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*Sundown*  
and  
**Problems of Anti-Development in Petro-Modernity**

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## Abstract

### ***Sundown* and Problems of Anti-Development in Petro-Modernity**

This essay takes the novel *Sundown* (1934), written by Native American writer John Joseph Mathews in the context of the Osage oil boom, as a literary source in order to address the question of how oil projects expectations of a glorious future, but actually prevents development in a colonial context. In this paper modernity is seen as a process of creation and destruction, able to create new ways of living and destroying the previous order, able to cause problems, but also find solutions in its never-ending movement. Oil-capitalism is one of the main reasons why modernity as we know it is possible, but it is also the cause of many modern problems. This essay examines negative impact of modernity outside the European and Euro-American cultures, and raises the possibility of an alternative *to* Western modernity, where development would be fair not only on the economic level, but also on the social and environmental one. In the first part the essay analyses the social effects of oil, such as the destabilization of the Osage culture and their exclusion from the system, which leads to stagnation and personal frustration; in the second part it interprets *Sundown* as a modernist anti-developmental novel, arguing that the stunted main character and plot are direct reflections of the context of impossible development. The paper concludes with an ecocritical discussion about the possibility of a post-oil future of human and environmental justice, and by extension, about an alternative *to* the Western modernity.

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## Introduction

The term modernity has been extensively studied by many scholars, originating a large number of interpretations. In this essay I am going to follow the line of research that supports the argument that colonialism and capitalism are two fundamental pillars of modernity, using the novel *Sundown* (1934) by Native American author John Joseph Mathews as a literary example in order to explain this vision. First, what has to be considered is the relationship between modernity and colonialism. This aspect is very accurately examined from the postcolonial perspective by Walter D. Mignolo in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, where the author argues that “there is no modernity without coloniality” (2-3) and attributes the origins of modernity to the West. Secondly, according to Fredric Jameson “the only satisfactory semantic meaning of modernity lies in its association with capitalism” (*A Singular Modernity* 13). Therefore, it can be said that colonialism carried not only Western modernity to other places, but also implicitly its capitalist mentality of exploitation of resources and population. Consequently, this interaction with other non-Western societies contributed to the modernization of the West, but at the same time it destabilized and prevented colonial territories from equal development. Some scholars, nonetheless, such as Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, argue that after the contact, non-European cultures will not necessarily follow the pattern of modernity predicted by the West as if it was something universal. Instead, they will form a mixture of different traditions and historical contexts, creating, as it is termed in postcolonial studies, “alternative modernities” (Eisenstadt “Multiple Modernities” 1-2). However, this vision, in its resistance to the Western model of modernity based on the idea of progress, leaves out an important fact which is the problem of underdevelopment in the world.

In this essay, I am taking the novel *Sundown* as a literary example of modern capitalist exploitation in a colonial context in order to examine the subsequent question of the negative impact of modernity outside the European and Euro-American cultures, and raise the possibility of an alternative *to* Western modernity, where development would be fair not only on the economic

level, but also on the social and environmental one. The particular importance of the book lies in the fact that the plot is set in the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of the Osage oil boom. As will be explained later on the essay, oil is one of the main sources of petro-capitalism and economic development, meaning that it is not only oil that supports modernity, but also causes its problems.

*Sundown's* main theme is usually considered to be the damaging consequences of the colonial contact on the young generation of the Osages. In the early criticisms the novel was given a naturalistic interpretation which states that “assimilation alienated those that were caught between the Indian and white values” (Hunter 71). Nevertheless, more recent criticism, by Hanna Musiol, focuses on the “colonial exploitation” of oil and suggests “reconsider[ing] assumptions about progress and modernity” (Liquid Modernity 370). This is a valuable interpretation of the novel and a theme that has been overlooked by early critiques. Musiol argues that “colonialist conditions that impose capitalism upon the Osages” in order to take advantage of oil exploitation are the main factors that destabilized the Osage culture making it “liquid” or unstable, while producing a “solid” (Musiol 357) phase in North America. Likewise, Stephanie LeMenager points out in her book *Living Oil* that there is an “illusion that oil, and its profits, belong[s] to everyone” (74). Oil, through its multiple democratic (available equally to everyone) uses, has the power to make people believe that it is the promised modernity itself. Oil plays an important role in the construction of the society as well as of the novel. As Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden point out in the introduction to the book *Oil Culture*, little attention has been paid to the role of oil in the culture and literature by scholars until very recently,<sup>1</sup> and for this reason it will be relevant to explore in this paper what effects oil has on culture and formation of modernity itself.

In literature, modernity reveals its artistic side in the modernist movement, where oil is often

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1. Barret and Worden say in the introduction that: “Whether inspired by an unspoken (and perhaps unspeakable) Western shame about the ruinous legacy of oil capitalism or not, humanistic scholars have until recently abnegated the historical and theoretical analysis of oil to industry insiders, energy policymakers, environmental historians, and journalists” (xx).

present in one way or another. *Sundown*, indeed, can be also considered a modernist novel, since it shares similarities with literary modernism, such as an alienated main character and a plot that resists a classical development. What is more, the novel very strategically encompasses Native American aesthetic traditions, in addition to Western modernist techniques (Schedler 140). For what concerns oil, it establishes the background for the novel and indirectly affects the protagonist's life. It has the power to build a whole culture around itself, creating new customs derived from the applications of the oil. These new possibilities offered by oil use become synonyms for many of the coming modernity .

Scholars such as Hanna Musiol, Robert Dale Parker and Christopher Schedler underline the impossibility of development for modern subjects in the colonial context. Their analyses of the book make us consider how Western modernity, in its particular expression of petro-modernity (modernity generated and supported by the oil industry), was imposed on the Osages. All that led to their loss of tribal power and traditions, resulting in fragmentation of identity, and generating characters who await the arrival of modernity, but finally are left behind. Extending this vision, this essay suggests that oil is the main reason for the destabilization of the Osage culture in *Sundown*, creating the context for the impossibility of development for the modern Osages.

Many postcolonial theorists position themselves critically towards ethnocentric vision of modernity, which leads them to defend vision of alternative or multiple modernities outside the West. The problem that that theory presents is that it does not pay enough attention to the matter of underdevelopment. But modernity is a dynamic process, and it has the power to create problems as well as to solve them. One of the ongoing problems of modernity, that has remained since the times of the Osage oil boom until now, is the problem of “uneven development”<sup>2</sup>. *Sundown* envisions problems that modernity supposes in 1934, but is too soon to suggest a solution which would imply a fair treatment of the Native American people . Therefore, if we consider oil as the basis for modernity, a possible solution to this problem would be an alternative source to support it. In fact, it

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2. See Esty, especially 1-69, for further description of “uneven development.”

has become more and more common to raise the question about the possibility of transition from petro-modernity to post-oil future. For this essay, after analysing problems that modernity supposes, it is important to open a dialogue about an alternative *to* modernity itself, or in other words, how modernity should not only be economic, but also human and ecological.

