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"History will always find you, / and wrap you In its thousand arms": The Representation of Counter-memory in Selected Poems by Joy Harjo

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التاريخ سوف يجدك دائمًا، / ويحتضنك بين ذراعيه الألف": تمثيل الذاكرة المضادة في قصائد مختارة " لجوي هارجو

Abstract

In addition to being utilized to revive their identity, poetry has always been at the heart of Indigenous American peoples' political struggles for independence. Although the genesis of Indigenous oral literature dated back thousands of years ago, it wasn't until the 1960s, when political protest and cultural regeneration were in full swing, that Indigenous American poetry officially became a recognized branch in the literary canon. During this time, a new spectrum of Indigenous authors and poets began to express themselves through the written word. Joy Harjo (born 1951-), a descendant of the (*Mvskoke*) Creek Nation, is among these poets. Her poetry is frequently distinguished by its strong ties to Indigenous peoples history, spirituality, and cultural identity, in addition to the representation Indigenous women's experiences in the United States.

With a strong foundation in Indigenous history, heritage, and socio-political experience, Harjo's poetry provides a thoughtful examination of the harm imposed on Indigenous peoples. Her poetry examines universal themes of healing

through resilience, which will be farmed in this article through the prism of Postcolonial theory. This article concentrates on healing interact in Harjo's selected poems of her anthology *An American Sunrise* (2019). This article also examine how she combines poetics with politics, showing how poetry can create a poetic space and serves as a decolonial healing tool. The researcher investigates how colonizers create colonial myths to justify their dominance, such as the idea that colonialism is a noble and civilizing enterprise at the expense of Indigenous people's realities. Additionally, the researcher shows how the poet resists historical erasure, emphasizing poetry's transformative power in postcolonial situations.

Keywords: healing, history, memory, oppression, postcolonialism

المستخلص

بالإضافة إلى استخدامه لإحياء هويتهم، كان الشعر دائمًا في قلب النضالات السياسية لشعوب أمريكا الأصلية من أجل الاستقلال. على الرغم من أن نشأة الأدب الشفوي الأصلي تعود إلى آلاف السنين، إلا أنه لم يصبح الشعر الأمريكي الأصلي رسميًا فرعًا معترفًا به في الشريعة الأدبية إلا في ستينيات القرن العشرين، عندما كانت الاحتجاجات السياسية والتجديد الثقافي في أوج عطائهما. خلال هذا الوقت، بدأ طيف جديد من المؤلفين والشعراء الأصليين في التعبير عن أنفسهم من خلال الكلمة المكتوبة. جوي هارجو (من مواليد ١٩٥١-)، وهي من سلالة أمة الكريك (الموسكوغيين)، من بين هؤلاء الشعراء. يتميز شعرها غالبًا بروابطه القوية بتاريخ الأمريكيين الأصليين والروحانية والهوية الثقافية، بالإضافة إلى تمثيل تجارب النساء الأمريكيات الأصليات في الولايات المتحدة. مع وجود أساس قوي في تاريخ السكان الأصليين وتراثهم وخبرتهم الاجتماعية والسياسية، يوفر شعر هارجو فحصًا مدروسًا للضرر الواقع على الأمريكيين الأصليين. تتناول قصائد هارجو مواضيع عالمية تتعلق بالشفاء من خلال المرونة، والتي سيتم تناولها في هذه المقالة من خلال منظور نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار. تركز هذه المقالة على تفاعل الشفاء في قصائد هارجو المختارة من مختاراتها "شروق الشمس الأمريكي" (٢٠١٩). كما تبحث هذه المقالة في كيفية دمجها بين الشعر والسياسة، موضحة كيف يمكن للشعر أن يخلق مساحة شعرية ويعمل كأداة شفاء ما بعد الاستعمار. تبحث الباحثة في كيفية خلق المستعمرين للأساطير الاستعمارية لتبرير هيمنتهم، مثل فكرة أن الاستعمار هو مشروع نبيل ومتحضر على حساب حقائق الشعوب الأصلية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تُظهر الباحثة كيف تقاوم الشاعرة المحو التاريخي، مؤكدة على القوة التحويلية للشعر في المواقف ما بعد الاستعمارية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الاستعمار، القمع، الشفاء، الذاكرة، التاريخ

Introduction

Colonization of the native American country has an on-going impact on its Indigenous peoples. From 1492, the year when the European colonization of the

Americas began, the size of Native American population declined due to wars, massacres, enslavement, and ethnic cleansing, among other reasons. It was, according to many historians, an act of genocide imposed on these peoples. This brutality reached its peak during the sixty years between 1830 and 1890. The European settlers, ideologized with a policy of settler colonialism, brutally removed the Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands, and imposed upon them unjustified, one-sided government treaties, in addition to indorse discriminatory government policies, including forced, systematic assimilation. The mainstream of policy makers in the United States held the belief that Indigenous peoples not only could change their cultures and lifestyles, but also they would value assimilative measures of advancement over their own culture. This belief originated from the Enlightenment ideal of progress that marked the 19th century (Keating, 2012, P.3).

