# The Many Faces of Displacement

Kara Reedy

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The many diverse Indigenous nations that populated what is now referred to as the United States of America experienced countless acts of displacement over the many centuries in which their homeland was occupied by invading European forces. Displacement has had many faces over the past centuries, but it has served the same purpose each time it has been implemented. The implementation of displacement contributed considerably to the decline in the Native populations across the country, resulting in the loss of a significant amount of knowledge and culture that still has lasting effects on the surviving descendants. Displacement began centuries ago but was especially prevalent in the mid-1800s when hundreds of thousands of First Nations communities were forced to leave the lands they had inhabited since first settling in the Americas in an event referred to as The Trail of Tears. The event resulted in the loss of countless lives, ending with the survivors being sequestered in foreign and unknown areas, with little to no resources to live within these new places. A few decades later, The Daws Act was signed into law in 1887, dividing lands into allotments that the Indigenous peoples were forced to pay for or be evicted from the land they had been pushed to during the events of the trail. Entire communities were essentially priced-out of the land, resulting in further displacement as lumber companies bought up the land. Around this time, the first boarding schools were established, resulting in the removal of children from their families' homes. The children brought to the schools were taught to conform to 'whiteness' and to remove all connections to their familial culture and spirituality. Children were displaced not only from their homes but also their identities, contributing to the devastating decline in knowledge and understanding of the first nations of this land. Understanding these events is often achieved through literary means, especially as contemporary writers focus on the harm committed during these historical events. Novelists like Diane Glancy and Louise Erdrich demonstrate displacement through historical fiction. Researchers like Margaret L. Archuleta, Brenda J. Child, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima draw from the retellings of those who experienced firsthand the destruction of their identities through the implementation of displacement. The effects of displacement are long reaching and stem directly from the beginnings of The Trail of Tears, representing the most literal sense of displacement experienced by the Native communities.

The Trail of Tears lasted from the year 1831 until the year 1850, resulting in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from their homes and communities. It is possible, as Diane Glancy implies that some of the Native population may have believed that the forcing of people from their lands was connected to a previous conflict, one that came to define early America. The character Knowbowtee mentions that "The white men were still angry that we had joined the British during the Revolutionary War," though he also goes on to express the more

likely reason behind the theft of their lands: Greed (Glancy 4). In the beginning, people were given the *option* to move, drawing "A few" to the new territory, but that appears to have not been enough for those who wanted the resources from within what had become the state of Georgia (Glancy 6). Many others would be forced to leave eventually after the signing of "the 1835 New Echota Treaty," which pushed many people into "internment in stockades" where they suffered "heat [sickness]" in the summer, then were forced to march after receiving a minuscule amount of rest in camps that were ill-prepared to provide for large amounts of people (Glancy 6). The trail was no better, with many being beaten into moving, some simply being beaten to death for *not* moving. No one knew what awaited them in the new territory, and many would never even make it, being left on the sides of roads, a few never even being buried. They marched through heat and cold, through horrible conditions like snow and storms of unimaginable magnitude, never having more than the road as a shelter; either that or the rickety old wagons that jolted women, children, the elderly, and the sick along at a slow pace. Glancy's novel, *Pushing the Bear*, explores every facet of the trail and every hardship endured as so many people were driven from their homes and forced to do impossible things. Kenneth Hada explores Glancy's novel, focusing on the factors of displacement in the story by touching on the effect that "dislocation from places of origin has" on a population, specifically the "tremendous psychological and cultural consequences" had on those who died on and survived the trail (134). The Native inhabitants of the land were forced away from where they had belonged for generations, removing access to spiritual places that had served their communities for centuries. Cultural practices that defined entire nations were lost, and the bodies of their people were desecrated on the trails across the country. The displacement of their communities "violates the very psychology of those who have some connection to land, regardless of how ownership and stewardship (or lack thereof) is perceived and practiced" (Hada 134). The Native peoples "were the land . . . [their] spirits clung to [it]. [Their] roots intertwined" (Glancy 4). Their removal from the land was a scourge upon the land itself, as their greatest and most diligent stewards had been displaced as the greedy and conniving thieves began to settle within what was never theirs. The Trail of Tears resulted in the displacement of the spiritual connection to the land. At the same time, allotment attempted to remove all new connections to the land that the Indigenous communities had been forced onto.

According to Researchers Sajjad Gheytasi and Mohsen Hanif, "It was the signing of the allotment act of 1887 which divided the communal reservations properties into individual properties allotted to members of the tribe" (160). Allotment forced Native communities to pay for the land they had been forced onto without the freedom to choose. Allotment plays a subtle role in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, serving as a final villain in the novel. The primary character group, containing Nanapush, Fleur, and Margaret, are all under threat of being evicted, along with many others, from their land after a particularly harsh winter leaves many unable to pay. The group was shown a map by Father Dmaian concerning the fate of the allotted land, with "figures and numbers, and all impossible" to pay off in time to keep from becoming evicted from the land, all "due before summer" (Erdrich 172-3). The Indigenous communities were "compelled to use their lands for profit, to search self-interest, to be concerned with paying taxes instead of sustaining their cultural

ties" (Gheytasi & Hanif 160). The purpose of allotment was to control the Native peoples that were living on reservations, to force many to become displaced from their homes, some of which had only been occupied for a short time after The Trail of Tears; to be removed from one home and then the next would have been considerably traumatizing, further eradicating many cultural ties to the land and even destroying families, as is depicted in Erdrich's book. Allotment turned communities against each other, with the blame being shifted from the actual culprits, "the lapping pink, the color of the skin of the lumberjacks and bankers" who bought up the land that the Indigenous peoples "would never walk or hunt, from which [their] children would be barred" (Erdrich 173-4). Native communities and families were coerced "into adapting the standards of capitalism and also assimilating the white dominant culture" (Gheytasi & Hanif 160). Displacement in the form of allotment contributed to the continued eradication of Native power and control. It also resulted in the continued destruction of the cultural identities of those forced from the land or to pay for it. Those who remained on the reservations would not be safe from further attempts, some of which began around the beginnings of allotment in the form of boarding schools.

