

**“POUNDED EARTH AND HEARTBEATS”:
20th-CENTURY POETRY BY NATIVE WOMEN
OF NORTH AMERICA**

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ABSTRACT

Apart from the lonely example of Emily Pauline Johnson’s (1861-1913) works, published poetry by Native American women is a relatively new phenomenon starting in the late 1960s. A survey of 38 anthologies published between 1969 and 1997 rendered a total of 362 names of Native women poets in the USA and Canada, of whom only about 25 are published more continuously. The continuity of life between the forces of colonization and the ensuing struggle for decolonization emerges as an overriding paradigm in their poetry, encompassing topics like history, land, language, forms of geno- and ethnocide, cultural identity, abuses, family and community. New aesthetic strategies and self-determined forms of publication enhance their struggle for decolonization.

Drums, chants, and rattles
pounded earth and
heartbeats
heartbeats

(Beth Cuthand 1992, 63)

Beth Cuthand’s (Cree) poem “Four Songs for the Fifth Generation” spans about one hundred years in the history of one Native family. Its chorus (above) links their experiences to the earth that has been pounded by buffalo hooves and dancers’ feet for ages, and that transmits unity in the rhythm of their beating hearts. The historical times Beth Cuthand’s poem covers extends from the memory of buffalo hunts and

the arrival of the first settlers on the Northern Prairies to urbanization and contemporary Native self-determination in education: there is a little (Indian survival) school. Within a hundred years the traditional way of life was utterly destroyed and the transition had to be made from a communally-oriented hunting economy to modern commodity capitalism. Throughout this traumatic revolution of Native cultures, Indigenous women carried their families from generation to generation, always trying to make the transition less painful. The poems published by Native women from the end of the 19th century until today, bear witness to their suffering, their stamina and their love, celebrating survival.

1. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

*“Here Are Our Voices —Who Will Hear?”*¹

Writing a survey-article of 20th-century poetry by Native Women in the USA and Canada is quite a task. We began it with a stock-taking assessment of 38 collections of Native literature published between 1969 (Gooderham) and 1997 (Harjo/Bird). In the process we recorded the names of 362 Native women poets whose poetry had been published in one or more of the anthologies and periodicals consulted. Our sources included well-known anthologies (e.g. Bruchac 1983, 1994; Hobson; Moses/Goldie; Niatum 1975, 1988), little known departmental publications (Forbes) as well as the most seminal Canadian periodical in this field, *Gatherings*, published annually since 1990 by Native owned and operated Theytus Books in Penticton, B.C. In this manner, we hoped to achieve a pertinent overview of established and frequently published Native women poets. At the same time, we hoped to gain an impression of what was written and published at a more grassroots level, including poems by girls. In addition, we also consulted works of poetry by individual women authors in a historical perspective.

The poems by Emily Pauline Johnson/Tekahionwake (Mohawk, 1861-1913) are the earliest to receive public acclaim. Tekahionwake began her literary career as a published poet with the appearance of *The White Wampum* in 1895 in London, England, followed by two further volumes of poetry (*Canadian Born*, 1903; *Flint and Feather*, 1912), a collection of stories from the West Coast oral tradition (*Legends of Vancouver*, 1911) and two volumes of prose containing a biography of her mother and various essays (*The Moccasin Maker* and *The Shagganappi*, both 1913), all published in Canada. Seen in retrospect, her pioneering achievement appears isolated and therefore the more admirable, especially when read against her biography (Brown Ruoff 1987, 1-16). Tekahionwake's life was marked by her arduous and often painful struggle for economic survival and public recognition as a writer, singer and performer. She intervened as a cultural nationalist mediator between dominant British Victorianism and internally colonized Native cultures, and she stood, perhaps most precariously, as a self-determining woman in a patriarchal society. Today, her historical achievement is fully recognized by scholars and critics (Bataille 1993, 127 f; Witalec 1994, 344-352). Métis novelist Joan Crate in her 1993 book of poetry, *Pale as Real Ladies: Poems for Pauline Johnson*, created a literary monument to her, by “re-inventing” the poet's “voice”, her “insistent geniality, ...toughness, ...pretense,

...desolation, illness, suffering (and) death". (8) In Pauline Johnson's lifetime there were a few other early Native women writers and activists, such as Sarah Winnemucca (Paiute, 1844-1891), Alice Callahan (Creek, 1868-1894), Gertrude Bonnin/Zitkala-Sa (Sioux, 1876-1938), or fellow-Canadian Mourning Dove/Hum-Ishu-Ma (Okanagan, 1888-1936), but their writings are in prose, so that Tekahionwake may safely be labeled the woman who ushered Native poetry into the twentieth century. But after the ushering-in, the theater of Native women's poetry remained dark and empty for more than half a century. Like other literatures by Writers of Color in North America, contemporary Native writing was born out of the Civil Rights struggle (Karrer/Lutz 14 f.) and did not appear on stage as a literature of its own until the late Sixties and early Seventies.

Early contemporary poetry by Native women (and men) was published first in tribal newspapers, school magazines, publications of budding Native American Studies programs at US universities and, on a pan-tribal and even international level, in *Akwesasne Notes*, the newspaper published by White Roots of Peace and the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation, reaching a large readership supportive of the American Indian Movement (AIM). Many of the poems of the Sixties and Seventies are strictly topical, occasioned by specific historical, political and cultural events. When compared to today's poems by Native women, they may seem "juvenile" or "naive." Poetry, unlike the novel, does not require "a room of one's own," and, as a more accessible form of expression, provides a genre which attracts many occasional writers, especially young people, to "pour out their hearts." Faced with persistently stifling economic and cultural conditions, it seems no surprise that many earlier Native poems express, almost stereotypically, what may be called a neo-romantic "Indian lament." Under this category come a host of poems which address in easily recognized images and language the terrible social conditions, the history of racism and dispossession, and the violence and the sexism of the white man. The evils of European greed and its concomitant destruction of the environment are contrasted by a nostalgically evoked superiority of Indian cultures, easily recognized by eagle feathers, gifts of tobacco and references to Mother Earth. Novelist and critic Lee Maracle (Cree/West Coast) has called such poetry "lost", and described it as a "body of literature outlining what we think Native traditions are," as "simplistic statements of faith." (Maracle 1991b, 86) While many of the horrors addressed in "Indian laments" remain as real today, as they were thirty years ago, today's women poets address them with far greater sophistication and stylistic complexity, succeeding without reductionist or dichotomizing perceptions, as, for example, Jeannette Armstrong's (Okanagan) poems "Rocks" or "Indian Woman" clearly indicate (1991a, 21-24, 106-107).

