

## Remembering My Home

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## Remembering My Home

Brittany Arzola

The summer before starting sixth grade, I moved to the east side of the train tracks in Tulare. I felt out of place in the white neighborhoods I had to walk past in order to get to school. There were small instances in which I would find people who looked like me. Nonetheless I was determined to find my place. I found comfort laying down at the end of the driveway at night, eyes locked towards the night above me. It probably wasn't the safest thing I could be doing for myself, but back at the age of 11, I found myself wondering how the world existed and I was determined to figure it out. My world was small before I began looking up at the sky. I would only wonder about instances as they were happening. My first thought was encapsulated by how humungous the star-filled sky was. Some nights, light pollution made me feel ignored by the universe; like why can't I see what's up there? I would lay my ears towards Earth, wondering if I could hear the heartbeat of Earth and the snores of those buried underneath, but was met with silence. Whenever I would put my head underneath deep waters, I wondered if I could hear anything, but again, I was met with silence. This silence swirled around in my head, wondering why I could only hear silence in the hot dry lands which was my hometown. Everyone must've found solace in their air-conditioned homes. We were tucked away in lil' old Tulare, a place where you might find a tumbleweed bouncing through. How boring... or so I thought.

Coming into our final sections of the Radical Futures class, I found Sybil Venegas's reading, "Take Me to the River: The Photography of Laura Aguilar" to be very inspiring in how Aguilar's work changed my perception on how I view a place that offers "nothing." I was introduced to the concept, "The Edge of Nothingness" as a cultural desert when Aguilar described their feelings towards the place they come from, which was South San Gabriel, saying, "Yeah, I used to tell people I grew up on the edge of nothingness!" (Venegas, 10) When reading this, I came to my roommate Jess with questions about how she felt about her experience growing up in Tulare. She also agreed with Aguilar's sentiment. We both grew up wanting more experiences that were different from what we grew up knowing. The way that

Venegas looked further beyond this edge of nothingness and found the rich cultural history of Aguilar was enlightening. I found myself wanting to do the same.

Before the late 18th century, there used to be an entire lake covering 570 sq mi of the Central Valley. It was once known as the largest freshwater lake west of the Great Lakes. Tulare Lake dried up after the rivers were diverted for agricultural irrigation and municipal water uses. The Yokuts lived amongst these areas where they fished, hunted, and had their homes when the world was their oyster until settlers came and destroyed their cosmovisiones. (Preston, 33) Cosmovisiones (world-views) is the way in which a person views, experiences, and responds to the world. The Yokuts numbered at 70,000, however, I believe there were more. This area once had one of the highest regional population densities anywhere in aboriginal North America due to how rich the habitat was. (Preston, 31) To preface, I never learned any of this history. The loss of many lives, animals, and land due to colonization sits heavy on my heart as I research more of this. Understanding the history of the stolen land I was born on helps me actualize that Tulare has a life to it that we just weren't taught about.

In William L. Preston's book, "Vanishing Landscapes: Land and Life in the Tulare Basin Lake," he stated that acorns from the great valley oak were plentiful in this area and that the Yokuts "lived principally on acorns." The Tulare Basin Lake had mussels, clams, terrapin, and fresh fish living in the waters. This area was very abundant and diverse and now Tulare is a dry hot desert where remains of the lake crack the dry ground underneath. It's horrifying that colonization caused an area that once was mostly abundant and diverse into a land plagued by water droughts.

From 2nd-5th grade, all I knew were the people I grew up amongst on the west side of Tulare. My neighbors in the cul-de-sac were all children my age who I would play outside with, most of whom were brown - just like I was. One time, we saw older kids/adults fist-fighting on the sidewalk. It was concerning to us, but we just turned around and went back inside to watch Spanish cartoons. Another memory I have growing up is about when I learned a lot about making money or hustling, as my mom would call it, because we grew up with not

much. I grew up playing in sports, but it cost us a lot of money buying the uniforms. For example, when I was in cheerleading, I would go around neighborhoods on the west side, knocking on doors asking the people inside if they would like to purchase candy bars for a dollar, so that I could have enough money to buy my cheerleading uniform. My mother would buy boxes of candy from Costco. A lot of us on the west side didn't have much money and it was nice to have that in common because money can be a shameful topic for me. To my young self, I viewed this as a sense of community.