Many Indigenous writers have created literature over time, but the most important ones emerged after the revival of Indigenous peoples ethnic pride and cultural traditions between the late 1940s and the late 1960s. This was a distractively political and radical literature which appeared to have impacted efforts to preserve Indigenous cultural heritage (Pacitti, 2021, P.3). This is because the 1960s was a period of political activism, which was informedy by "discriminatory governmental policies, the second world war, the implications of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, and the anti-colonial struggles of South Africa and other postcolonial nations" (Furaih, 2017, p. 1). In his book *Poetry of the Civil Rights Movements in Australia and the United States, 1960s-1980s*, Furaih (2024) asserts that "the works of N. Scott Momaday and James Welch added a new spectrum to the American canon. So-called "American Indian" writers received increasing critical praise and scholarly attention… Native American poets assume the role of cultural spokespersons" (Furaih, 2024, p. 5). Similar to how Langston Hughes sparked the Harlem Renaissance, N. Scott Momaday sparked the modern Native American Renaissance. By winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, Momaday paved the way for other Indigenous writers to receive recognition from critics and publishers. It was as if floodgates had been opened, and through them poured a steady stream of books by Indigenous writers (Ali, 2011, p. 73). Consequently, Momaday revived Indigenous literature with the help of numerous novelists, short story writers, and poets, including Leslie Marmon Silko, Lids Hogan, James Welch, Simon Ortiz, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and Geary Hobson. Their contributions focused primarily on Indigenous peoples, their cultures and identity

(Huntsinger, 2007, P. 24-25). Among these writers is poet-activist Joy Harjo. Harjo challenges the colonialism-era legacies that have suppressed Indigenous peoples identities by weaving the themes of survival, remembrance, and perseverance in her poetry. She reclaims Indigenous landscapes and histories through her poetic investigation of the earth as a living creature, demonstrating how Indigenous peoples continue to practice their cultures in spite of centuries of persecution and expulsion.

Harjo's poetry asserts the continued endurance of tribes in the face of colonial erasure and cultural dislocation by evoking ancestral memories and spiritual links to the land. This makes Harjo's poetry an effective means of postcolonial resistance. Harjo's poeticized history and culture are deeply entwined with the (*Mvskoke)* Creeks' activism and aspiration. A major theme in Harjo's poetry is the oppressive socio-political and cultural environment in the United States. According to her, "The Indian wars never ended in this country, we were hated for our difference by our enemies" (Haight, 2005, p. 205). Additionally, Paula Gunn Allen, an American poet, literary critic, and activist, describes her as "a poet whose work is concerned with metaphysical as well as social connections" (Allen, 1983, p. 16). Harjo's viewpoint is consistent with the idea that poetry develops organically, frequently of the core of one's own experience, emotion, and instinct, as opposed to rigid academic procedures or harsh discipline: "You cannot force poetry/ With a ruler, or jail it at a desk," as she puts it in her poem "Break My Heart" (Harjo, 2019, lines 13-14).

Poetry flourishes in spontaneous responses and liberty, rejecting rigid structures, as the artwork suggests. Harjo honors poetry as a potent and wild manifestation of the human soul. poetry has been given a sacred space and its mystery and beauty are impenetrable but can be gracefully shared with readers in an effort to restore what has been lost. Her poetry employs to create a narrative of understanding and harmony between Indigenous peoples and mainstream society, as well as to usher in a new era in the multiracial history of the United States. By using images, figurative language, connotation, and idea association, Harjo aims to reconcile herself, the Other, and memory in her poetry (de Mancelos, 2006, p. 6). Poetry serves as a counter-history to resist the misrepresentation of her people in the mainstream narratives: "this poetry is decolonising because it contest the assumptions of white history" (Furaih, 2018, p.165). In her collection *An American Sunrise* (2019), she records all of the crimes done against them.

In the epigraph, Harjo writes about the crisis of immigrants and the Trail of Tears:

On May 28, 1830, President Andrew Jackson unlawfully signed the Indian Removal Act to force move southeastern peoples from our homelands to the West. We were rounded up with what we could carry. We were forced to leave behind houses, printing presses, stores, cattle, schools, pianos, ceremonial grounds, tribal towns, churches. We witnessed immigrants walking into our homes with their guns, Bibles, household goods and families, taking what had been ours, as we were surrounded by soldiers and driven away like livestock at gunpoint. There were many trails of tears of tribal nations all over North America of indigenous peoples who were forcibly removed from their homelands by government forces (Harjo, 2019, p. 1).

Harjo identified herself as a representative and a spokesperson of Indigenous peoples in the Unites States. This article studies selected poems by Harjo and examine how she utilizes and appropriates her poetry to resist the misrepresentation of her peoples' narrative in the mainstream history. It illustrates how her poetry is a multimedia genre that radically transgresses the boundaries of poetry, politics, and history.

Theoretical Framework

Colonialism is described as a powerful nation ruling over a weaker nation. Postcolonialism is, therefore, understood as a historical era that concentrates the consequences of colonization. Although there are still traces of colonialism in the postcolonial era, the colonial era has come to an end, and a new era known as "postcolonial" has begun. But as a theoretical framework—and the main focus here—postcolonial criticism aims to comprehend how colonialism and anticolonialist ideas function on a political, social, cultural, and psychological levels. Much postcolonial criticism, for instance, examines the ideological forces that, on the one hand, encouraged colonized peoples to resist their oppressors—a resistance that is as old as colonialism itself—and, on the other hand, forced the colonized to internalize the values of the colonizers (Tyson, 2015, p. 23). Thus "Postcolonial literatures are by and large a result of the interaction between imperial culture and the complex of Indigenous cultural practices. Though the colonies once subjected to imperial rules are now free, they are still subject in one way or another to covert or subtle forms of new colonial domination in the form of language and cultural interactions" (Koban, 2017, p. 146).