Another development is equally obvious when looking back over the last three decades: while early publications generally foregrounded male writers, the number of women poets increased steadily over the years, and, today, it can safely be said that there are more collections of poetry by women than men. Most of the anthologies we consulted contain both male and female poets, usually in even numbers, and within nine "mixed" anthologies of works by female and male poets in the Eighties, the gender ratio was a fairly balanced 143:146. However, in the same period there were five additional anthologies containing works by women poets exclusively. This ten-

gency has increased since, and in our total sample there are nine anthologies containing works by women only, while we found no collections exclusively for male Native poets.

Among the 362 women poets whose names and works we identified, only 25 were published in five or more of the anthologies we consulted, and these poets additionally had several books of poetry of their own, whereas the vast majority (241 authors) were published in only one of the sources checked and had no individual volumes to their names. We take this as an indication that there is a vast number of closeted writers or poets who never make it beyond a single publication. For them, to be published in a journal like *Gatherings*, provides encouragement, communication, recognition and a non-hierarchical acknowledgment of their commitment. In our survey, Joy Harjo (Muskogee/Creek) emerges as the Native woman poet most often anthologized in Canada and the USA (in 13 collections), followed closely by Jeannette Armstrong and Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok) (11 each), by Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna), Kateri-Akiwenzie Damm (Anishnabe), Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (Anishnabe) (9 each), by Charlotte DeClue (Osage) and Roberta Hill Whiteman (Oneida) (8 each), and by Annharte (Marie Baker, Anishnabe), Kimberly Blaeser (Anishnabe), Beth Cuthand (Cree) and Mary TallMountain (Athabaskan) (7 each).² Nevertheless, this listing must not be taken as statistically “representative,” since it is based only on anthologies in our possession here in Germany and giving a comprehensive account of women poets in only one (Canadian) Native journal. For example, the famous fiction writer and poet, Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), was only included in three of our anthologies, despite having brought out a book of poetry of her own in a major publishing house (1984). However, we relied on anthologies as indicators of an overall development, especially when looking at books that were collected, edited, and published by Native Americans/First Nations scholars and publishers themselves. They make public an “inside” evaluation of Native poetry by their peers.

A short publication history of anthologies of Native literature, including poetry by women, shows clearly a general development towards greater self-determination. While early anthologies (Gooderham 1969; Dodge/McCullough 1972) were edited by non-Natives, the struggle to present Native literature to the reading public was soon taken up by Native editors and scholars themselves. Jeannette Henry (Cherokee) in California and Joe Bruchac (Abenaki) in New York State promoted Native writing in their own periodicals and publishing houses, *The American Indian Reader* (The Indian Historian Press, 1973) and *The Greenfield Review* (Greenfield Review Center, 1981). As early as 1975 Harper and Row, who had successfully published a number of Native American novelists, brought out Duane Niatum’s (Klallam) anthology of poetry, *Carriers of the Dream Wheel*, with beautiful drawings by poet Wendy Rose. The seven women poets included in that anthology are still among the foremost today. Its 1988 sequel, *Harper’s Anthology of 20th-Century Native American Poetry*, is seen as the most authoritative anthology of Native poetry today. In the struggle for more Native American self-determination in literary matters, Geary Hobson’s *The Remembered Earth* (1979a) marks a cornerstone. Not only because it was then the most comprehensive collection but also because it included criticism, especially an attack on the “whiteshamanism” of

non-Native poets like Gary Snyder, who had assumed a Native voice and published "Imitation 'Indian' Poems" (Silko 1979, 211-216), thus continuing cultural appropriation as a "New Version of Cultural Imperialism" (Hobson 1979a, 100-108). Silko's attack on Gary Snyder was seconded five years later by Wendy Rose in a seminal article published in Denmark in Bo Schöler's collection of essays, *Coyote Was Here* (1984, 13-24).

The controversial and often painful discussion about cultural appropriation (Lutz 1985) re-emerged in Canada a decade later (Lutz 1990; 1991; 1996). After the military standoff between Mohawks and their supporters and provincial and federal armed forces at Oka, Quebec, in 1990, Native writing in Canada really "took off" and began to be received by mainstream institutions. Again, anthologies by non-Natives (Petron 1983, 1988; Grant 1990) were soon followed by collections brought out by Native critics (Jaime/Taylor 1992) or in collaboration with them (Moses/Goldie 1992). In this struggle, *Gatherings* emerged as an avant-garde periodical. Special anthologies of writings by Native women followed, including poetry. Again, they were first collected by non-Native editors (Green 1984; Perreault/Vance 1990) but then increasingly by First Nations critics themselves (Brant 1984; 1988; Fife 1993, Keeshig-Tobias 1996, Brant/Laronde 1996), often even specializing in regional/tribal collections (Jensen/Brooks 1991; *Kelusultiek* 1994).

Andrew Wiget in a 1984 article on "The Emergence of Contemporary Native American Poetry" stated that "contemporary Native American poetry is flourishing," but in the same article, he noted that, despite an abundance of poetry and a host of critical studies on orature and novels, "it is rare to find much discussion in print about contemporary Native American poetry." (Wiget 599) Fifteen years later, this statement is still true today. Native American poetry, by women and men, is still going strong but receives relatively little attention in academia. For example, the 1997 special issue on Native American writers of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* introduces a great number of poets, but in the bibliography, among a total of 85 titles of books and articles on Native writing, there are only three articles on poetry (Ruppert; Wiget; Maddox). When it comes to secondary literature on poetry by Native women, there seems to have been even less general critical attention (not counting review articles on individual women poets).³ Rayna Green (Cherokee) in her 1983 introduction to her pioneering work, *Native American Women: A Contextual Bibliography* discusses the complex and often conflicting relationship between Native women activists and white feminists, and she adds as an aside:

I should also note that the lives of Native North American women have drawn much less scholarly attention from feminists than any other group of Third World women, perhaps because Native women have not revealed themselves to be sympathetic to a feminist analysis any more than to any other kind of analysis. (13)

However, this reluctance to accept analysis from outside critics (like ourselves) has begun to change as Native critics themselves take an active part in developing critical studies (Allen 1983) and "looking at the words" of their own writers (Armstrong 1993).