The character Lulu–the daughter of Fleur in the novel *Tracks*–is one such child who cannot escape the boarding schools, being sent to one by her mother to ensure her safety as the land is being taken away. Gheytasi and Hanif specifically draw attention to what writer Adams W. David suggests was essentially the "boarding school experience" between the years "1875 [and] 1928" (153). The purpose of the schools during that period–around when Lulu would have been attending one of them–was to provide an "education for extinction," or to actively contribute to the eradication of Native cultural and spiritual identities through the use of the education system (Gheytasi & Hanif 153). Children endured great strife within these institutions. The government provided endless excuses "for the implementation of brutal educational programs in Indian boarding and day schools with the intention of wiping out Native culture" (Gheytasi & Hanif 153). The researchers briefly mentioned in the introduction explored many perspectives of those who directly experienced life in the boarding schools in their book *Away From Home,* which spans the presence of the schools on reservations from 1879 to the year 2000. The schools eventually became more accepting of the Native identity, but they began as extremely traumatic places intent on causing children as much harm as possible. The developers of the text–Margaret L. Archuleta, Brenda J. Child, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima–describe life in the schools as bleak. They reference the words of John Rogers, who was a survivor of the boarding schools, saying that "It was very difficult for [him] at first, for students at the school were not allowed to speak the language of the Indians. At the time [he] understood nothing else" (Archuleta et al. 24). Rogers reported his personal experiences in 1974. However, the practice of banning Native languages was by no means uncommon throughout boarding school history. The purpose of the boarding schools was to "transition from "uncivilized" space to "civilized" space," to force 'whiteness,' or conformity, onto Indigenous children using "practices consiously designed to strip them of their identities" (Archuleta et al. 24). Children were stripped from their homes and very identities, displaced not just physically, but mentally and emotionally. The toll that such displacement took on children

was considerable, with many losing their connection with their families and ancestral heritage. It was not enough for them to be "prohibited from speaking Native languages, wearing Native dress, or participating in any practice of cultural traditions," not in the eyes of the government or the school management (Archuleta et al. 26). Children had "singing, praying, dancing, and [the ability to create] art" taken from them (Archuleta et al. 26). Displacement had evolved from physical to cultural and spiritual removal of identity, but it was through such hardships that a new sense of community and identity emerged, especially in the wake of the boarding schools.

Those who initially founded the boarding schools "were, from the outset, simultaneously impressed with and horrified by the power and place of song, dance and ceremonial activities in the lives of Indian people" (Archuleta et al. 60). They saw creative expression as something that "endangered the assimilative and Americanizing goals of the schools" (Archuleta et al. 60). Even without the right to their cultural and ancestral songs and dances, children at the schools were still able to design means of expression that could run under the strict radar of the school faculty. Those who had been "encouraged to forgo or reject Native gatherings and entertainment now took up the forms of gatherings and entertainment deemed acceptable by the school administrators, putting them to their own social, political, economic, and even religious uses" (Archuleta et al. 61). Identities became meshed together as so many of the students combined their forms of expression with those who came from different reservations, resulting in the cultivation of a new form of cultural and spiritual expression that allowed many "to evade or occasionally close the watchful eyes of boarding school matrons and subperintendents" (Archuleta et al. 63). The boarding schools became a hotbed for new and altered forms of identity, contributing to the fight against the continuation of displacement. The fight against displacement is not depicted solely in *Away From Home*, for the character Nanapush is one such character who also adds weight to the battle against the displacement of his cultural identity. Nanapush "is one of the main representatives of Native American cultures really believes in its value. He knows native songs by heart, loves telling stories, and has tribal healing power . . . It seems that there is a relationship between what Nanapush believes and his survival" (Gheytasi & Hanif 160). Nanapush maintains his identity. However, he also adapts to use the "whites' legal system" to his advantage, "becoming a bureaucrat" and using the system "to prove that he is Lulu's father" when he needs to protect her from the boarding schools (Gheytasi & Hanif 160). Nanapush is the only character in *Tracks* who genuinely comes out as the one to recognizes "the real causes of the tribe's troubles; capitalistic adventures of the dominant "whites" and their tendency to control and contain" (Gheytasi & Hanif 164-5). It becomes clear that "those who try to become actively dissident and subversive . . . will have their voices heard. Their culture will survive" (Gheytasi & Hanif 165). In the end, displacement was not entirely successful in eradicating the cultural and spiritual identities of the members of the First Nations of what is now the U.S. The survivors who remain descended from the original peoples maintain their identities because, in the end, "Power dies, power goes under and gutters out, ungraspable. It is momentary, a quick flight and liable to deceive" (Erdrich 177). The Native populations will continue to survive for as long as they can fight back against a system that, for centuries, has tried–and failed–to achieve complete eradication.

Works Cited

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