Frantz Fanon declares that those under colonial rule are constantly compelled to ask themselves a question related to their identity, "In reality, who am I?". This is because colonization and the oppression it imposed on the colonized peoples involve a systematic denial of the other person and a solid commitment to reject the other people's traits of humanity (Fanon, 1967, p. 203). Similarly, social critics, Hall Stuart, Stephen Greenblatt, and Michel Foucault, believe that the political system uses labels such as "high" or "low" ethos to maintain its power and sense of superiority (Tyson, 2015, p. 296). Furthermore, the question of "Who am I?" gives rise to a number of related sub-questions, the majority of which deal with self-identification and existence in society. Stuart states that there are "certain historical moments when some people had more power to speak about certain subjects than others" (1997, p. 142). Through these experiences of marginalization and prejudice, the hybrid character will be established. This condition is known as "in-betweenness," when the individual is divided between two distinct ethnicities or cultures (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1-3). According to Gayatri Spivak's essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” (1988), certain kinds of individuals are not only subservient due to the lack autonomy and will, but they are also unable to communicate. These individuals are subordinate to bot h native peoples and enslaved people. They lack humanity, which makes them the "other" (1988, pp. 66-98).

Historically, the most effective weapons of assimilation used by the mainstream policy-makers to repress Indigenous languages, cultures, and identities are English language and formal education. Indigenous children were forbidden from using their native tongues or engaging in traditional activities while attending residential and boarding schools. In addition to displacing Indigenous languages, this enforced English usage undermined cultural links and identities. Indigenous peoples pupils' perception of cultural inferiority was further cemented by the curriculum in these institutions, which placed a strong emphasis on Western values and frequently depicted Indigenous culture as inferior. By teaching practical skills appropriated for European-American society instead of Indigenous knowledge and abilities, the schools sought to create "Americanized" citizens. The belief that assimilation into mainstream culture was the only path to success was strengthened by this education: “[W]ith the proper education and treatment Indians could become just like other citizens” (Marr, 2004, p.2).

Harjo realized that in order to contest the prevailing narrative and regain authority, Indigenous people needed to reimagine the enemy language. In order to preserve their identity while advocating for sovereignty and decolonization,

Indigenous peoples storytellers and poets have taken up the task of using the English language to write in order to communicate their true stories or history. Harjo does this by combining her native languages with English in her poetry. She asserts that speaking up is essential, no matter the cost empowers oneself as opposed to making oneself a victim of devastation. Harjo is aware of the ability of language to create, heal, and rejuvenate. She states that "[m]any of us at the end of the century are using the enemy language' to tell our truths, to remember ourselves during these troubled times to speak, at whatever the cost, is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction" (Harjo, 2019, p. 21). By defying established, Eurocentric literary rules, Harjo deterritorializes English poetry as a literary genre; her poetry is a multimedia genre that radically transgresses the boundaries of poetry, politics, and history. This is a response to the fact that the prevailing literary canon of Britain, Europe, and America holds that a poem is frequently only deemed "universal" or "great art" if it reflects well-established European forms and focuses on European experiences (qtd. Furaih, 2024, p. 171). According to Deleuze and Guattari, this conviction in "universalism" stems from the "arborescent model of thought," a strict framework that favors fixed, hierarchical representations (as cited in Furaih, 2024, p. 171).

Michel Foucault (1926-1984), a philosopher and historian of ideas from France, who was also a writer, political activist, and literary critic, presents the idea of the "history of present" in his *Discipline and Punish* (1975). In order to understand the complexity of the past over the present (31). He proposes "presentism," which is a historical research method that uses ideas and concerns from the present to analyze the past. It gives present relevance to a past that could have been written very differently. Asserting fundamental actuality of thoughts in a certain sequence of statements and subjects that shaped discourses and knowledge at that time, according to Foucault, might adequately explain this noteworthy exploration (Garland, 2014, p. 365). The majority of historical narratives begin with the totality of human existence and then place particular incidents and deeds within it in contrast to counter-memory that arises with the unique and particular forming of the whole. Time and narratives are important to historians because they believe that understanding the past will influence people's "common sense" (Lipsitz, 1990, pp. 213-215).Therefore, memories that influence how people perceive others may be affected, consciously or unconsciously, by false ideas or impressions reinforced by those in positions of authority. Thus, the theory focuses on the differences in cultural, social, and political marginalization that are justified by imperial actions. Postcolonial philosophy originated in response to

the "Political Discourse" that arose from oppressive practices and struggles for freedom and independence (Young, 2001, p. 383-426). Additionally, it emphasizes the experiences of oppression and dominance that govern the modern environment (Young, 2001, p. 11). As a result, the theory's emphasis is not solely on previous colonial actions or conflicts, but rather on current circumstances that are, indirectly or directly, the consequences of the past. As a result, the struggle focuses on neocolonialism and its global and domestic forces, which are still enforced by the legal system. The confluence of historical and contemporary concepts has resulted in a powerful framework for sociopolitical identification. Rather than replicating the prior native culture or introducing a completely new culture, postcolonial theory promotes a fractured culture, a fusion of worlds (Rukunda and Aarde, 2007, p. 1175).

The writings of Indigenous authors, particularly Harjo's poetry, clearly reflect these arguments. In the discussion of the various elements that influence Harjo's recollection as an Oklahoman child, postcolonialism might be utilized as a pillar. She saw herself as a spokesperson for the political struggle and heritage of Indigenous peoples. Her poetry explores the ideas of historical misrepresentation of her peoples narratives, redefining attitudes and views about them.

Erasure Resistance Poetics:

American writers of ethnic origin have shared across generations the urge to tell their story as chosen keepers of history. They know that by telling history, they become guardians of not only of it, but also of native cultures at the risk of extinction. While history is the objective, the discourse of power presents a public narrative, and memory is a personalized rendering of the tale as it intersects with one's arc of experience (Hanna, 2023, p. 293). The first poem by Harjo to be discussed here is “Break my Heart,” It starts with juxtaposition of imagery of“flowers, love, blood,” that indicates that the colonized effects have not yetended:

There are always flowers,
Love cries, or blood.
Someone is always leaving
By exile, death, or heartbreak (Lines: 1- 4).