2. TOPICAL CONCERNS

I write because I am aware that whoever controls the image controls the population; that those who define us determine not only our lives, but our concept of our selves, and that colonization begins and ends with the definer, the contextualizer, and the propagandist. (Paula Gunn Allen in Harjo/Bird 151)⁴

Paula Gunn Allen's statement touches on central topics Native American women poets are concerned with. Their overall aims are self-definition and self-determination as women and as members of the "Fourth World" (Manuel/Posluns 1974), the internally colonized Indigenous inhabitants of North America. When, in their poetry, they address issues of colonization, they do so as an act of consciousness-raising and in defiance, but with the ultimate goal of decolonization. Allen's reason for literary production is a political one, a rational one. She knows that decolonization can only come about when the colonized can participate in forming the dominant discourse. There are quite a few women poets who see writing as an overt means of taking part in the political struggle for decolonization. Laura Tohe (Navajo) declares that writing means for her to claim voice and to take power. Others, like Chrystos, Rita Joe, Linda Hogan, Connie Fife (Cree), and Jeannette Armstrong utilize poems not only to resist the colonizer but also to correct stereotypes, to correct what people "know" about history, and to speak for those who have not claimed voice yet, for those who never had the chance to tell their stories, for those who were and are "speechless". They use poetry to decolonize their peoples.

In an autobiographical essay on her becoming the poet and artist she is, "Writing with the Sun," Joy Harjo recalls how, as a child, she would go out in the morning before sunrise and dig and mold the moist earth. She would start singing together with birds and insects around her to call up the sun, and she remembers her "unspeakable happiness" and that there "was an unbroken connection between the process of the creation of the world and a child's human spirit." (Harjo 70) In school, she forgot "Talking to the sun" and learned to "associate poetry with books, with words printed," but once "Emily Dickinson spoke to me from winged pages," her voice "penetrating the soft wet earth of the bog beneath the wordlessness," and poetry revealed itself to her "as a sacred language." (Harjo 72) In the Seventies she heard the poetry of Simon Ortiz, Leslie Silko, Scott Momaday, Native writers whose poetry "is of this land, a land that mothers all those who step out unto the earth from between their mothers' legs." (Harjo 73) She also found "poetic sensibility through the works of African poets as well as other women poets who struggle(d) to claim power against the disrespect for all women: Emily Dickinson, Phyllis Wheatley, Nancy Ward, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lord, and, again, Leslie Silko. Besides Joy Harjo other poets, among them Janice Gould (Maidu/ Konkow), Kimberly Blaeser, Luci Tapahonso or nila northSun, also proclaim their motivation for writing to be on a more emotional than political level. For them, writing is a means of keeping one's sanity, of securing survival, of releasing emotions in a safe place, of healing oneself, or of finding the way home. These emotional reasons, however, are being expressed in the face of ongoing colonization. Therefore they, too, belong to the process of decolonization, only in a more personal sense.

As the statements concerning the purpose of writing poetry indicate, a lot of the poems themselves revolve around the topics of colonization and decolonization.⁵ It is impossible, and, we think, nonsensical, to classify the literary texts strictly by theme, because the poems’ themes are interwoven with each other. Still, there are texts which more or less deal with the process and consequences of colonization and others reflecting the struggle for decolonization.

2.1 COLONIZATION

Out of the belly of Christopher’s ship
 a mob bursts
 Running in all directions
 Pulling furs off animals
 Shooting buffalo
 Shooting each other
 left and right.

(Armstrong, “History Lesson”) (Hodgson 54/55)

Jeannette Armstrong begins where North American history begins —at least that version which is written in history books. She depicts the colonizers as a tide, as a wave without any concept except that of destruction. The vanguard of this disorderly group is the church, operating under the cloak of well-meaning, using “makeshift wand[s]” to fascinate the “primitive” “saucer-eyed Indians”. Among those flooding America are the harbingers of capitalism, the merchants, who bring along their means of colonization and thus genocide, “Smallpox, Seagrams/and Rice Krispies”. Finally, after the completion of Christianization, after the employment of chemical and biological warfare⁶ and after the introduction of commodity philosophy, “Civilization has reached/the promised land.” Gail Tremblay (Onondaga/Micmac), too, takes up the role Christopher Columbus played in Native American history, demanding to “Reveal His Name”, which is “butcher” (Fife 48).

A couple of poets deal with the role of women throughout the process of colonization. Some of these poets aim at setting history right, at clearing well-known names such as Sacajawea,⁷ Pocahontas,⁸ or Mary Mathews Musgrove Bosomsworth⁹ of the flaw of being the colonizer’s tool.¹⁰ Others declare how important women in general were in resisting the colonizer’s impact, even if the hegemonic discourse tries to deny their presence in the past, “my own grandmothers/ have no names/ their heroic actions/ erased from history’s page.” [Marcie Rendon (White Earth Anishnabe), “my own grandmothers” (Fife 127)] Joy Harjo emphasizes the significance of claiming voice, even if the consequence could be murder, as in the case of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, who was murdered by the FBI, “You are the shimmering young woman/ who found her voice,/ when you were warned to be silent” (“For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, Whose Spirit Is Present Here and in the Dappled Stars”, Fife 78-80). Claiming voice in the presence of colonialism can be deadly, but still the poets do just that. Writing poems, however, can be difficult in a colonized country, as it is not only difficult to find a publisher, but also being published without a change of one’s work. Doris Seale (Santee Sioux/Cree) discusses this problem in

“On Getting Published” (Fife 88). She depicts how white publishers alter the poems, adapt them to their notion of understanding. She employs the image of “taking one’s words” here, signifying again how the process of colonization works. Hence the maintenance of colonial powers is still going strong, not only in the field of publishing. Janet Campbell Hale states that “Custer Lives in Humboldt County” (Bruchac 1983, 89), relating the story of a policeman who shot a young Native American. She refers to the fact that Custer’s massacres were called “[j]ustifiable genocide” and thus declares that history repeats itself, as the murder of the young man is said to be “[i]nvoluntary manslaughter.” Again it is the question of who controls language, who controls naming to depict reality as it is or as it is said to be. Reality as something to be manipulated by language is also dealt with by Carol Lee Sanchez (Laguna). In “(Conversation # 2)” (Hobson 1988, 241/242) she states “They have disappeared me.” The “vanishing Indian” can actively be brought about by just announcing that (s)he has vanished. Thus Native Americans are made invisible. Those who still are visible for the masses are stereotyped, and, in combination with making them voiceless, are diminished into pitiable objects, “I am poor and/ diseased and/ ignorant and/ alcoholic and/ suicidal.” Carol Lee Sanchez affirms that Indians constantly have to explain themselves, constantly have to justify what they wear, eat or do, because their environment “knows” everything about Native American customs.¹¹ Native Americans are the constructed “other”. This is the mechanism that maintains the system of colonization. The accompaniment of stereotyping is appropriation, a phenomenon Wendy Rose calls “a temporary tourism of our souls” (“For the White poets who would be Indian” Hobson 1988, 381/382)

Leave us alone Find your kulture & your spirituality in our
mutual history
Stop selling out ours
Cut your knotty hair off Leave Rasta to Rasta
Leave the Drum & Sweat Lodge & Sundance to those whose
heart beats it
(Chrystos, “Zenith Supplies,” Bruchac 1994, 79)

Both Chrystos and Rose fuse the revelation of appropriative behavior with the voicing of the struggle for decolonization, stating that Native Americans will not tolerate the exploitation of their culture, along with being labeled as “other” any longer.