One of the main difficulties that modernity has to deal with is the petro-capitalist materialist vision of nature that eliminates the possibility of seeing nature as something more than a simple commodity which supports development. In his book *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, Marshall Berman makes reference to Herber Marcuse, a critic of Marx who “uncritically celebrates the values of labor and production, and neglects other human activities and modes of being that are ultimately at least as important” (126). In Berman's interpretation what Marcuse suggests is that the “Marxian vision fails to see...the joys of peacefulness and passivity, sensual languor, mystical rapture, a state of oneness with nature rather than achieved mastery over it”(127). Berman does not fully agree with Marcuse, saying that it is not that harmony between man and nature has no place in Marx's theories, but that they are not central to his studies, since it would be quite difficult to maintain this balance in the fast developing world (127). As for *Sundown*, modern petro-capitalism that arrives to the reservation makes it impossible for the Osages to continue being in harmony with nature. In other words, the new impositions of the white men break with Osage practices that were linked to nature and land, which leads to the fragmentation of identity because of the lack of cultural references. It is of interest for this paper to emphasise that it is not a question of romanticizing Native Americans' attachment to the land, but underlining the damaging consequences of the materialist mentality of capitalism in the colonial context, and attempting to trace an alternative path to lived modernity.

On this basis, the first point of this research is to establish a connection between modernity, colonial expansion, and the capitalist exploitation of resources in *Sundown*. The second point is to examine how these factors combined are together reflected in the literature, in this way linking

modernity to modernism in art, a literary movement that finds its own techniques to criticise modernity. And finally, the essay will join environmental theories to support the idea of development that would be respectful and fair with people and nature in the postcolonial world.

### **Theoretical Overview**

*Sundown* is a semi-biographical novel published in 1934 which describes particularly the life of the young mixed-blood Challenge Windzer in the context of allotment and the Osage oil boom; more broadly, it deals with themes of modernity, internal colonization, and failure of modernity for the Osages. Its purpose is to bring to critical attention the disintegration of the Osage culture after the imposition of the white man's order. But more deeply, Mathews' novel critically addresses problems raised by modernity outside the Western context.

As an historian, Mathews very accurately depicts historical encounters between the Osage tribe and the US government in the early twentieth century. Consequences of the Euro-American colonization of the Native Americans are seen in their confinement to reservations, and in the loss of their tribal power in favour of the federal government after the signature of the Allotment Act. But the theme that has a real historical importance in *Sundown* is the discovery of oil in the Osage territory, the following arrival of a large number of white men ready to make a fortune out of the Osage oil, and problems resulting from the new imposed order.

To point out the beginning of this notable transformation within the Osage culture, it is necessary to go back to 1887 when Dawes Allotment Act<sup>3</sup> was adopted by Congress, according to which communal tribal land had to be divided for individual use. When the Osages finally signed the Allotment Act in 1906, they did it under condition of keeping communal possession of the mineral resources, which shows that they must have been aware of oil in the reservation. In this way, the Osage tribe managed to share economic gains from the oil among “all persons enrolled

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3. One of the most significant moments in the history of relationship between the Native Americans and the US government is the passing of the Dawes Severalty Act (General Allotment Act) in 1887, meaning that “communally held land” could be “allotted individually, thus eliminating another vestige of Indian culture” (Wilson 36).

before 1 January 1906, and all the children born between that date and 1 July 1907” (Wilson 90). This makes the Osages a unique tribe that would get to benefit from oil exploitation. However, this benefit did not have long-lasting effect because Native Americans were not directly included in the system. That means that they only received payments but had no chance to work, run a business, or what is the same, to participate in the capitalist system that was expanding at that time around them. Land allotment and the oil industry are, thus, two important factors in the destabilization and fragmentation of the Osage culture.

The oil industry grew quickly, transforming the Osages' life. *Sundown* is not a story about oil, but most of the events of the book are consequences of the effects of oil capitalism on the Osage culture. Thus, even though oil might be rather a new theme for critical discussion, it has certainly been affecting culture for a long time, and consequently, literature as a cultural form has also been affected by its presence. *Sundown* is one example of the strong influence of oil on modern culture, and for this reason it is worth being examined.

As Walter D. Mignolo claims, Western modernity would not be possible without coloniality (2-3). This means that the exploitation of colonial resources contributed to development and modernization of the dominant white society, that is to say, the European and the Euro-American. Inseparable from modernity is the concept of capitalism. The expansion of the capitalist economy greatly benefited the Western world in the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The fuel for the development of the capitalist Western society was coal first, and oil later. Multiple applications of petroleum, in fact, started a new stage of capitalism, making Western modernity possible (Canavan 331-332). In other words, oil-capitalism contributed to the formation of petro-modernity (oil-based modernity). Thus, there would be no Western modernity without colonial expansion and capitalism's institutionalization in the colonies and, of course, without the oil.

In his book *Unseasonable Youth* Jed Esty explains the link between colonialism and

modernism,<sup>4</sup> seeing it as a critical vision of modernity and its implicit belief in development, which is visible in modernism's resistance to development in the plots of modernist novels which show the failures of modernization.<sup>5</sup> According to Esty, “the bildungsroman becomes the story of modernity's unfinished project condensed into the trope of endless youth” (36). *Sundown*, therefore, fits into this category of novels that “cast doubt on the ideology of progress through the figure of stunted youth”(4). *Sundown*'s main character Chal Windzer represents “stunted” or “frozen youth” that cannot develop in the colonial context. Esty uses the term “uneven development” (Esty 9) to refer to these unequal stages of development between the metropolis and the colonial territory produced by modernity. In this interpretation, modernity creates “uneven development” which is expressed in literature in anti-bildung/anti-developmental modernist forms, featuring characters who cannot develop and are immobilized by forces of modernity.

Along the same lines scholar Hanna Musiol analyses *Sundown* saying that while oil “produce[d] social stability in American industrial centers” it also produced “a cultural fragmentation on the Osage reservation” (260), meaning that Euro-American capitalist society made a profit out of oil discovery under the tribe's ground, using it to construct their petro-modernity. In addition, everyday Osage life changed dramatically after the discovery of petroleum. For Musiol, the anti-developmental form of the novel (336) is linked to the impossibility of development for characters like Chal in a colonial context. By not letting Chal develop, Mathews resists the idea of “progress” implied in the colonial project and capitalism. Musiol argues that it is oil exploitation that creates a “solid” stage of modernity in the Euro-American culture, but an unstable or “liquid” one in the reservation.<sup>6</sup> This instability and uncertainty are direct effects of oil's destabilizing force

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4. See Esty, especially 2-4 of the introduction, for further information about the relationship between modernism and colonialism.