The speaker is full of rage even the beautiful image of love is associated with blood and cry. And then speaker continues with this rage by explaining that there is separation by “exile, death, and heartbreak”; one is being forced to leave, one is about a final departure, and finally by emotional separation. "Imposed

disconnection from our traditional territories and confinement on reserves" results in a deep sense of loneliness, and increased "fear of losing beloved ones" that results from this separation (Dupuis-Rossi, 2024, p. 113). Thus, "soul wounding" caused by colonialism, makes Indigenous peoples of America insecure (Dupuis-Rossi, 2024, p. 111). The poem continues:

The heart is a fist.
It pockets prayer or holds rage.
……
You cannot force poetry
With a ruler, or jail it at a desk (Lines 5-14)

Throughout the poem, the inevitable departure brought on by exile, death, or heartbreak is discussed. The heart becomes a fist, ready to strike and to plead for salvation. Poetry, in Harjo's opinion, cannot be restricted or forced, although humans can be herded like sheep in violent situations: "You cannot force poetry with a ruler, / or jail it at a desk". Poetry has been given a sacred space by mystery and beauty that is impenetrable but can be gracefully shared with readers in an effort to restore what has been lost. The poem continues:

Police with their guns
Cannot enter here to move us off our lands.
History will always find you,
and wrap you In its thousand arms (Lines 18-22)

The speaker appears to be examining the conflict between history and power in these lines. The line, "police with their guns," shows an oppressive power outside authority. Harjo represents the violence that is frequently connected to law enforcement. She also represents the vision of armed authority and the terror it arouses, particularly in oppressed populations. But the next line, "cannot enter here to move us off our lands," refers to something more permanent and unchangeable than physical control, namely land dispossession. This represents a truth that cannot be revoked by force which is a strong, innate bond with the land. The last two lines of the poem imply that history is an inescapable force. History is personified here as something alive and pervasive rather than merely a chronicle of occurrences. The perspective of Indigenous poets have a lot in common with those of Franz Fanon, as Furaih contends in his article "'Let no one say the past is dead': History wars and the poetry of Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Sonia Sanchez"; Fanon contended that the colonized nations aspire to "put an end to the history of colonization . . . and to bring into existence. . . the history of decolonization" (as cited in Furaih, 2018, p. 172).

In her poem, "Exile of Memory," Harjo muses on her return to the ancient regions her people were driven from. She calls on Monahwee, her grandfather, an idolized character who symbolizes her ancestry and culture. He spearheaded the Red Stick War in opposition to American efforts to drive the Creek people from their ancestral territories. During the 1832 deportation of the tribe, Monahwee perished on the Trail of Tears (Sokin, 1978, p.146). Customary Indigenous names frequently have profound connotations that represent individual histories, kinship ties, and cultural revival. Indigenous peoples reject cultural erasure and assert their identity by reclaiming and using their ancestral names (Hall, 2015, p. 3).This trip back is not just physical but also profoundly spiritual and emotional, bearing the weight of memory and history. "I returned to see what I would find, in these lands we were forced to leave behind" (Harjo, 2019, p. 4). In this poem, the poet writes:

Do not return,
We were warned by one who knows things
You will only upset the dead.
They will emerge from the spiral of little houses
Lined up in the furrows of marrow
And walk the land.(Lines 1-6)

The poem starts with a warning statement, "Do not return," which establishes the scene for a story on the repercussions of looking backward. The warning is delivered by an informed person, alluding to the knowledge of elders who are aware of the risks associated with disrupting the past. The theme of the poem is presented in a lyrical and evocative style, which enhances the emotional impact by using metaphor and imagery. The narrator's internal turmoil is made more intimate and immediate for the reader by using direct address: "You will only upset the dead", where the deceased are entombed in "the spiral of little houses / Lined up in the furrows of marrow". The poem continues:

There will be no place in memory
For what they see
The highways, the houses, the stores of interlopers
Perched over the blood fields
Where the dead last stood (Lines 7-11)

Here, both a physical and a metaphysical context are present. The physical location of the invaders' occupied ancestral lands is depicted through pictures of "highways, houses, the stores of interlopers," standing over "blood fields." Harjo explores the spiritual world and memory metaphysically. By drawing a

comparison between the disrespect shown to Indigenous peoples holy areas and the feelings that Americans would have if their sites were vandalized, Harjo criticizes the lack of respect shown upon them. She writes:

And some places are sacred, not meant for non-ceremonial or non-tribal members. Many Americans just don't accept this, though they certainly wouldn't want us putting highways across their altars and pulpits. 'I'm an American, I can do anything I want. I can write about anything I want. I can give myself an Indian name if I want.' And so on (Harjo and Winder, 2011, p. 14).

It seems that Harjo is not adopting the identity here (American) as a replacement of her Indigenous identity. Rather, she uses it to enjoy freedom, just like any American does. By this freedom inscribed in the constitution, she can writes and voice her people' s demand and present her poetry in the form of a counter-history. Her speech emphasizes how cultural insensitivity and conceit frequently ignore the sacredness of Indigenous peoples of America places and customs. In his book *Red Earth*, *White Lies*: *Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (1995), Vine Deloria Jr., author and activist, explores how conquerors' introduction of advanced technology affected native American spiritual practices:

For much of the first four hundred years of contact, technology dealt Indians the hardest blows. Mechanical devices from the musket to the iron kettle to the railroad made it a certainty that Indians would lose the military battle to maintain their independence. Technology made it certain that no tribe would be able to maintain its beliefs in the spiritual world when it was apparent that whites had breached certain fundamental ways of living in that spiritual world and in this breach had foreclosed even the wisest of their people from understanding the larger arena in which human destiny was being played out (Deloria, 1995. P, 14).