“we are prisoners of a long war”¹²

Another major topic Native American poets deal with is destruction caused by radiation, substance abuse, loss of identity and violence.

It wasn’t enough
in “45”
Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

They say no one died.
Nevada desert

1000 miles into her bowels
earth melted.

radiation, radiation, radiation,
radiation
oozed into blood
of Shoshone and Paiute.
The bomb lasted minutes
the intent lasts generations
in the womb of Creation, herself.

(Terri Meyette, “Celebration 1982,” Brant 1988, 60/61)

Terri Meyette (Yaqui) mentions Hiroshima and Nagasaki in order to emphasize the fact that Native Americans are not the only ones affected by imperialist practices executed by the United States. With these lines she accuses the United States of consciously poisoning Native Americans, as they consciously poisoned Japanese 40 years earlier. Moreover, she points out that they simultaneously poison the earth, disregarding the fact that earth is the mother, that they poison not only her but in consequence themselves. The gist of poems like this one is, that the United States government seems intent on killing those Native Americans living now as well as the generations to come.

Carol Lee Sanchez proclaims her anger about being regarded as “the drunken Indian”. Still, alcoholism is a major problem in some nations. Lee Maracle (1988, 3) states that Indian alcoholism is quite different from white alcoholism. It is not, says Maracle, the “polite alcoholism” of a white middle-class person resulting, perhaps in the loss of the car, the job or the house. What is called “bottoming out” there is only the top of the downstairs ladder for Native Americans. Marnie Walsh’s (Sioux) poems “Angelina Runs-Against Pine Ridge, So. Dak.” and “Vickie Loans-Arrow 1971” (Hobson 1988, 367, 367/368) depict both the reasons for and the consequences of alcoholism. Angelina Runs-Against starts to drink because she feels lonely and alienated. She is far away from home, and always wanted to go back but “never got money enough/ for a ticket home/ only for wine.” By being uprooted she lost contact with herself and with her people, subsequently prostituting herself and becoming an alcoholic. Her alcoholism ends on skid row, where the average survival-expectancy is about five years. Vickie Loans-Arrow almost perfectly embodies the “Native-Girl-Syndrome”:¹³ she steals as a child, is physically abused by her father, is then sent to a catholic school in order to be re(-)formed, drops out of college, becomes pregnant, starts to drink, and, finally, begins to prostitute herself. She eventually ends in a psychiatric ward because she hallucinates as a consequence of her alcoholism. Her biography is coined by a feeling of being culturally torn apart, “unable to be Indian, unable not to be Indian” (Allen 1986, 134). Jeannette Armstrong designates the handing out of alcohol to Native Americans as chemical genocide, “It would be neater though/to kill us all at once.” (“Death Mummur” (Fife 10/11). Alcoholics are the living dead, “preserved in alcohol.”¹⁴

Paula Gunn Allen’s statement concerning Vickie Loans-Arrow’s main problem, the struggle for her identity, is also reflected in nila northSun’s “moving camp too

far” (Hobson 1988, 380). The poet recounts her ignorance concerning her own people’s history, employing the words “i can’t” several times, only to contrast them with “i can” when it comes to contemporary Native life. This description of modern life is full of irony, and full of images which reveal a certain sardonic humor. Humor presumably is necessary to keep one’s sanity as a Native American living in a world that is not in keeping with traditional values. In *nila northSun*’s poem the eagle can only be seen on “surplee plastic cups”, the Winnebagos are mobile homes instead of people, and the only buffalo meat available comes from a tourist burger stand. The protagonist has to manage the balancing act of living in two different eras as well as two different cultures.

Those confronted with a different dichotomy within themselves are the “half-breeds”, especially those who are very well aware of their “blood quantum”. In “Half Breed” (Fife 61) Nicole Tanguay (Anishnabe) reports that “half-breeds” not only have to cope with trying to find their center in a world where they seem to belong nowhere, but also that they have to cope with racism turned against them from both cultures. Since by far the greatest number of Native Americans belong to the group of “half-breeds” or “mixed-bloods”, racism against them is especially effective, —and this in turn implies, that colonial structures are especially easy to maintain. By far more destructive than racism from outside is racism coming from the inside of a person, especially if it is accompanied by sexism and homophobia. The protagonist in Beth Brant’s poem “Her Name Is Helen” (Roscoe 176-179) is ashamed of being an Indian, of being a woman, and of being a lesbian. The stereotypes propagated in society are deeply rooted in Helen, who has internalized them, so that she perceives herself as being a dumb, fat and ugly “squaw” —Brant deliberately uses the term “squaw” that combines all the common stereotypes about Indigenous women. Because she is torn apart she constantly has to take pictures of herself “so she will know she is there (...) to prove she is alive.” Beth Brant not only depicts the destruction of a Native woman by colonialism, but also the subsequent use of her “wrap” as a form of tokenism by her white girlfriends. They tell her “what to wear/ what to say/ how to act like an Indian,” thus forcing her to live the life of a stereotype, becoming the embodiment of their prejudices, —a self-fulfilled prophecy.

The ultimate destruction is carried out by abuse. A great number of poems deal with the various forms of abuse, be it abuse of children or of adults, especially of women. Both Alice Lee (Metis: Cree) (“confession,” Perreault/Vance 158/159) and Willow Barton (Red Pheasant Band/Sioux) (“Where Have the Warriors Gone?,” Perreault/Vance 8-18) portray the abuse of a girl by a priest. Abuse of children —both boys and girls— started to come to light only a few years back, but the cases covered in the media show that it not only was a common phenomenon, but that it was practiced for a very long time. The forms of abuse referred to in both Lee’s and Barton’s poems leave two shattered persons behind. Christianity was a major tool during the process of colonization to destroy Native cultural values and beliefs. Here, it is also a cloak for the destruction on a very personal level. Another poem written by Alice Lee, “child’s play” (Perreault/Vance 159) outlines the psychological process of a child during the abuse itself. This girl “leaves” her body, exchanging it for the body of her doll on the toy shelf. Moreover she pretends the abuse to be a dream. These two mechanisms help her to somehow endure the

state of being abused, although this girl surely will be severely disturbed as a consequence of the abuse. [By contrast, in Jo-Ann Thom's "Thank You, Mr Hughes," the effects of child abuse are left ambiguously open (Lutz 1992, 180).]