5. Idem, 46.

6. Musiol argues that: “However, Mathews’s novel dramatizes the ways in which these developments fail to produce order in all geopolitical spaces and for all social subjects at the same time; in fact, his work reveals the ways in which this solidity within ‘core’ industries and societies is not only synchronous with but also always dependent on ‘liquefying’ cultures elsewhere” (371).

that affects everything and everyone.<sup>7</sup> In this context development is impossible. Thus, its *anti-bildung* or anti-developmental form reveals the failed promise of modernization.

Usually, artistic forms are used to resist oppressive environments. Modernity's aesthetic outcome might be modernism which, in turn, can offer a critical vision of it. In other words, if modernity, in its different manifestations, has an impact on culture and cultural forms, then these acquire power to answer back by exposing its abuses. *Sundown* can be considered a modernist novel because of its undeveloped plot and alienated character. But at the same time it includes stereotypically Native American techniques such as circular narration. Mathews uses both literary traditions as a resistance to development. In this way he questions American internal colonialism, oil capitalism, and the very idea of modernity as equally suitable or beneficial for everybody.

Published in 1934, *Sundown* has not received much praise by early critics, being described as lacking literary merit, although historically accurate. Christopher Schedler explains this as follows:

Perhaps one reason for Mathews's marginalization within Native American literary studies is that the author has been characterized as assimilationist, a view that equates him with his protagonist, Challenge Windzer; furthermore, his novel has been read primarily through the lenses of naturalism or social realism, modes that privilege a tragic view of the “vanishing American”. (127)

Schedler argues that Mathews, in fact, questions “received traditions – both Osage and Euro-American” (128) and suggests, that instead of underestimating novel's artistic value, the reader should see it “as an experiment in new ways of expressing a modern American Indian identity” (128).

It is considered that the arrival of modern times makes many authors search for and adapt new literary techniques, or what is the same, modernist techniques. And this is what Mathews does in order to deal with modern themes. He uses a modernist style combined with Osage forms to produce a Native American modernist novel (a hybrid form that adapts some Western conventions,

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7. See Musiol 372.

and resists them by subverting them). On the other hand, there are some critics such as Arnold Krupat and Louis Owens who claim that Native American literature lies out of the modernist canon (Schedler 129). In contrast, Schedler affirms that there is more than one modernism even inside the canon. It is these other modernisms, which he calls “border”, with which he compares Mathews' work. Schedler argues that “‘border’ modernism was more often predicated on a greater connection to place, history, community, and the ‘other’”, underlining that identity depends on historical context (130). Nevertheless some features of the typical “high” modernist hero still can be found in the protagonist Chal Windzer. For instance, he is doubly alienated both from the white and from the Osage communities, not only because of his mixed-blood, but also because of the “modernist fear of identification with the ‘other’, and particularly with any form of collective” (Schedler 134). Additionally, he is a failed artist “unable to express himself through his art” (Schedler 133), meaning that when he tries to dance or sing a warrior song he cannot truly fulfil his needs for expressing himself. In fact, these frustrating attempts to realize himself artistically lead him into circularity. Mathews borrows this technique from the Osage oral tradition and uses it as a way of resisting dominant Western literary conventions of linear development. Throughout the novel Chal goes a number of times to nature in order to sing or dance and relieve himself in this way, but fails. As he says he is “out of step” with the culture of the white men, but also of the Osage because there is no solid reference for him neither in the Osage heritage nor in the white culture. He is stuck between the two, unable to identify with either of them. Mathews, contrary to his character, who is unable to find a balance between his inner (Osage) and outside (white) worlds, tries to bring together Osage and Euro-American identity in the same aesthetic form while “questioning both European and Osage traditions” (Schedler 135), since neither of them is suitable to deal separately with the problems in the transforming Osage society. So, the novel presents a character with internal conflict -typical to “high” modernist style which depends on external historical context -characteristic to “border” modernism. Modernism, being able to be critical to modernity, subverts a

classical linear development showing that modernity cannot be expressed in a closed form, since modernity itself is an unfinished project. At the same time, Mathews subverts it too by adding circularity to the plot. Chal's repetitive acts are a kind of ceremony to resist the force of modernity. Ceremony usually has a healing purpose, but in this case, it is a failed ceremony since it never cures him, which proves that Native American techniques do not work either in the new times. Therefore, it can be said that by borrowing from both traditions, Euro-American and the Osage, and by resisting both, the author produces, thus, a hybrid form, articulating the need for creating a new modern Native American identity. Mathews' work, in fact, deserves attention because of its capacity for dashing expectations about development. *Sundown* has a beginning of the *Bildungsroman*<sup>8</sup> which starts with the birth of the protagonist. However, the novel does not follow a linear development, as we might expect from a *Bildungsroman*, but goes into reiteration. This lack of progress and circularity of events are directly linked to Chal's lack of advancement and his repetitive behaviour. In this way, the author creates a kind of anti-*Bildungsroman*, that is, a novel with a static main character whose inability to progress is directly reflected in the formal anti-development of the plot. This is also what Esty terms "stunted youth." This *anti-bildung* structure may be interpreted as a criticism and resistance to development, and the whole novel as a failed expectation of modernity.

If we take into consideration Schedler's argument about "border modernism" paying particular attention to the context for the formation of identity, then we can say that Chal's problems of identity are directly linked to the problematic historical moment of modernity within a colonial framework and petro-capitalist system.

Development and realisation are also associated with work in modern capitalism. The mentality of the modern era is an individual running a business and making money in a continuous rhythm in order to prove oneself a valuable member of society. Robert Dale Parker maintains that

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8. *Bildungsroman* is a coming-to-age story or novel of formation where the main character goes through different situations that make him grow morally and psychologically and finally reach adulthood.

the capitalist model is based on working in order to “aspire to linear, progressive advancement” (22). Chal feels that he and other Osages do nothing because he measures them from the white men's perspective. For this reason, as Parker points out, he interprets “Osage action as inaction” (31). In this sense, Chal cannot achieve self realisation through work that he desires and therefore advance because, on the one hand, there is no work for Indians, and on the other hand, Osages are away from the Western wage labour mentality.<sup>9</sup> Besides, the money received from oil prevented them from integrating “into a national work ethic” (Parker 41). In short, the Osage do not work according to Western standards first, because what is understood as work by white men does not form part of their society, and second, because it is extremely difficult for an Indian to get a job, and third, because the money from oil relieved them from the need to work. As a result, they cannot become full participants in modernity because the colonial context prevents them from becoming.