Deloria draws attention to the ways that technology invasions have not only interfered with physical resistance but also have undermined spiritual practices by upsetting the sacred contexts that these practices were based in. The primary tension exists between the need to get back in touch with the ancestors' history and the possible effects of such an action. The narrator has fallen between wanting to go back and being afraid of what might occur if he does. Harjo justifies this by linking the ancestors world with the technology of this world that replaced everything ancestors ever knew and familiar with. The poem continues:

And then what, you with your words
In the enemy's language,
Do you know how to make a peaceful road Through human memory?

And what of angry ghosts of history?
Then what? (Lines 12-16)

Harjo discusses the difficulties and complications of speaking "the enemy's language," which bears the weight of Indigenous peoples' colonial past. Since the official adoption of standard English by the federal government, the history of Indigenous peoples has been marginalized (Furaih, 2018, p.163). It will only cost conflict and suffering when this language is used, especially for elderly people who are not familiar with what had happened. Language thus turns into a hybrid domain where sociocultural struggle takes place. Although Harjo admits that the "enemy's language" is forced, it acts as an agent for history and memory. She finds herself in a state of transition, torn between her own heritage and the language of the colonists, "the enemy." The essence of hybridity is reflected by this duality. Hence, using the image of a "peaceful road" suggests that she hopes for reconciliation. She uses "memory" to refuel her own personal memory with tribal memory which is one of the main themes of her poetry; Harjo transcends linear time and forges connections with the past, present, and future. “For us, there is not just this world, there’s also a layering of others. Time is not divided by minutes and hours, and everything has presence and meaning within this landscape of timelessness” (Harjo and Moyers, 1996, p. 39).

According to Harjo, it is essential to preserve tribal memory by bringing their cultures into the present and the future. Harjo and her generation become the guardians of history and Indigenous cultures by referencing tribal memory and ancestry. She portrays the connection between the past and the present as that of kinship. For her, memory is an “active thing and it kind of twists through present, past, and future...Your spirit can travel back or forwards, depending and connect because it’s there and part of you ...I believe that history contracts and expands” (Harjo and Winder, 2010, p. 11-12).

Harjo continues to refer to injustices and unresolved wounds that "should be disturbed all the time to uncover the hidden stories" (Furaih, 2018, p 165). The "angry ghosts" represent the injustices of the past that continue to haunt current generations, including colonization and cultural erasure. This sentence underlines how, in order to move forward, these old issues must be addressed. "Then what?" is a rhetorical device that emphasizes ambiguity and encourages contemplation. It raises concerns about what happens after these pervasive problems are acknowledged and addressed, suggesting that taking action and coming up with answers is necessary; just acknowledging these issues is insufficient for her. The poem continues:

.....
Don’t look back.
In Sunday school we were told Lot’s wife
Looked back and turned
To salt.
But her family wasn’t leaving Paradise
We loved our trees and waters
And the creatures and earths and skies In that beloved place.
Those beings were our companions Even as they fed us, cared for us.
If I turn to salt
It will be of petrified tears
From the footsteps of my relatives
As they walked west (Lines19-26).

The allusion to and juxtaposed with Lot's wife provides a thematic foundation. According to the Biblical story, Lot's family leaves Sodom, a city known for its immorality and approaching extermination by God (Petruzzello, 1998). When Lot's wife turns to look back, she faces punishment and becomes a salt pillar. This story is decontextualized in the poem. Harjo’s ancestors are leaving a beloved land, called paradise, with trees, waters, creatures, and skies they adore, instead of a location of sin. The line "turning to salt" is reinterpreted as a metamorphosis resulting from sorrow rather than as punishment. The salt is a symbol for "petrified tears," which denote intense sorrow felt by her peoples as a result of land dispossession. This pain is connected to family members' footprints, implying a shared experience of uprooting and the lingering anguish of a people driven from their country of origin. Furthermore, It's common to call Harjo's poetry "ecological" (Bryson, 2005, p. 169). Nature is portrayed as a living, breathing, holy entity that serves as a battleground and a sanctuary, a source of blessings and sunlight, and a means of achieving self-fulfillment. Earthly characteristics are crucial for regeneration (Coltelli, 1996, p. 287). The use of "our trees and waters" and "companions" highlights a close, almost familial relationship with the natural world, in contrast to the colonial idea of the land as a resource to be used for profit. According to Dunbar-Ortiz, in his book *An Indigenous peoples’ history of the United States* (2014), “Indigenous peoples had occupied and shaped every part of the Americas, established extensive trade networks and roads, and were sustaining their populations by adapting to specific natural environments, but they also adapted nature to suit human ends” (27). The poem continues:

...
We are still in mourning.
The children were stolen from these beloved lands by the government.
Their hair was cut, their toys and handmade clothes ripped
From them. They were bathed in pesticides
And now clean, given prayers in a foreign language to recite
As they were lined up to sleep alone in their army-issued cages (Lines 27-32).