Chrystos proclaims that the battering of women is quite common in the US, that nobody helps these women, that nobody listens to them, and that the plight of the lower classes in capitalist US is disguised by the outward appearance of "economic recovery" ("Dear Mr. President" (Lerner 35). Marilyn Dumont (Métis) ("Helen Betty Osborne" (Fife 26/27) and Beth Brant ("Telling," Bruchac 1994, 50-56) take on the death of Helen Betty Osborne who was first raped and then killed by four white men on November 13th, 1971, in The Pas, Saskatchewan. The authors regard Osborne's death as an eruption of racism and sexism prevalent in society. The life of an Indigenous woman has no value, a murder of this kind is not worth investigating. Her death stands for the injustice done to all Natives, the stereotypes they have to confront, "Betty, your crime was being a woman, an Indian. Your punishment,/ mutilation and death" ("Telling").¹⁵

In contrast to Marilyn Dumont's poem, "Telling" not only deals with Helen Betty Osborne's death, and in contrast to the other poems mentioned above it does not merely describe abuse and its consequences. In addition to this, Beth Brant also tries to come to terms with her role as a poet when she writes about abuse. She describes the inner battle she fought whether to tell what she knows or not, whether it is her duty to speak for others who cannot speak, or if telling is a kind of betrayal.¹⁶ At the end of the poem she writes "I have to tell./ It is the only thing to do." She voices her anger about the violence abundant in Native society, a violence that did not exist in pre-colonial times, and at the same time she equates the imposition of the enemy's language with mind mistreatment, "RAPE. MURDER. TORTURE. SPEECHLESSNESS. INCEST. POVERTY./ ADDICTION. These obscene words that do not appear in our own language. (...) They stole our speech and raped our minds." Beth Brant does not abide by merely proclaiming her rage, or voicing her lament, but she points the way towards decolonization, which —for a poet— can only mean to tell, to write. Her pen becomes her weapon, "This pen feels like a knife in my hand."¹⁷

2.2 DECOLONIZATION

*"Resistance is a woman whose land is all on fire"*¹⁸

The preceding chapter describes a kind of "formula of colonization", a formula that, according to Wolfgang Klooss, begins with original pride, but as a consequence of social prejudices and an adoption of alienated value structures turns to fear, racial shame and eventually to self-hatred and ethnic self-denial (Klooss 213, 214, 218). It is, as Beth Brant and other poets have declared, one of the poets' tasks and intention to break this formula, to destroy the feeling of self-hatred and ethnic self-denial. The poems of Native American women outline possibilities of fulfilling this task, of achieving this aim, of designing a "formula of decolonization". One module of this formula is a strong relationship among women. The longing for the presence of women can be felt in these lines, "I go to the Lodge/ to be with the women./ Though I am old/ and no longer bleed/ I go to be with the women." (DeClue, "Voices (for Joy)" (Blanche 233-236). Charlotte DeClue alludes to the menstrual lodge, which has always been a place used by women to be in the company of other women. There women comforted each

other, gossiped, made plans and simply had fun. Women-bonding is also delineated in Gail Tremblay's prose poem "After the Invasion" (Harjo/Bird 518/519),

On dark nights, the women cry together washing their faces, the backs of their hands with tears —talking to their grandmother, Moon, about the way life got confused. (...) On dark nights, the women whisper how they love, whisper how they gave and give until they have no more. (...) Together, women struggle to remember how to live, nurture one another.

The women's collective memory is not only a reason to grieve the changes that have taken place because of colonization, it also provides strength. This strength emanates from spirituality, from love and a sense of sharing. The women's prayers concerning the future are for women and men alike —although these women are angry about their men, they do not exclude them. Women are the heart of each day's struggle to survive, to evade termination, but to take the path towards decolonization. That Native women poets regard this to be a global process is made very clear in Linda Hogan's "The Women Speaking" (Green 1984, 170-172). Hogan names, besides the "dark women of the Americas", also the Russian, East Indian and Japanese women who manage their everyday lives. These women do not openly lament, they do not openly fight, but they all "stud[y] the palms of their hands/ and walk toward one another." Hogan concludes her poem with the words "Daughters, I love you" which disclose a feeling of being together in the struggle for decolonization all over the world.¹⁹

A special relationship among Native women between (great-) grandmothers and their (great-) granddaughters is reflected in poetry.²⁰ This bonding can cross great time-spans, can be felt without the necessity of each other's presence, such as in Suzanne Rancourt's (Abenaki) "Thunderbeings" and "Haunting Full Blood" (Bruchac 1994, 232/233, 233/234). The humming of the grandmother can still be heard in the brass bed she used to sleep in, and she is still able to "haunt", that is to unsettle and disturb the poet's life, to "speak to [her] through generations". This (great-) grandmother was denied by her family because she was an Indigenous woman. The racial shame felt by the family is overcome by the great-granddaughter, for whom remembering her ancestor is a way of claiming her heritage, for achieving a feeling of historical consciousness, thus affirming her ethnic identity. The rearrangement of the past enables her to rearrange the future. Childhood memories of the grandmother, frequently occurring in the poems, are also the central topic in Vickie Sears' (Cherokee) "Grandmother" (Fife 15/16). The poet remembers her grandmother's house, symbolizing comfort, consolation, warmth, love and a sense of home. She also recalls her grandmother telling stories in the Cherokee language. These stories were stories about Coyote and about creation, thus creating a feeling of tribal identity. Sears' grandmother hardly spoke English, only "broken-tongued", because "she didn't need the english".²¹ English was rejected by grandmother as being useless —useless since this language is not designed to transport the essence of the stories being told. Jo Whitehorse Cochran is another poet who emphasizes the importance grandmothers have with regard to maintaining one's language, who warn their granddaughters that speechlessness arises out of the loss of one's language.²²

*“And the ground spoke when she was born”*²³

In Mary TallMountain’s poem “Matmiya” (Niatum 1988, 15/16), which follows a circular design that signifies continuity, grandmother as a person merges with the earth.²⁴ This grandmother seems to come out of the earth, is almost indistinguishable from earth.²⁵ A close connection to earth not only nurtures, not only gives strength, it also provides identity and a sense of belonging, of home. She is representative for all ancestors and thus for one’s personal heritage. “Matmiya” stresses the close relationship between people and land and women as the connecting link.