Still, Parker suggests that Indian activities such as ceremonies may be counted as *doing*. But “to Chal, such things...don't signify progress, ambition, moving onward” (Parker 47), because his vision is “much narrower than the novel's” (Parker 50). When Chal tries to perform his own ceremonies in nature or when he is invited to the peyote ceremony by his friend (*Sundown* 267) he cannot achieve self realisation because he constantly rejects his Indian heritage. In this way, ceremony does not work for Chal; it does not heal him. The novel implies that there are things for Indians to do, but they cannot see them as long as they look at themselves through the eyes of the white men.

Modernity gives the promise of “progress” and “civilization” which characters like Chal hope to experience. But eventually, the promise of a great modernity fails for the Osages. They cannot become rightful members of the new capitalist system, and therefore what modernity promises is unachievable for them. They have no possibility for development in an unstable

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9. Parker explains that “Indian people had not organized their economic life in terms of jobs until their movement into the white dominated economy let them increasingly in that frame of mind, but even then there were few jobs for Indians” (40).

colonial context dominated by oil capitalism, which is reflected in the *anti-Bildungs* form. *Sundown* can be, thus, considered a Native American modernist novel. It includes features of “high” modernism (an alienated main character and failed artist) and “border” modernism with the focus on historical context, in this case, of oil exploitation, and shows the critical position of modernism toward problems of modernity. Additionally, it incorporates circularity from the Osage oral tradition which prevents the plot from advancing. Together, these techniques work against the idea of development that defines modernity. At the same time Mathews has a critical view of both traditions, since neither of them work properly alone, nor offer a solid path to self-realisation. In short, the author attempts to find new forms to express a modern Native American identity in modern times.

Mathews does not state it explicitly in *Sundown*, but hints that modernity (in its colonialist and capitalist expression) does not work for Native Americans, and there is a need for an alternative to this model of modernity. Thus, the novel can be read as a critique of modern petro-capitalist exploitation of colonial resources by the dominant society, and as a call for the need of an alternative model in which Native American could be offered meaningful participation and development.

### **Analysis**

*Sundown* is a semi-biographical novel which includes some fictitious data as well as some real data based on the author's life and on the history of the Osage tribe. The protagonist of *Sundown* Challenge Windzer, is a mixed-blood Osage, like Mathews, born in the beginning of the twentieth century in the Osage Indian Agency in Oklahoma. His attendance at the University and becoming a pilot during the World War I are inspired by Mathews life too. The importance of the historical background of the novel lies in the fact that the first two decades of the twentieth century were marked by the oil boom in Oklahoma. Due to the existence of oil a large number of white people

came to the Indian Territory and the prairie started to transform. These were unstable times known as the “Great Frenzy” (*Sundown* 266, 304) characterized by significant changes in the lifestyle of the Osages due to the wealth originated by petroleum.

### **1. Destabilizing the Osage culture. Socio-economical anti-development**

The discovery of oil and the previous land allotment are key points in the modern history of the Osage tribe. These events irremediably transformed the Osage culture and contributed to socio-economical anti-development. The Osages could delay the acceptance of the Act until 1906, after long disagreements between the full-bloods, who wanted to preserve communal right over the land, and the mixed-bloods, who believed in the benefits of the allotment. In *Sundown*, Chal's father, John Windzer, is a member of the Osage tribal council, and believes in the righteousness of the government. One day Chal attends, with his father, a meeting during which John convinces the full-bloods that allotment is good. One of the full-bloods, Red Bird, says: “We are selfish. We want to keep our land. There is plenty land for white man, I believe. There is plenty land where he can put iron thing” (51). In this way, the separation of land into individual allotments not only made the Osages lose their tribal sovereignty, but also contributed to internal friction, destabilizing the culture. From the beginning it becomes clear that land means very much to the Osages; it defines their identity. Dividing the land also divides their identity and tribal unity.

Many mixed-bloods, like John, believed that the government meant good; they want to be participants in the “progress” and “civilization” promised by white men. In his childhood, Chal was influenced by his father's view: “Chal had never thought much about the Government except that it seemed present, like an atmosphere. But its presence had been beneficent and protective...He had visualized it as a great force which had overcome everything” (*Sundown* 60). But when his father is dismissed from the Council, Chal thinks that “it would be better to avoid it” (*Sundown* 60).

When oil exploitation begins the usual calm and silence transform into activity and noise in

the Agency which becomes the town of Kihekah (*Sundown* 40) Chal witnesses the transformation of his town:

He liked to watch the carpenters and the brick-masons building the two-story buildings which had begun to band the hill; he watched the shovels excavate the hard yellow clay at the bottom of the hill, and even at home he could hear the hammers and the saws, the chuffing of the train and the rattle of shunted freight cars. He heard constantly the grumbling of the drilling wells. (64)

Throughout the novel, silence is associated with Indianess and noise with the activity of the white men. Silence, and natural sounds of the prairie gradually start to disappear. Chal realizes that “[i]t had been several years since he had heard the wild turkeys flying up to roost along the creek, and he could scarcely remember what the howl of the wolf was like” (64).

From the very beginning the novel projects expectations that something is about to happen. The descriptions of the calm atmosphere in the Agency foreshadows that there is going to be a kind of “storm”: “Far from the screeching of the mechanism of Progress, the little Agency slept peacefully in the winter sun” (*Sundown* 42), but something already “charge[s] the atmosphere with expectancy” (*Sundown* 42). The arrival of the white men to the reservation and the following massive oil exploitation later in the novel is what disrupts the previous order, and marks the beginning of the new “frenzied” period. In other words, it means the arrival of modernity in its colonial and capitalist manifestation.

The prairie starts to change its aspect with the appearance of the equipment of the petroleum industry, and other activities of the white newcomers. Oil becomes part of the everyday life. Among the direct uses of oil in the town there are paved streets, gas supply (*Sundown* 61), and the increasing number of cars. Even those older Indians who did not come under the influence of the “Great Frenzy”, as Mathews says, ended up living “in houses with modern conveniences; radios, telephones, bathrooms and modern furniture” (*Sundown* 266). The increasing number of cars is

another application of oil. Cars eventually begin to replace horses. More and more Indians acquire new forms of transport (*Sundown* 162). Oil has the power to change the customs of the Osages. Thus, if habits define identity, then the moment of the big changes in the way of life produced by oil also causes changes in their identity. The “Great Frenzy” is a period of social uncertainty, where it is impossible to have a solid identity. This is exactly what happens to Chal who is stuck under the pressure of petro-modernity.