In these lines, Harjo's story is further entwined with the process of reinterpreting horrific historical occurrences; the line, "We are still in mourning," is a potent first phrase that establishes an atmosphere of continuous sadness and memory. Here, mourning is a continual state that symbolizes the ongoing effects of past injustices on Indigenous communities rather than being limited to a period of time. The frightening policies of forced assimilation and deportation, such as those implemented by the Indian Boarding Schools in the United States, are evoked by the image of children being taken by the government. The goal of these institutions was to deprive Indigenous students of their cultural identities and acclimate them to Western ways of life by further severing culture from tradition. There is a crisis of historical memory. It legitimized a deception that had long been feared by philosophers, dating back to Plato. “To speak someone else’s words or to wear someone else’s clothes meant hiding one’s own identity” (Lipsitz, 1990, p. 7). The explicit reference to children's hair being chopped off and their toys and handcrafted clothing being taken away is a striking illustration of how identity and cultural legacy are being erased. In fact, in many Indigenous cultures, hair is a symbol of both cultural and personal identity. Cutting one's hair represents severing oneself from one's heritage. Particularly startling is Harjo's usage of the word "bathed in pesticides," which highlights the cruel and humiliating treatment these kids endure. This metaphor goes beyond the literal to represent an effort to "purge" individuals of their ancestry, mirroring the larger assimilation and erase goals of colonialism. The United States government used the motto of “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (Little,1990, p. 1), and, thus, kids are instructed to recite prayers in a foreign language, emphasizes how a foreign culture and religion are imposed upon them, further severing them from their own customs and beliefs. “Through breaking bonds to culture, they [broke] bonds to one another,” Doug Kiel, a history professor at "Northwestern University, explains the atrocities of this act as “it’s a way of destroying a community.” (qtd. Little, 1990, p. 6).

The image of children "lined up to sleep alone in their army-issued cages conjures up ideas of incarceration and militarization. The word "cages" is intentionally inflammatory, emphasizing the cruel and terrible circumstances these kids had to live in. This artwork creates a striking picture of the systematic oppression and brutality against Indigenous bodies and minds, turning what ought to be a nurturing and educational environment into a site of detention and oppression. Discipline authority "became the main tool of governance" (Sarvesh, 2022, p.156). By imposing stringent rules and harsh punishments, boarding schools serve as establishments that control and normalize behavior. The fact that the kids were "lined up to sleep alone", speaks to the inhumane and rigid character of these institutions, which aimed to have total control over their lives. The poem continues:

...

Grief is killing us. Anger tormenting us. Sadness eating us with disease.
Our young women are stolen, raped and murdered.
Our young men are killed by the police, or killing themselves and each other. (Lines 33-35)

Harjo conjures up a powerful image of collective misery, "grief" and "sadness." The speaker personifies these feelings and turns them into destructive force. This representation highlights the fact that the suffering endured by Indigenous populations is a visceral, living force that affects their mental and physical well-being rather than being inert or abstract. The poet illustrates the enduring essence of past tragedy by portraying grief, rage, and misery as consuming energies. Deep wounds from colonization, forced assimilation, and institutionalized brutality still plague the community today. The lasting effects of these historical injustices are highlighted by this enchanting depiction of mental and physical suffering.

The explicit reference to young men and women being "killed by the police, or killing themselves and each other," as well as young women being "stolen, raped and murdered," emphasizes the extreme vulnerability that Indigenous youth suffered from. These lines highlight the point at which racially and gendered violence cross, subjecting Indigenous men and women to separate but related kinds of oppression and violence. Beyond merely narrating these horrors, Harjo's story lyrically reconstructs them, giving the community's suffering and resistance a voice. The poem turns personal sorrow into an enduring socio-historical memory by identifying these particular types of violence.

Foucault's concept of surveillance is pertinent in this situation since governmental apparatuses frequently place a greater emphasis on monitoring and controlling Indigenous communities. Therefore, Indigenous people "would always have to assume that they were under surveillance and act accordingly" (Kelly, 2014, p. 59). Public settings become hostile and dangerous places for Indigenous males, and the police violence referenced in the poem is a concrete reflection of this surveillance and control. Further evidence of the profound psychological effects of structural oppression comes from the internalized violence, in which young males murder one another and themselves. Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, which holds that social norms and regulations affect individual behavior and identity, can be used to comprehend how colonial and state violence is internalized within oppressed populations. This internalization can result in damaging self-behavior, which feeds the cycle of oppression and violence even more. "The oppression can be internalized in the form of self-hatred, or we may believe our power comes from oppressing or hurting others" (Rodriguez and Gonzales, 2005, p. 1). The poem continues:

...
This is a warning:
Heroin is a fool companion offering freedom from the gauntlet of history.
Meth speeds you past it.
Alcohol, elixir of false bravado, will take you over the edge of it.
Enough chemicals and processed craving
And you can't push away from the table.
If we pay enough, maybe we can buy ourselves back (Lines 36-42).

Here, Harjo's poem takes a critical turn by addressing the effects of drug on Indigenous communities: "Meth speeds you past it. Alcohol, elixir of false bravado, will take you over the edge of it." The speaker warns sharply that people try to shake off the lingering effects of historical trauma. These drugs are portrayed as manipulative therapies that offer respite but ultimately cause further destruction. The phrase "gauntlet of history" aptly conveys the sense of persevering through a number of extreme difficulties and misfortunes. The continuous effects of colonization, forced relocation, systematic violence, and cultural erasure that Indigenous peoples have experienced are symbolized by this symbolic "gauntlet." The idea that drugs, like heroin, meth, and alcohol can provide a way out, highlights the widespread feeling of hopelessness and the extent people will go to in order to block out their suffering.