Re-connecting with the land belongs to the formula of decolonization, because it provides the strength necessary for the struggle. This in turn is due to the relationship many Native Americans have towards land. Land is the core of everything, everything emanates from land, “It begins with the land; think of the land, the earth, as the center of the spider’s web. Human identity, imagination, and storytelling were inextricably linked to the land, to Mother Earth, just as strands of the spider’s web radiate from the center of the web.”²⁶ Land occurs in the poems in different ways. For once they focus on the literal earth, as in Gail Tremblay’s “The Returning” (Lerner 218). Gail Tremblay compares the sky, experienced during a flight, with the earth. She states that flying is unnatural for people, that life somehow seems to stop. Only the return to earth makes the heart beat again, lets sensations come back and “makes love possible.” Charlotte DeClue regards earth as something you can touch when you get lost, it is something you can focus on because it is the focus. Thus it provides comfort, consolation and strength, “if the wind changes directions/ or you are caught midstream/touch earth.” (“To the Spirit of Monahsetah” (Green 1984, 79-81).

Susan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne/Muskogee) deplores the destruction of the earth by man, the colonizers respectively, “now/ our mother/ lies open and wounded/ drained of her richness/ wealth stolen by man” (untitled poem, Hobson 1988, 149). Most poems, though, focus on land as home and thus as a means of identity, “The land is not an image in our eyes but rather it is as truly an integral aspect of our being as we are of its being.” (Paula Gunn Allen, “Iyani: It Goes This Way,” Hobson 1988, 191-193). The relationship to the land, to the home, is connected to places,²⁷ perceptible in the following lines,

In the west, Shiprock looms above the desert.
Tsébit’ái, old bird-shaped rock. She watches us.
Tsébit’ái, our mother who brought the people here on her back.
Our refuge from the floods long ago. It was worlds and centuries ago
yet she remains here. Nihimá, our mother.

(Luci Tapahonso, “The Motion of Songs Rising,” Evers/Zepeda 65/66)

Certain places such as Shiprock create a feeling of belonging and caring, connecting the present to the past and to the future. The dancing described in this poem could not take place without the land, the dance virtually emanates from the land, thus restoring the dancers. Home places are the ones which connect today’s people to yesterday’s and to tomorrow’s people, “below me in the moist red earth/ are the smooth round stones/ and the bones of the dead/ and the seeds of the unborn” (Susan Shown Harjo, untitled poem, Hobson 1988, 145/146). Home places are the ones

which can heal the wounded²⁸ and which magically draw their children back home. The meaning of these places, of home and land as such, is indicated in Joy Harjo's prose poem "My house is the red earth" (Evers/Zepeda 49). Joy Harjo states in this poem that she regards "her house", i.e. Oklahoma, as the center of the world, although everybody else regards big cities as centers.²⁹ Harjo says about this state, "Oklahoma means a center of life to her people, a whole spirit of being. (...) The spirit is alive in the landscape that arranges itself in the poems and stories that are created and the spirit takes many forms and many voices." (Hobson 1988, 43). Joy Harjo declares that her poems are not *about* land, but that they are *from* the land. This is a great difference to non-Native poetry.³⁰ Home places as the center of life, as the center of strength, as something one has to go back to, are also addressed by Mary TallMountain. In "Koyukons Heading Home" (Lerner 203) she describes the ferrytrip back home, looking forward to being there, literally feeling the land and its atmosphere. Among all the tourists who are on the same ferry she immediately recognizes the other Koyukons heading home as well. The longing for home, whatever the difficulties lying in its way, is especially strong in Louise Erdrich's "Indian Boarding School: The Runaways" (Niatum 1988, 334/335). These children run away from school, heading home, no matter how often they get caught, no matter what the punishment. Their homes are visions, places of strength and comfort, they head home every night in their sleep.

Land and its connection to continuity is another aspect which runs through Native women's poetry. Continuity in the face of colonization is the bedrock of decolonization. Again it is Joy Harjo who delineates the close interdependence between land and continuity, amplifying this foundation by adding women as another factor,

And the ground spoke when she was born.
Her mother heard it. In Navajo she answered
as she squatted down against the earth
to give birth. It was now when it happened,
now giving birth to itself again and again
between the legs of women.

("For Alva Benson, and for Those Who Have Learned To Speak"

Niatum 1988, 291/292)

Land and women, and therefore giving birth, living and dying are inextricably bound together, merge as spaces of time merge. Joy Harjo, being in line with all Native poets, moreover stresses the significance of language. The Navajo language connects this woman with the ground, enabling her to communicate with the ground, making birth possible. Harjo thus attributes to Native languages the power of securing continuity as well as strengthening the process of decolonization. Decolonization is not inextricably bound to the Native language though. Adopting the title of one of the most recent Native women's anthologies, linguistic decolonization is also a question of "reinventing the enemy's language" in order to claim voice, to learn to speak, "there is the hope that in "reinventing" the English language we will turn the process of colonization around, and that our literature will be viewed and read as a process of decolonization." (Gloria Bird, Harjo/Bird 25).³¹

Turning the process around, affirming one's presence, is depicted in Gail Tremblay's "Indian Singing in 20th-Century America" (Harjo/Bird 170/171). Gail Tremblay describes the colonial structures that are still up and about in this century, such as stereotypes about Native Americans which in turn lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, appropriation, destruction of the earth, and plans to make Native peoples vanish, to actively deny their presence. In the midst of all this, "we're always there —singing round dance/ songs, remembering what supports/ our life— impossible to ignore." In their process of resistance, of subtle decolonization, they are strengthened by "Earth breath", even felt in the core of urban life, which "caresses the surface/ of our skin". Again the power of the land manifests itself, maintaining its impact despite concrete and glass. A similar message is that of Paula Gunn Allen's poem "Kopis'taya (a Gathering of Spirits)" (Bruchac 1983, 5). Allen describes the environment as marked by artificiality, where everything that is natural is cut off from the world we live in, where one is cut off not only from one's surrounding, but also from oneself. Still, she announces, one has to gather strength and spirits which are present even in the "browning", "hardedged season" in order to survive in a colonized world. Associated to Gail Tremblay's poem is Connie Fife's "Dear Webster" (Harjo/Bird 480/481) with regard to cataloguing the existing colonial and moreover patriarchal structures. She does this much more pointedly than Gail Tremblay, but she affirms the Indians' presence as well, "i am the one whose death was intended/ and didn't die."