Petro-modernity provides its own ways of shaping personality, and business is one of the forms of modern self-definition. The figure of the businessman is a referent of the times. Oil-based business that indirectly gets benefits from the excess of money among the Osages dominates on the economical level in the reservation. But Osages cannot participate in the newly-opened banks and other growing local businesses all operated by white men, meaning that they cannot become participants in the socio-economic system.

To Chal it seems that one can only reach self-realisation and progress through work. He thinks that not having an occupation equates him with other Osages, and he does not want to be like them: “The talk he had just listened to was the talk of the strong, practical men who did things, while the Osages dreamed silly things in a mystical dream-word” (*Sundown* 280). As he distances himself from the Osage community, it makes it more complicated to see Indian activities as action. Chal measures himself by the white men’s standards and feels inferior for this reason. He feels the need to run a business, but at the same time he thinks that “he must have two dignities, one tellin’ him to do something, and one tellin’ him not to do anything” (*Sundown* 263). He hesitates between two ways of understanding activity, unable to choose one, which finally leads him to total inactivity, or what is the same, to anti-development on the social level.

Therefore, there are several reasons for the so called Osage inactivity: on the one hand, “[n]o one would give a job to an Indian” (*Sundown* 263), because they are seen as rich,<sup>10</sup> but also

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10. Osages received money from the sale of their Kansas reservation and from the pastures leases, in addition to their following oil wealth.

unprepared, because they have no experience. On the other hand, such Osage activities as riding a horse on the prairie, lying on the ground, or participating in tribal dances and ceremonies are no longer seen as activities by mixed-bloods like Chal. They are inadequate to express his modern unstable identity, but neither would white men's activities help him realize himself, as he admits to himself. This inactivity makes Chal feel hopeless, because he thinks that doing nothing is what the Osages do, meaning that he failed to be “like white men”, that is, “civilized”. The sentence “Chal didn't know what to do with himself” (262) summarises his uncertain existence throughout the novel.

Petro-modernity creates its own activities or ceremonies that become socially meaningful. Throughout the book, oil becomes a source of a series of spectacles which provide excitement and illusion that define a petro-capitalist society. Oil provides direct entertainment especially when it becomes visible. For example, one of the events in the novel that people turn into spectacle is the gas well burning in the fire caused by lightning. These mixed-bloods who gather around the place of incident interpret the huge fire as “a symbol of that indefinite glory” (*Sundown* 85) that is somewhere near . This manifestation of the power of oil in the form of fire makes them identify the greatness of the spectacle with their own greatness. This feeling of pride, as if oil were their national emblem. Another example is when oil is made to shoot out of the earth with the help of nitroglycerin: “At such times the citizens of the town would drive out and watch the spray of oil as it shot high into the air... On one occasion a mixedblood rushed into the spraying oil and had his new suit and a 'damned good hat-a twenty-five-dollar hat' covered with oil. He said , 'Whoopee!' He didn't give a damn” (*Sundown* 73-74). Oil offers happiness and expectations to the Osages, especially to mixed-bloods, that a glorious future is about to come. Stephanie LeMenager argues in her book *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. that “[t]he spectacular nature of the oil strike, in that it allows an audience to experience discovery with its own senses, confers an illusion of democratic access to such scenes, also an illusion that oil, and its profits, belong to

everyone” (38). In *Sundown* too, this view transmits a false impression, especially to the mixed-blood Osages, that they can be full participants in the oil experience, and consequently in the petromodernity. It fills them with illusions that the promised “progress” and “civilization” (which Euro-American modernity advertised) will become available to them too. After one of these spectacles of oil spraying, a character names his new-born son “Osage Oil DuBois” (*Sundown* 86). “Osage Oil” as a name points out to what is essential for the Osages in that time. Oil characterises Osage culture in the 1920s, and represents new times in opposition to older Osage tradition. If Osages formerly gave names according to what they could see around like Running-Elk or Fire Cloud, then in the modern times they give names based on what they see and what has meaning to them at that moment, that is, oil.

Oil has so much influence in the Osage society that, as Mathews says, “as the payments became larger and larger, men's heads became filled with dreams and their life became a frenzied activity. So intoxicated did they become that they forgot to stop in their frantic grasping to point the finger of accusation at a neighbor” (78). In fact, oil has the power to shape a kind of mentality that is only concerned with getting more economic profit. Other problems that might arise from this way of living are not taken into account, which leads to issues of injustice. That is to say, if the Osages themselves do not acknowledge system's faults and become critical toward it, then eventually they will be disappointed by the system that excludes them.

Therefore, Osages just received their quarterly payments, but were excluded from the petrol industry and business derived from it. Mathews describes it in the following way: “There were no factories, no mills, no industry except the cattle business which had flourished for years. There weren't even oil refineries. These had been established in neighboring towns because the owners felt that it was too expensive to satisfy all the business men who seemed to have influence over the destinies of the town” (78). In other words, “they have no means to institutionalize their wealth under their own long-term control” (Parker 46). It should also be noted that “in the US oil rights

almost always have belonged to private owners” (LeMenager 74), meaning that the capitalist system benefits a limited number of people. Thus, all industry and business are carried out by white men under the banner of colonial exploitation and capitalism, which supports the construction of Euro-American modernity and excludes the rest. This is what Musiol refers to as “liquid” and “solid” stages of development, which are not simultaneous, meaning that due to this inequality it is impossible to “produce order in all geopolitical spaces and for all social subjects at the same time” (371). This is also what Esty refers to as “uneven development” produced by modernity.

The oil industry provides a completely new form of entertainment for white people such as car excursions to the oil fields. Cars become more and more common modes of transport fuelled by the very same gas, and a means of reaching camps located far away. Mathews depicts it in the following way:

People from the town drove out to the end of pavement, then over the dusty roads that twisted into ravines and climbed the prairie hills from all directions, and entered the forest of black derricks where they became lost in the maze of roads crossing and recrossing each other. A near-sighted Sunday driver from Kihekah, taking his family out to see the greatest oil field in the world, would lose himself hopelessly.

*(Sundown 239)*

All this forms a part of the spirit of the time. Cars are used and exhibited as a proof of being in step with the new times. The oil camp might be interpreted here as the origin and the ultimate symbol of the greatness of modernity. However, the only concern of these excursionists is how to get more benefit for their business out of the Osage wealth and move away to “civilization”; that “civilization” that mixed-bloods like Chal await, but which does not come.