Harjo's depiction of substance abuse poeticizes this historical reality, transforming the individual struggle with addiction into a broader commentary on collective suffering and resilience. The substances are not just personal choices but are responses to a historical and social context that has inflicted deep wounds on the community. The deceptive nature of addiction is further highlighted by the lines, "Enough chemicals and processed craving / And you can't push away from the table". Being unable to "push away from the table" conjures up images of helplessness and entrapment, with people locked in a circle of dependency that reflects larger cycles of marginalization and oppression. It is possible to see the pervasive drug misuse as an example of biopower (Foucault,1978, p. 136), in which the state has authority over Indigenous bodies even in matters of health and wellbeing. Substance misuse becomes a widespread problem in portions of Indigenous communities because of institutional neglect and marginalization. The line, "Buying ourselves back," highlights the constant impact of capitalism and commodification on the process of reclaiming one's identity and culture. Long-standing "systems of subordination and domination" have been maintained by the "drunk Indian" caricature and the "firewater myths" that support it. By characterizing Indigenous peoples as inferior in both biology and culture, these ideas and perceptions contributed to the conscience-salving rationale for the massacre of Indigenous peoples tribes during the protracted period of Native American-European encounter and warfare (White and Coyhis, 2002, pp. 2-3). Harjo says in her anthology as Executive Editor in *When the Light of the World was Subdued our Songs Came Through* (2020), "When the first colonizers from the European continent stepped into our tribal territories, we were assumed illiterate because we did not communicate primarily with written languages, nor did we store our memory in books and on papers." (Harjo 28). Thus, It is crucial to note that Harjo in her collection *An American Sunrise* states:

Until the passage of the Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, it was illegal for Native citizens to practice our cultures. This included the making and sharing of songs and stories. Songs and stories in one culture are poetry and prose in another. They are intrinsic to cultural sovereignty. To write or create as a Native person was essentially illegal (Harjo, 2019, p. 38).

The incorporation of short stories before each poem by Harjo indicates her awareness of the significance of incorporating her peoples' oral traditions in her poetry. Harjo's

written work also contributes to the enhancement and preservation of her cultural legacy. She makes sure that these customs and tales are preserved for future generations by converting the transient quality of spoken language into the permanency of text. In "The Rumpus Interview with Joy Harjo" with Juliy Morse (2014), Harjo states: "I believe that we always return to the root, in some manner or other." She continues: "I always tell younger poets to feed the source of the poetry. To give honor and thanks to those who came before us, and to take care of those who are following." Her writing serves as an example of how old traditions can be subtly incorporated into current poetry, highlighting their beauty and significance in the present day. Hence, Harjo's poetry is a prime example of this dynamic interaction, as her current voice, imbued with contemporary themes and events, both recognizes and alters the cultural traditions of the past. Engaging in a creative tension that both respects and reinterprets those traditions in the context of the current world is more important than adhering to the canons of the past:

Song 1.
We were corralled then
Like horses, like captives
Like slaves. We were
Anything but horses, captives,
And slaves. But we were
Hungry (Lines 1-5)

Harjo emphasizes how the United States government has taken away personal freedoms and imposed strict control. The tribes were confined and subjected to methods at Fort Sill, which reduced them to dependence and hunger. The organized distribution of food (like the beef controversy) is a prime example of the "micro-physics" of power that Foucault writes about, in which control is exercised not only by physical incarceration but also by controlling basic needs and actions (Kelly, 2014, p.155). This makes the Red River War and its aftermath a case study of Foucault's theories in action, as disciplinary actions taken by the government of the United States attempted to take control of Indigenous peoples lives by depriving them of their autonomy and imposing a new system.

The United States government used biopower in the Red River War by restricting the Indigenous peoples tribes' access to resources and food, so controlling their survival and enforcing obedience through the regulation of basic needs. The goal of this strategy was to produce "docile bodies," a word coined by Foucault to characterize people whose actions and behaviors are controlled and normalized in order to conform to the framework of power (Foucault 135). The conflict between the tribes' enforced identity and their willingness to defend their territory is reflected in the poem "Song 3. Soldiers":

We were ready to defend the land
And the people against those
Who wanted what was not theirs to take. We were called heathen
But who is heathen here?" (Lines 1-4).

The United States administration attempted to rationalize the tribes' enslavement and integration into a regulated, orderly state by designating them as "heathen." This classification, along with the following control over their life, is a prime example of how power institutions work to produce and maintain "docile bodies," submissive and devoid of individuality. The Red River War and its aftermath, had a huge impact on Indigenous peoples as the United State government attempted to modify and control Indigenous peoples life by depriving them of their inherent rights and identities and reducing them to objects of governance. Harjo's next poem is "Granddaughters",

I was a thought, a dream, a fish, a wing
And then a human being
When I emerged from my mother's river
On my father's boat of potent fever
I carried a sack of dreams from a starlit dwelling
To be opened when I begin bleeding
There's a red dress, deerskin moccasins
The taste of berries made of promises
While the memories shift in their skins
At every moon, to do their ripening (Lines 1-10).

The idea of subjectivity as put out by Foucault is essential to comprehending how Indigenous peoples perceive themselves in relation to societal systems. In "Granddaughters," the speaker describes how she evolved from a "thought, a dream, a fish, a wing" to a "human being," signifying the slow process of constructing one's identity. This change is consistent with Foucault's

theory that subjectivity is formed by a variety of social and cultural processes rather than being innate.

It is important to give considerable thought to Foucault's explanation of subjectivity because of its revolutionary impact on western philosophical tradition as well as its profoundly political goals regarding resistance and the pursuit of different alternatives. Because once one begins to consider how subjective identities and experiences are constructed, one may grow more optimistic about defying authority and establishing fresh, alternative forms of subjectivity (Öner, 2016, p. 3). Socioconstructivist Ungar, in his article “Comstructionist Discourse on Social Resilience” (2004), claims that by telling their own tales to broader referents, individuals might reconstruct the meaning of their own identities and difficult situations (349). The "red dress," "deerskin moccasins," and "berries made of promises" are examples of symbolic language used in the poem. These objects are not just sentimental mementos; they have been given significance by the speaker's cultural discourses. The "red dress" stands for womanhood , and the "deerskin moccasins" stands for a link to the past and the soil. These symbolic images are related to Foucault’ discourse. Cultural practices and symbols, according to Foucault, are a component of the discursive constructions that aid in the production of identity (Foucault, 1978, p. 194). The development of personal identity, which includes objectives, values, and beliefs; social identity, which is group identification and affiliation; and cultural identity, a subset of social identity that includes solidarity and connectedness with a cultural or ethnic group, are all aspects of identity formation that are influenced by parents, friends, the community, and sociocultural factors (Castro and Murray, 2010, p. 375). Harjo’s title poem "An American Sunrise" reads:

We were running out of breath, as we ran out to meet ourselves,
We Were surfacing the edge of our ancestors’ fights, and ready to
Strike It was difficult to lose days in the Indian bar if you were
Straight. Easy if you played pool and drank to remember to forget. We (Lines 1-4).