Wendy Rose follows a more humorous approach towards decolonization. Her starting point is a list published by *Cosmopolitan* enumerating "99 things to do before you die" (Harjo/Bird 395/396). Most activities on this list were for rich white people, "so what's a poor indian to do?/ come up with a list that's more culturally relevant." Wendy Rose wastes no time lamenting the colonial structures which are clearly palpable in this list, she simply creates a new list. This catalogue consists of actions which help strengthen the Indigenous nations, which help promoting the process of decolonization, as for example attending ceremonies, participating in demonstrations, reading Indian novels, or being nice to your people. The humor which shines through in all parts of the poem—as it does very often in Native women's poetry—almost erupts in lines like "curl up in bed with a good Indian novel/ better yet/ curl up in bed with a good indian novelist". Humor has got a different quality in Native literature than is often the case in "mainstream" literature. The intention of utilizing humor is not only to entertain, it rather is an expression of resistance.

*"angry women are building"*³²

A clear statement of decolonization is made by Carol Lee Sanchez in "(Conversations # 4)" (Hobson 1988, 242/243), "Father Europe:/ I divorce you/ from this tierra indigena." These words, formed like a prayer, clearly express that it was Christianity in the first place that contributed to the erection and maintenance of colonialism. Sanchez opposes the images of "Father Europe" and "tierra indigena" with each other, which simultaneously represent suppression by the church, by patriarchal structures as by language. The "divorce" can only be brought about by beating the colonizer with his own weapons, by dismantling his house with his own tools, "I stand before you:/ fully equipped./ I am a New Age/ electronic Indian!/ carefully bred and tutored

by you.” Sanchez, humorously alluding to the “New Age philosophy” which eagerly makes use of Native values, states in these lines that the termination policy of the past has failed, that it became a boomerang. Sanchez not only reinvents the enemy’s language, she also reinvents the enemy’s tools. In the same vein as Sanchez’ poem, but not as somber, is Chrystos’ “I Have Not Signed a Treaty with the United States Government” (Lerner 33). This poem, as all her political poems are, is marked by wrath. Besides expressing her anger about the present and past situation she reverses the colonial process by opening her poem with, “We don’t recognize these names on old sorry paper,” alluding to the historical fact that the Europeans did not recognize treaties made either in written or oral form—especially in oral form. Chrystos rejects the colonizer’s paper and words, simultaneously affirming rights that were once established orally. In the next step she reverts the termination policy, “We declare you terminated” and finally sends the colonizers home, “Go so far away we won’t remember you ever came here/ Take these words back with you.” Chrystos not only expels the Europeans from the US, from Indian country, but also expels their language, the enemy’s language, at the same time getting rid of all the anger, hate and grief that is tied to this language.

The role Native women hold in the process of resisting the colonizer is another major topic in Native women’s poetry,

resistance is every woman who
has ever considered taking up
arms writing a story leaving the abuse
saving her children or saving herself
she is every woman who dares
to stage a revolution complete a novel
be loved or change the world
resistance walks across a landscape
of fire accompanied by her daughters
perseverance and determination.

(Connie Fife, “Resistance,” Bruchac 1994, 98/99)

Resistance, according to Connie Fife, can be realized in different ways. It does not have to be the active, heroic resistance, like beginning a revolution or an armed struggle. Less heroic actions like writing a novel or leaving persons by whom one is mistreated can also be acts of defiance. Even the mere thought of resistance is resistance itself—as long as you do not give in or give up. Connie Fife mentions women from all walks of life: “a palestinian mother who/ hands her children a legacy of/ war together with the/ weapons to fight in it”, “a girl child/ who witnesses her mothers death and/ swears to survive no matter/ where the hiding place” or “a black woman draped/ in purple satin who strolls/ down a runway allowing only/ the clothes she wears to be sold.” These lines reveal that Connie Fife has a very global understanding of resistance, that she not only regards it in the narrow terms of resisting the colonizer in Native America, but all over the world.

Gayle Two Eagles (Lakota) perceives resistance to colonizing structures in a similar way as Connie Fife (“The young warrior,” Brant 1988, 119/120). It is not only

the opposition against colonization of the Indian peoples women have to cope with, but they simultaneously have to tackle sexism in their own nations. Two Eagles declares that women are not going to endure patriarchal structures any longer, “Quiet defiance to the men who say, ‘respect your brother’s vision,’/ She mutters, ‘respect your sister’s vision too’.” These structures were introduced and maintained by the colonizers, utilizing the tool of language and the written word once more in order to accomplish this aim, “Tradition as told by men,/ Written in history books by white men.” Gayle Two Eagles thus affirms that those who write and publish are the ones who control the dominant discourse. That women are not going to endure sexism on top of racism any longer —both distinct features of colonial structures³³— is likewise depicted in Joy Harjo’s poems “Conversations between Here and Home”, and “I Am a Dangerous Woman” (Green 1984, 128, 128/129). In the first poem women still remain silent, noiselessly maintaining family structures and securing survival with what is left, “angry women are building/ houses of stone/ they are grinding the mortar/ between straw-thin teeth/ and broken families.” This silence still is perceptible in the second poem, but here it is evident that the situation will not remain like this forever, “i am a dangerous woman/ but the weapon is not visible/ security will never find it/they can’t hear the clicking/ of the gun/inside my head.” Once again language—even if still to be formed—is the means that will turn around the process of colonization. Rayna Green (Cherokee) sums the three previous poems up in “Nanye’hi (Nancy Ward), the Last Beloved Woman of the Cherokees, 1738-1822” (Green 1984, 112-114). Alluding to the last Beloved Woman before Removal, famous for introducing commercial cattle-raising and weaving in the manner of whites as well as for acting as a negotiator in treaty conferences,³⁴ Rayna Green points out that Native American women prepare seizing power again, the power that was taken away from them by the introduction of European patriarchal social structures and values. The women in Oklahoma, in Adair County, hold ceremonies in remembrance of Nanye’hi. From these ceremonies and the memory they evoke the women draw the strength they need to keep quiet, to hide their thoughts, to do their jobs, and to plan in secret, “Their silence all these years/ doesn’t fool anybody.”

Although Rayna Green writes about women plotting the toppling over of men, the formula of decolonization, which has been developed in Native women’s poetry, certainly is not one of exclusion. It is, in contrast, one of inclusion, as its starting point is the forming of strong relationships within the family and community. The consciousness of one’s cultural background (e.g. language, stories and heritage), thus affirming ethnic identity, is a module of the formula as is the reinvention of the enemy’s tools and language, simultaneously claiming voice. All these modules bring about the final aim, the dismantling of the colonizer’s house.