Another popular entertainment of the time is attending “the oil leases sales, [where] you could stand and watch the auctioneer auction off a-hundred-sixty-acre tracts and sometimes stand within a few feet of a nationally known oil magnate whose name screamed at you from billboards

along the highway” (*Sundown* 246). White people want to be part of such an important event, and to be near the oil magnate, the real owner of the oil industry.

Oil is the main subject of conversations and news, its content is usually positive, promising a bright future. Even such incidents as a bank robbery become social events, and if one has “the honor of not only seeing the bandit but actually talking with him” (*Sundown* 246), it means that everybody wants to be somehow related to the central events, and feel the importance of the moment. Likewise, newspapers show enthusiasm for proudly spreading news about somebody “becom[ing] an oil millionaire” (*Sundown* 246) or “the Osage Indian becoming civilized” (*Sundown* 244) or “going into business” (*Sundown* 244), as if it were a demonstration of their inclusion on the system. However, it was only an appearance. Surprisingly “the sudden leavetaking of the cashier of the Oil National bank and the country treasurer” (*Sundown* 244) is not mentioned by the newspapers, just as negative consequences of oil, such as murders of the Osages, with money constituting their main reason, are never mentioned. Only after the oil boom do investigations of those crimes begin. Chal's father and a friend are victims of these crimes, but he does not see the reasons behind their deaths that happened while he was on his military service. During this time, white guardians were assigned to Indians who could not administrate their wealth, and finally they were taken advantage of by their guardians.<sup>11</sup> This is another example of how Osages were considered unable to control their economy, and consequently, were excluded from the socio-economic system. Chal's mother says about his father regarding this theme: “He always said that gov'mint would not let white mans that is lawyer and white mans that sells clothes and houses, and white mans that is doctors, cheat Indian. I believe your father did not believe this. I believe his tongue said this so that his heart could hear it” (236). Like many other mixed-bloods, John wanted to believe in white men and government and their promises. Despite his self-conviction that

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11. As Wilson says: “Legally competent Osages who spent all their money and became hopelessly mired in debt were often brought before local county courts and declared incompetent. The courts appointed guardians to handle their business affairs, a presumable beneficial arrangement that often backfired. Because of the ambiguous text of the 1921 legislation, the Indian Office, had decided that all “surplus funds”, money left after the \$1,000 quarterly payments were allocated to incompetent Osages be placed in the hands of their guardians” (138).

cooperation between both cultures would be beneficial, he knew deep inside that his people were utilized by all the members of white community. Although he used to say that “bad white mans would not come here now, 'cause this civilization is here now” (*Sundown* 236-237) he owned a pistol which the robbers eventually used to kill him. In this way, the long-awaited arrival of “civilization” and “progress” never happens, but totally opposite effects are achieved. Chal, as well as his father, finally perceives that something “had happened to the world” (*Sundown* 307), but cannot fully acknowledge what exactly was wrong with the system, nor that his father and him were wrong about the beneficial effects of “progress”. In fact, they cannot see that things that the government did to them so that they would become “civilized” prevent them from development in either society. Overall, there is no development for the Osages as they imagined it, but rather an involution, and the novel reflects it in its anti-developmental form.

## **2. Form that reflects anti-development**

*Sundown* is a novel whose historical context of restricted development is enclosed in an anti-developmental literary form. The novel is structured in three parts – Chal's childhood in the Indian Agency, his years at the University and air force, and his return to the reservation. The novel starts as a classic *Bildungsroman*, narrating the life of the protagonist from the beginning. Chal is born in the beginning of the twentieth century some years before the land allotment. In the opening paragraph of the novel the author implies that the event took place when the Osage culture was not so deeply affected by the white: “The god of the great Osages was still dominant over the wild prairie and the blackjack hills when the Challenge was born” (*Sundown* 1). The tribal unity was stronger, the prairie was untouched, and the blackjacks were representative of the landscape.

The name of Challenge is given to the protagonist by his father John Windzer. He expects his son to become “a challenge to the disinheritors of his people” (*Sundown* 4). This beginning places the reader before expectations of the classic *Bildungsroman*, with all the steps in the

character's personal formation. As protagonist, he is supposed to go through a process of becoming a grown hero at the end. However, the novel frustrates these expectations and presents anti-development in the figure of a failed hero/artist, or “stunted youth” (Esty 4) which is directly linked to the anti-development of the structure of the plot, and both are reflections of the impossibility of development of the Osages on the socio-economical level.

As described above, *Sundown* fits into the category of the modernist novel referred to as the “novel of frozen or stunted youth” by Jed Esty. As this paper proposes, colonialism and capitalism are two constituent parts of modernity, and carry the same ideology of progress. In *Sundown* capitalism, which arrives to the Osage culture with the colonial expansion, constitutes an endless process that cannot be expressed in the closed structure of linear development; colonialism operates as a force that destabilizes the Osage culture and produces characters as Challenge Windzer, who embodies the concept of “frozen youth” typical of the not wholly modernized periphery (Esty 49). All this put together points out that capitalism has expanded irregularly against the colonialist belief that all the territories would develop equally. This idea is defined as “uneven development” by Esty. Thus, modernity produces a modernist version of *Bildungsroman*, or anti-*Bildungsroman*, which works against the linear plot development, meaning that it positions itself against the idea of progress as it is understood by modernity. There is no development in *Sundown*, neither in the plot nor in the character, because the promises of modernity fail for the Osages.

Mathews wisely employs modernist writing strategies together with traditional Osage techniques in order to resist the imposed idea of development. Christopher Schedler draws parallels between different modernisms, “high” and “border”, and *Sundown*. Chal, for example, resembles an “isolated and deracinated ‘high’ modernist subject” (Schedler 132) who is also a failed artist. As such he tries to channel his feelings into Osage ritual songs and dances, in which he does not feel fulfilled, but rather frustrated and ashamed for having these needs: “He tried to dance, but the hills were rocky; then he chanted; chanted an Osage song, but the feeling that he was overpowered

caused him to stop” (*Sundown* 71). Chal goes through these moments several times during the novel, which shows his unstable identity. Unable to express himself he says that he is “disappointed with himself” and that “he had somehow reverted” (*Sundown* 138) for having returned to these practices, because in his vision, Osage traditions are backward. At the end of the novel, his attitude is of giving up when saying that “he [is] an Indian now” (*Sundown* 297), as if he was admitting he has failed to get “civilized”. But he still tries to express his emotions by dancing and singing “tribal songs of his people” (*Sundown* 296) in order to achieve “some sort of climax; that sort of completeness that consummates the creative urge” (*Sundown* 297) but he cannot. In the similar way, the novel reaches no climax that leads to progress in narration. The repetition of the events (Chal's struggle to adapt to the white culture and his getaways to nature) form the structure of the novel. Mathews uses this circularity representative of Native American storytelling in order to prevent the plot from classic *Bildungsroman* development.

