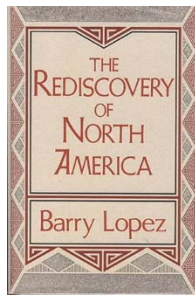


# **Revaluing the Cost of Natural Collateral Damage: A reflection on sacred obligation towards plants and animals in Susan Brind Morrow, Barry Lopez, Simone Weil and John Berger**

By Jasmine Bailey Epstein

The stories of Major General John Sullivan's burning of the Iroquois orchards in 1799 and Cortés's burning of the Aztec gardens and aviaries in 1520 underscore the bankruptcy of the expansion narratives it has been relatively comfortable for us, its descendants, to accept. Instead of struggles for survival between groups competing over the same parcels of land, European conquest often worked instead as a double-edged attack on both traditional attitudes towards nature and against the very souls



of the people existing on the desired territory. These conflicts are not worthy of a term like "war," which carries implications of rules, boundaries, acceptable tactics, and an inherent value to human life. These stories are neither isolated nor, as we have seen, are they unengaged by modern philosophy. The story of the United States' campaigns against the Comanche in West Texas is another example: instead of attacking the Comanche directly, in 1874 U.S. forces captured and destroyed thousands of their horses in an act meant to functionally and spiritually cripple them. Simone Weil and John Berger, writing at

different historical moments, nevertheless provide the philosophical structure to understand the nature of such acts as crimes against human survival and sins against what is sacred in human beings. It is crucial that we practice this way of looking back and around us, of evaluating the real meaning of environmental victims of human conflicts, if we value our own spiritual and moral integrity. This paper examines the question through the writings of Susan Brind Morrow and Barry Lopez.