A potent portrait of Indigenous identity can be found in this poem which begins with the speaker and their friends "running out of breath" as they attempt to "meet" themselves. This image conveys the idea of rapidly evolving and changing youths who are attempting to figure out who they are, possibly in a metaphorical sense by running to reunite with their true identities. The speaker continues by referring to “surfacing” hardships and consequences of the past generation—whether of colonial legacies or resilience— are being reexamined

rather being buried. Although the difficulties of the past are still there, they are being highlighted in a way that promotes introspection and personal development. One way to see this is as a sign of healing, where the younger generation accepts their past, grows from it, and is ready to go on with courage and wisdom. The idea that the "edge" is a tipping point also implies that those who acknowledge the significance of the past are now able to alter it. Indigenous peoples of America should “strike” to recover what was previously lost as a result of colonialism. This willingness is a sign of proactive engagement—of taking back control—rather than victimization. Hence, "strike" represents overcoming colonial limitations, claiming one's own identity, and forming a future that is determined by the community's own power and vision rather than by the oppression of the past. Indigenous peoples who attempt to live sober lives "straight" with those who feel that drinking and playing pool help them deal with their suffering. The dichotomy of taking alcohol to numb memories yet being unable to escape them is encapsulated in the line “drank to remember to forget". The poem continues:

…

Sin Was invented by the Christians, as was the Devil, we sang. We Were the heathens, but needed to be saved from them: Thin
Chance. We knew we were all related in this story, a little Gin Will clarify the dark, and make us all feel like dancing. We
Had something to do with the origins of blues and jazz
I argued with the music as I filled the jukebox with dimes in June,
Forty years later and we still want justice. We are still America. We. (Lines 9-15)

In Harjo's poetry, it is made clear how the imposition of institutionalized power structures—like Christianity—has molded Indigenous identity. She draws attention to the ways in which colonists used their own theological frameworks to redefine Indigenous activities and beliefs. The colonists' attempts to impose a new moral order and delegitimize Indigenous spirituality are clear examples of how Foucault's concept of power creating knowledge is at play here. Considering that Harjo accepts the Christian faith but what she received from her protestant grandparents, and the Bible and the Holy Spirit are reflected in her poems (Hughes, 2010, p. 50). However, Harjo primarily honors Indigenous beliefs found in the recollections of Indigenous oral traditions in her poems. "Stories, songs, rituals and ceremonies, that celebrate and praise God as well as instill an awe of

the mystery of life", (Harjo, 96, p. 419) are all considered to be part of the Bible, according to her. Although Harjo acknowledges her Christianity, she maintains that "the Creeks already had a spiritual path laid down in the very beginning, given by the same Creator" (Harjo, 96, p. 419). To preserve cultural identity for future generations, one must approach life with an honest acknowledgement of one's own heritage. Regarding Harjo, exposing the flaws that undermine efforts to preserve Indigenous peoples cultural identity is a moral obligation. Harjo muses about hopes and accomplishments, emphasizing that in spite of obstacles, they and other members of their community followed careers. Being able to "sing" shows how to preserve cultural customs to present their selves through art. She uses the force of all American ethnic battles and connects them to her own: “Forty years later and we still want justice. We are still America. We”. The poem uses the pronoun "we" rather than "I" or "me," which stands for unification. The reader and the author are connected by Harjo's word choice. Since Indigenous peoples have been the subject of much division throughout American history, this language and their capacity for unity is another topic that inspires optimism.

Conclusion

This article deals with epitomizes the postcolonial battle of recovering and affirming their identities and history in the ruins of colonial trauma. Harjo poeticizes the Indigenous peoples of America experience as one of both loss and resiliency by revisiting the tragic history of compelled immigration, the Trail of Tears, and the long-term effects of colonialism. Her poems show how resilient Indigenous peoples have remained in the face of decades of conflict and violence. In *An American Sunrise*, history is a living entity that breathes and engages with the present rather than only being a topic of the past. It is a dynamic force that forges a route toward healing while influencing and forming the Indigenous peoples’ survival. She implies that history should be understood, respected, and utilized as a basis for future survival despite its unpleasantness. This article also demonstrates how Harjo's poetry unites oral traditional methods with modernism. She blends old Indigenous peoples oral traditions—such as music, and ritual—with western literary (written) forms, poetry. She is able to engage with the larger, contemporary literary scene while yet preserving the essential principles of her Indigenous ancestry. Her approach to the themes of nature, land, and identity, for example, is entwined with her contextualisation of traditional Indigenous peoples of America orality through the use of vivid imagery, symbolic language, and a strong sense of interconnectedness. According to Harjo's poetry,

decolonization entails more than just removing colonial forces; it also entails reclaiming one's identity, history, and culture. Those who have been oppressed must actively participate in this continuous struggle. A strong postcolonial message is thus made by Harjo's work, which urges a return to the natural, the ancestral, and the sacred life in order to mend the scars of the past and create a more fair and just future. Hence, poetry serves as a reminder that despite centuries of colonial aggression, narratives of survival, resilience, and freedom is still being written and is a tribute to the continuity of Indigenous peoples' resistance.

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