Chal is alienated from both the Osage and Euro-American cultures, which can be explained by “‘high’ modernist fear of identification with... any form of collective.” (Schedler 134). Chal becomes friends with white boys and thinks that he has “less and less in common” (*Sundown* 68) with his Indian friends Sun-on-His-Wings and Running Elk, and it does not worry him. He does not want to be like them, and feels “a little annoyed with them for acting like Indians” (*Sundown* 94).

Mathews, thus, borrows techniques from both traditions, since combined together they can express modern Native American identity better than separately. Had the author used only modernist techniques -although modernism can be critical toward modernity- it would not have expressed Osage identity. In the same way, circularity does not describe the modern Osage world any longer. But working together they show the main feature of the modern Osage identity, which is frustration resulting from the impossibility of incorporating both identities, Osage and American, and consequently of developing.

In the early 1930s depression strikes the Osage economy and tribe members stop receiving

huge amounts of money. This is mentioned in the last chapter of *Sundown* making the end of the novel coincide with the end of the Osage oil boom: "Then one day something happened. It didn't all happen in one day, but it seemed that way. The all-powerful life that had come with the creeping derricks began to recede to the east... The roar of activity faded into the lazy coughing of pumps, and the fever brightness of the Great Frenzy began to dim" (304). In general, people do not understand what is happening. Everybody tries to improve their mood saying that oil will come back and the leases will start to grow again. Nevertheless, the decline is already there, before the factual arrival of the glorious future. Economic depression coincides with Chal's depression and apathy. He realizes these changes in the environment, and feels irritated because his mother "[does not] seem to understand that something had happened to the world" (307). She, like other full-bloods (and contrary to mixed-bloods like her husband John Windzer), continue living in the way they were used to before the oil boom. It is not that they do not realize the changes, but that their life was not that influenced by oil, and they did not have high expectations regarding the progress and civilization. They were not blinded by promises of glorious future that one day might be available to them too. They did not bother about money, and when all the uproar about oil and money is over, they still live like always. Unlike his mother, Chal did have expectations of achieving the promised "civilization" and "progress," and what makes him feel uneasy is the realisation that he lost the possibility of becoming "civilized" and modern even before achieving it. The worst thing is that he thinks that it is his fault that he cannot reject his Osageness and be like white men. But the solution is neither to reject his heritage nor adopt white men's customs, but rather be able to reach a compromise that would work.

At the end of the novel Chal has a conversation with his mother about his intentions of going to Harvard and becoming a great orator. She does not say anything against it, but she knows that he has no intention of going anywhere. To her he is still "a little boy in breech clout and moccasins, holding up a sparrow for her approval" (311). Chal's intentions of going to university are the same

as his intentions of working, aiming to pretend that he has ambition and engagement with the new times, but in fact he is more lost than he has ever been. His mother's vision of him as a little boy might be explained in Esty's terms of "frozen youth" (Esty 3). that is, a young man who never grows up or develops, which leads directly to the anti-developmental form of the novel.

Consequently, there is no formal closure because there is no solution for Chal in that moment due to, as Esty points out, the "uncertain future of a colonial world-system" (32). Chal, as well as the novel, never develops because the context he lives in prevents him from moving forward. He never reaches adulthood or self-realisation as it is expected from the classic *Bildungsroman* because capitalist modernization is an endless process (Esty 36-37) and it is impossible to describe it in the finite form of the *Bildungsroman*. The use of the form of the anti-developmental novel is interpreted as a "critique of colonial modernity" by Jed Esty (1), where both the characters' and the plot's development is restricted by the devastating force of colonial expansion and the capitalist system. *Sundown* fits, thus, into the anti-developmental category of novels where the main character is "frozen" in his endless adolescence, connoting that the project of modernity is never completed or fully available for colonial subjects, as in the case of Chal Windzer.

Since Osages are prevented from development (as it is understood by the West) because their traditions were taken from them, without any alternatives being given, they have to find another way of looking towards the future; they have to find another path which would be different from the path of the white men. The most common choice for the full-blood Osages was to become members of the Peyote Church (Wilson 198) as a means of finding oneself in new times. In *Sundown* some of Chal's friends are peyote followers and, although he is uninterested, he agrees to attend one of the peyote ceremonies. During the ceremony, the leader, called the Road Man, speaks to appease the anger of Chal's dead friend's father who would like to kill the white men responsible for his son's death. Road Man's words are significant for everybody present there, but also for the interpretation of the novel: "Long time ago there were only one road and People could follow that

road... Now it seems that road is gone, and white man has brought many roads. But that road is still there” (271). This makes reference to the time before the colonial expansion, when the Osages lived according to their own traditions. But with the arrival of the white men the lifestyle of the Osages changed, and they abandoned their ways of living in favour of the white man's practices. Despite new foreign customs, there is still the possibility of living according to Osage traditions. The Road Man continues explaining: “There is white man's road, and there is road which comes off from forks. The bad road which no white man follows – the road which many of the People follows, thinking it is the white man's road... People who follow this road say that road of Indian is bad now” (271). He makes reference to practices introduced by settlers which do not bring anything positive, such as those that many mixed-blood Osages adapt believing that if they copy them, they can be like white men, and the promises of modernity and “civilization” will be available to them. Like Chal, they think that having Indian blood, heritage and being attached deep inside to the tribal customs is a reason for being ashamed and feeling inferior or “uncivilized.” For this reason the Road Man says that “they are not Indians any more” (271), because they rejected the Indian part of themselves in the pursuit of “civilization” and “progress” preached by the white men. However, he suggests that there is a possibility of feeling themselves Osage, although their former ways of life have been eradicated. He says: “we cannot follow this road with our feet now, but we can see this road with our eyes, and our hearts will go along this road forever” (271). What is important is to feel Indian and accept their belonging to the tribe. It is common that in times of uproar spirituality gains ground in order to serve as guidance. For Chal the peyote ceremony does not work. It only makes him feel a little bit less frustrated for a few days, but then he returns to his suffering. Although this scene gives hope to endure in the quickly changing world, hiding in religion is not going to provide a solution to the problems of modernity. In this sense, the peyote ceremony is a failed ceremony for Chal, along with tribal dancing and singing, because they have no longer the power to heal modern problems.