This brief story of my childhood leads me into a concept I learned in the reading of "Brown Commons" by José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz states, "I am drawn to the idea of a brown commons because it captures the way in which brown people's very being is always a being-in-common" (2020, 2). They go on to say that the brown commons is made of feelings, sounds, buildings, neighborhoods, environments, and the nonhuman organic life that might circulate in such an environment alongside humans, and the inorganic presences that life is very often so attached to (Muñoz 2020). My thoughts about the inorganic presences that life is very often so attached to immediately pictures the hot Cheetos and Pepsi I often begged my mom for. We would pass by the tiny corner store on the way home from softball/cheer practice (depending on what season it was) and grab some. The brown commons of Tulare was the entire west side of the tracks. I felt safer, as a brown person, in the place where gunshots filled the night than in the white neighborhoods I would walk through to get to school.

My emotional connection to the land really has to do with which side of the train tracks I'm on. To be on the west side meant that I was upholding a legacy in which my family created. I would've gone to Mulcahy Middle School and Tulare Western High School instead of Live Oak Middle School and Tulare Union High School. I probably would have met my now roommate/best friend if I never moved. Alas, that was not the case. The east side of Tulare was the Tulare I grew up knowing. I was an outsider/newbie/Mexican to my new white peers and neighbors and I was terrified. I found solace in running cross country; where I was able to explore this land as far as my willpower would take me. While running cross country, I found out how strong I actually am. My mother and grandmother were surprised at how

much I liked running for long periods of time, but I like to think of my willpower as a reflection of theirs. I come from a long line of beautiful strong women, and honestly, I had no male-figure in my life who was as strong as my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother.

In the reading, “Secret Gardens: Rahel Aima on Maria Thereza Alves Seeds of Change,” I found out how powerful seeds are. Aima states, “Those seeds are little inadvertent hitchhikers to unspool violent histories of colonialism, transnational commerce, migration, and resource extraction. They are storytellers” (Aima, 99). They are like my great-grandmother (abuelita) Carmen who came to the United States from Guadalajara, Jalisco on her way to find a better life for her family. She was met with harsh backlash because she resisted colonialism by speaking Spanish in a white man’s world. My abuelita was almost kept in the Japanese internment camps that were located at the (now) Tulare Fairgrounds because she was mistaken as being of Japanese descent. Instead of being in the internment camps, she was deported back to Mexico thus forced to make another attempt to come back to plant her roots and flourish. My abuelita knew me until she passed away when I was five-years-old. I still remember speaking to her in Spanish at her little wooden house located in Goshen. I wish I had the chance to know her more.

My grandmother Esperanza was my biggest inspiration in life. I grew up hearing her stories about how hard it was to work in the fields and how she had all twelve of her children follow in suit to help her pay bills. Her connection to the land was a laborious one, as is my mothers. My mother currently works as a groundskeeper for an elementary school. I never realized how deeply connected most of my lineage was connected to the ground, specifically in Tulare.

My connection to these environments, in which Tulare envelopes, is powerful now that I understand fully the history that I come from. Although I am not five-years-old and I am not in that period of time where I moved away from everything that I knew before sixth grade started, nor am I the cross-country runner that I knew for a while in high school. I am now a 23-year-old, who wishes she knew how precious and courageous she was while growing up in a town that bored her to death. I moved so far away from home that I hardly recognize it

whenever I go back during breaks. I walk around Tulare knowing that although there is silence; there's power and energy in the land that has been left over time and that in itself is the loudness I was missing.

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