self feels right. Feels true. (8)

Maggie grounds a balanced "self" in the connections between the forest, its smaller inhabitants, and her presence, while recognizing that her appreciation of this moment does not have to conflict with her clan powers. Similarly, in her growing friendships with Grandpa Tah, and later with his grandson, Kai, she begins to see an alternative self beyond

evil—a self who can be a daughter, friend, sister, and hero: "[Tah]'s the closest thing I have to a living relative. We aren't even related, aren't even the same clan, but he calls me daughter. That means something" (25). These relationships are initially marked by fear of rejection and being seen as monster: "Trauma, scars. That's what I know, what I'm good at. . . . I feel ridiculous for even thinking Kai and I could be friends, more than friends" (124). As she learns to trust and accept help from Kai, however, putting aside her fears, Maggie begins to revise her self-as-monster narrative: "Whatever happened to you may have been evil, but you aren't evil. And out of that evil deed came a blessing, not a curse. . . . Tah thought that . . . you would save our people. He believed you were a hero" (233). Such moments of confrontation with Kai and later with her growing circle of friends enable Maggie to start re-evaluating her "Chíníbaá'" origin story, and offer a different path to viewing her clan powers through kinship, "one that can be used to protect just as much as destroy" (234).

The second book, *Storm*, further explores Maggie's process of emotional growth, self-awareness, and healing, shifting the focus to female kinship. The narrative follows several months after the events of *Trail,* when Maggie confronts and ultimately defeats Neizghání. As Maggie tracks Kai's mysterious disappearance, rumored to kidnapped by a powerful cult leader who can control locust swarms, her path crosses with Ben, a teenage girl with clan powers. Maggie learns that Ben's powers, which give her a supernatural ability to track people by smelling their blood, have also been triggered through a traumatic and violent event. Like Maggie, Ben feels guilty for surviving: "I used to wonder why I survived the Little Keystone Massacre when my parents and everyone I knew at the camp died. It never felt right" (110). Maggie immediately notices the environmental context of Ben's trauma as well as its connection to the Big Water, remembering how families "sitting in protest at the site of a proposed pipeline through Osage territory" were attacked by supporters of oil companies during the Energy Wars (110). As Ben navigates the grief of losing her family, Maggie finds herself wanting to offer consolation and compassion, while noticing her inability to do the same for herself: "I know that shame. It's all too familiar. And even though I don't believe it about myself and my nalí's death, I try to offer her something. 'You were a child.' She's still a child but I don't tell her. She's lived through the kind of thing that strips one's childhood away" (111). Maggie and Ben both share

disrupted girlhoods, marked by memories of violence and feelings of guilt, and Maggie notices the similarities in their experiences. Like Maggie, Ben also decides that her new purpose will be to seek revenge through further violence, by killing the cult leader responsible for the death of her last remaining relative. Maggie agrees to help her search for the cult, partly to protect Ben, and she even accepts helps from others, sharing her new caregiving responsibilities. When both girls grow close to Rissa, another girl whose brother has also been kidnapped by the cult, Maggie wonders at being surrounded by so many people for the first time: "When did I become part of a team? Hell, when did I become its leader?" (96). Indeed, while taking on the role of caregiver for Ben and the responsibility of leading their expanding team with Rissa's addition, Maggie chooses to build connections over isolation and uses her clan powers to protect these. She learns to trust others and form new relationships: "Besides Kai, I haven't had friends since I met Neizghání. Definitely not family. And I'm not sure what that means, what's expected of me to be Rissa's friend. But I'm willing to try" (203). By the end of *Storm*, Maggie and Ben have already re-evaluated their reasons for using their clan powers to seek revenge:

> [Ben:] "I think I'd rather just get out of here and go home. With you and Rissa alive. So if it means you could get hurt… Your life means more to me than his death. Does that make sense?"
>
> A warmth spreads through my chest, that same feeling I got back at Twin Arrows when Rissa offered me her friendship. "It makes a lot of sense."
>
> "Okay, then." She presses both hands over her heart . . . "It means come home safe. It means we are family." (297)

By choosing to depend on one another rather than isolation and violence to fuel their clan powers, both Maggie and Ben find belonging in their kinship, ultimately forming a chosen family. Maggie holds on to these growing feelings of belonging in moments of crisis, even jokingly intimidating an opponent, "Didn't anyone tell you . . . I'm the crazy one in the girl gang" (252).

Maggie and Ben's "coming out" in their apocalyptic in-between is marked by an initial state of imbalance and disconnection from their communities. Their disrupted girlhoods parallel the ecological crisis of the Big Water; the patriarchal violence, loss of self-worth, and fractured familial ties they experience are deeply entangled with settler-

colonial structures that lead to ecological disaster and generational trauma in Dinétah. They both internalize the violence they endured, perceiving their clan powers as manifestations of their disrupted girlhoods evolving into monstrosity. Through her commitment to her friends and her compassion for Ben, Maggie distances her identity from her encounter with evil, realizing that her clan powers can also be used to help her community, and, in doing so, rediscovers her connection to her land and people. This shift is evident even as she ventures beyond Dinétah's borders, affirming, "we Diné are part of this land as much as any mountain or valley or stream. We are it, and it is in us" (126). Maggie no longer sees herself as isolated or monstrous but as a "simple five-fingered girl," embracing a relational identity (126).

Conclusion

Trail of Lightning and *Storm of Locusts* in Roanhorse's *Sixth World* series imagine disrupted Indigenous girlhoods in relation to devastated nonhuman environments. "Chíníbaá'," or "girl who comes out fighting," initially portrays Maggie as an isolated figure in eco-crisis, suffering from trauma in the Big Water. However, she recovers agency and empowering possibilities of resisting the settler-colonial and heteropatriarchal structures that have disrupted and defined Indigenous girl identities—a transformation only made possible through the kinships she builds along the way. By presenting Maggie and Ben as ambiguous figures and agents of hope—caught between disrupted girlhoods and emerging adulthoods, as well as between humans and monsters—*Sixth World* creates a counterapocalyptic narrative that celebrates Diné girlhood as an embodied subjectivity, while emphasizing its diversity, resilience, and survivance.

As a work of Indigenous futurisms, *Sixth World* bends narrative time on itself, weaving together the settler-colonial past and a speculative future grounded in Diné sovereignty. It offers a decolonial ethnospeculative and ecofeminist commentary on the intertwined oppressions of Indigenous girls and of the nonhuman environment, and envisions possibilities for healing for both. Maggie's journey reflects, to remember Dillon's words, "the process of 'returning to ourselves,'" through confronting trauma and adapting in the post-Native Apocalypse (10). Importantly, Maggie neither tries to "save the world" nor reverse the Big Water's effects to a previous settler-colonial way of life. Instead, she acts as a protector for her chosen family and community, defending those vulnerable

to the Big Water's lingering effects. Healing, then, is a communal and relational process, aptly captured in the series' closing scene: Maggie sits outside her trailer next to Kai, the joyful voices of Ben, Tah, and Rissa drifting from inside, and quietly reflects, "For once, I think I'm okay" (Roanhorse, *Storm* 309). This moment encapsulates the series' broader visions—making visible ongoing processes of resilience, survivance, and kinship that resist erasure, and opening space for Indigenous girl futures.

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