When Mathews wrote the novel in the beginning of the 1930s, he looked at the problem very closely, and could only perceive that the system was not working for the Osages. For this reason, although the novel is a criticism of the destructive force of modernity, it does not envision any alternative. Nevertheless, nowadays, we have a deeper perspective due to what we have learnt from history. It seems that the best way to deal with the problems of modernity would be by combining “contemporary ” with “non-Western” (Serenella, Oppermann 290) knowledge.

Throughout the close reading of *Sundown* it becomes clear that the capitalist system extended with internal colonial expansion in North America are two pillars that support the project of modernity. Osage culture is deeply affected by this quick and radical change of lifestyle and mentality. The American government wants the Osages to believe that assimilation would be beneficial and it would allow them to become full participants in the promised civilization and modernity. Many mixed-blood Osages, like Chal, have their heads full of expectations and illusions about a glorious future that is awaiting for them, and that all those promises of modernity would be available for them too. Oil plays an important part in this context, since the type of Western modernity that is advertised is petro-modernity (modernity supported by petro-capitalism, that is, by oil). Oil is usually invisible, but it makes the concept of modernity and progress more tangible, through its many uses, which, in turn, makes the Osages consider that having money, cars and modern luxuries means that they are enjoying modernity. But what it is actually does is destabilize Osage culture, while creating stability in the North American society. Instead of offering development (which modernity implies) it leads to stagnation and even anti-development and degradation (drugs, and murders) among the Osages.

In its pursuit of continuous progress, capitalist modernity overlooks harmony between nature and people, which are frequently associated with well-being<sup>12</sup> and opposed to development. Chal has urges to be alone in nature because he needs to feel like a part of nature in order to be at

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12. Mignolo says that “Native American sustained decolonial arguments... connect land with spirituality and not with commodity, and which also disconnect “buen vivir/to live in harmony” from development” (63).

ease. In his consideration, it is incompatible with his desire to become “civilized”. This frustration ends up with his resignation and abandonment to alcohol. In this way, he never reaches the glory promised by petro-modernity. On the other hand, Osage influence is no longer strong, and Chal's bonds with cultural traditions are too weak, and he cannot find comfort in it. Overall, he is unable to identify with either of them. This situation turns into the impossibility of development for mixed-bloods like Chal, which is also shown in the anti-developmental form of the novel. What is reflected in the novel is the failed project of modernity for colonial subjects who become stuck in uncertainty.

### **Conclusion**

As has been argued in this essay, colonialism and (petro)capitalism have played an essential part in the construction of modernity. Modernity can be described as a circular process of destruction and creation<sup>13</sup> or what is the same, as a process that creates new problems but also tries to find solutions for them. For instance, postcolonial studies arise out of the huge human inequality that modernity produces. As a way of defence against Eurocentric pattern of modernization, postcolonial thinkers elaborated a theory of “alternative modernities”, meaning that non-Western cultures do not have to follow the path towards modernity predicted by the West, where development usually supposes economic progress, neglecting people and nature. The concept of “alternative modernities” means that each culture develops its own modernity in accordance with its own cultural background, and economic development is not a priority. However, this vision often overlooks the underdevelopment which is linked to economic growth. Thus, a fair development and modernization should not only focus on one aspect but include both, economic and human. Taking this argument even further, development should not only be socio-economic, but also environmentally sustainable. Nowadays, one of the most popular debates in postcolonial studies is the one that addresses human problems in

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13. Berman says that “Thus, in the first part of the Manifesto, Marx lays out the polarities that will shape and animate the culture of modernism in the century to come: the theme of insatiable desires and drives, permanent revolution, infinite development, perpetual creation and renewal in every sphere of life; and its radical antithesis, the theme of nihilism, insatiable destruction, the shattering and swallowing up of life, the heart of darkness, the horror” (102).

combination with those of ecology. Postcolonial criticism together with ecocriticism has the power to criticise “social and environmental dominance” (Huggan, Tiffin 2) and both are looking for “alternatives to... Western ideologies of development” (Huggan, Tiffin 29). There are several theories that suggest that “contemporary knowledge” can be combined with “nonmodern (and frequently non-Western) religions and philosophies” (Iovino, Oppermann 289-290) in order to defend justice on social and environmental level. Some of these theories are philosophical animism and panpsychism (Iovino, Oppermann 289-290), which try to solve problems of modernity taking into account the importance of achieving harmonious interaction between people and nature as the high point of development.<sup>14</sup> In other words, by combining contemporary science and technology with indigenous knowledge, which care for nature, we could learn how to not only take from nature, that is, see it as a resource, but also to give something in return in order to benefit it as well.

This environmental consciousness is of importance to this essay since oil exploitation is one of the main dilemmas of modernity. The petroleum industry supports modern life and the global economy, but it is also one of the main causes of uneven development in the world. What is more, “ultradeep ocean drilling” (LeMenager 2) and contamination resulting from oil spills represent a great danger for the environment. For this reason, post-oil future is a current theme for discussion in a variety of fields. There is a growing number of scholars who include in their discourse themes dealing not only with a world after coloniality, but also theorize about a world after petro-capitalism supported by some alternative source of energy. It seems, overall, that there is an extended thinking regarding a future with alternative bases to those of modernity. The position of this essay is not of rejection of modernity, but of raising awareness of the existing problems created by modernity. In fact, the solution would be not to oppose development, but make it more equitable, on the economic and technological level, not forgetting about sustainable human and environmental development.

In the 1930's, when the events portrayed in *Sundown* took place, human and environmental

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14. It perfectly engages with what Mignolo terms as “decolonial spirituality” as one of five possible trajectories for the future 62-69.

factors were overlooked. Mathews does not give an answer to how it should be handled because there were no solutions for characters like Chal Windzer in the new rapidly changing world at that time. Modernity gives many promises while creating a number of problems. Chal cannot become part of the white men's world, neither can he come back to the Osage culture that no longer has strong influence, and has never been a reference to him. Nevertheless, he has an innate attraction to the natural environment where he feels comfortable away from modern activity. This link with nature is broken by modernity. Nowadays, it is of great importance to incorporate the care for nature into postcolonial discourse as it is directly related to the care for people. But not only postcolonial or ecocritical thinkers address critically problems of modernity, but also modernist literature. In fact, modernism can be critical towards modernity, although it is a direct product of the era. Using this style, Mathews offers a criticism to modernity that turned the Osage's world into an uncertain existence. However, the novel does not give any answer to how that problem should be solved. Today, too, we live in a world of uncertainty, but luckily there is a growing desire for improving human and environmental conditions. Living in a modern world is living in a world of constant transformations and imagining new or better ways of existing. For this reason, acknowledging problems that modernity supposes is the first step to achieving a more fair future. *Sundown* is only one example that points out that the project of modernity does not work perfectly for everybody.

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