3. WRITING HOME

When we write, I believe that what we are doing is reclaiming our house, our lineage house, our selves, because I think we already have a spirit of cooperation that just underlines everything we do, and when you reclaim the self, there’s no category. It’s significant with the person. It’s wonderment. Abs-

lute wonderment. That's how we see each other's work, and we want to read each other, and to see each other, and to experience each other, because the more pathways we trace to get to the centre of the circle, the more rich our circle is going to be, the fuller, the rounder, the more magnificent. There just aren't words, I think, in English. (Maracle 1991b, 176)

Today, at the threshold of the next millennium, one thing seems clear: poetry by Native women is a vibrant and popular genre, and like that of their Black, Asian or Chicana sisters, their creative and theoretical impact seems to have surpassed that of their men, without, however, abandoning the common cause of fighting racism and poverty, and simultaneously combating the sexism within and without their retrospective constituencies. The struggle for decolonization transcends ethnic, class and gender categories without glossing over existing social rifts.

The creativity of First Nations women poets and the urgency of their expression has led to new aesthetic strategies. Linguistically, there are examples of code-switching (Armstrong), albeit on a much smaller level than in Chicana literature. Besides, there are a number of poets who braid into their texts the various ethnic strands of their "mixed" heritages and upbringings [Inés Hernandez (Nez Perce); Carol Lee Sanchez; Leslie Silko], resulting in uses of English combined with Spanish and Indigenous languages (Silko, Hernandez) and even other European languages (Sanchez) in their poetry. Moreover, they may use forms of "village English" [Maria Campbell (Métis); Louise Bernice Halfe (Métis), "Valentine Dialogue" (Perreault/Vance 89-91)], a vernacular in writing which captures the oral uses of English by Native people. And their writing transcends the borders of genre, resulting in texts which combine poetry and prose (Armstrong, "Mary Old Owl," Armstrong 1991a, 45/46) or recapture the quality of orality through uses of performance art or audio-recording of music and poetry.³⁵ There is also a remarkable amount of cooperation and cross-fertilization among Women Authors of Color throughout North America, even including alliances with Indigenous women of Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Australia. "This world is a song, a large poem we are all working on together, Alice Walker has said. We are all linked together in this song that rejuvenates culture, that changes us as we climb the sun." (Harjo 74)

While many Native writers, especially male academics, are producing literature and theories that merge fully with other forms of postmodernity, there are many more traditionalist Native writers, especially women, who insist on finding and defining their "own" Indigenous way of expression, even if "the stuff doesn't come out for 10 years." (Armstrong 1991b, 28). In the process of defining their own theories and writing in culturally relevant aesthetics, they are no longer primarily concerned about "writing back" (Ashcroft et al.) to the colonial center, or about being understood by the mainstream. Texts contain fewer and fewer ethnographic (omniscient) comments or "translations" to smooth mainstream access or to (re-)educate the majority and decolonize the dominant discourse. Instead, Native women poets are "writing home" to their own people, using philosophical concepts and linguistic materials which "culturally literate" readers (Hirsch 1987) will understand immediately, whereas "culturally illiterate" outsiders may first have to acquire the philosophy and epistemology required to fully grasp the impact of culturally relevant literary texts and theories. In this process Indigenous publishing houses, self-determined centers of Native Educa-

tion, and, foremost, the En'owkin School of International Indigenous Writing form the institutional backbones in the stand for total self-control of Native writing. Again, the women are at the avant-garde in this move. Women poets and theorists network with other individuals willing and able to subscribe to the goals set by Native cultural nationalists conscious of the global value of their literature and the contribution it has to offer "to the dialogue on English Literature and First Nations Voice within literature itself." (Armstrong 1993, 8) Thus "writing home" is not a sulking retreat into a cultural niche but rather a necessary and timely concentration on Indigenous cultural values to be shared with those willing to listen to First Nations Voice, because:

...First Nations literature, as a facet of cultural practise, contains symbolic significance and relevance that is an integral part of the deconstruction-construction of colonialism and the reconstruction of a new order of culturalism and relationship beyond colonial thought and practise. (Armstrong 1993, 8)

Notes

¹ La Roque xv.

² Further listings: Gladys Cardiff (Cherokee), Chrystos (Menominee), Anita Endrezze (Yaqui), Rita Joe (Micmac), Janet Mountain Leaf Volborth (Apache/Comanche), nila northSun (Shoshone/Chippewa), Lucy Tapahonso (Navajo), Gail Tremblay (Onondaga/Micmac) (6 each), Tracy Bonneau (Okanagan), Beth Brant (Mohawk), Janet Campbell Hale (Coeur d' Alene), Elizabeth Woody (Navajo/Yakima) (5 each).

³ One of the first articles was "The Grace That Remains" by Paula Gunn Allen in 1981.

⁴ See also Huntley 12.

⁵ In this article we will not employ the term "post-colonialism" which at first sight might seem to be more appropriate. This, for one, is grounded in the fact that the term "post-colonialism" appears to be very much in use, and is imprecise. Besides, it does not fit the present-day situation in North America, or as McClintock (294) expressed it, "By what fiat of historical amnesia can the United States of America, in particular, qualify as 'post-colonial' — a term which can only be a monumental affront to the Native American peoples currently opposing the confetti triumphalism of 1992."

⁶ See also Charlotte DeClue, "Blanket Poem # 2. The Pox" (Bruchac 1994, 91/92).

⁷ Paula Gunn Allen, "The One Who Skins Cats" (Brant 1988, 19-23).

⁸ Paula Gunn Allen, "Pocahontas to Her English Husband, John Rolfe" (Bruchac 1983, 4).

⁹ Rayna Green, "Coosaponakeesa (Mary Mathews Musgrove Bosomsworth), Leader of the Creeks, 1700-1783" (Green 1984, 114/115).

¹⁰ The struggle to restore the honor of Women of Color whom dominant history has slandered as assimilationists or collaborators is not limited to Native women alone, as the Chicana re-visionist discussion of Malintzin/Malinali Tenepat clearly shows; see Alarcón 1981, 182-190, Anzaldúa 1987, 22f. Even the "conformist" poetry of the African former slave Phyllis Wheatley is given a new revisionist scrutiny (Kraft 45-57).

¹¹ The same situation is depicted in Diane Burns' "Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question" (Bruchac 1994, 40), in nila northSun's "stupid questions" (Bruchac 1994, 217/218), and in Kim Caldwell's "Bad Taste in My Mouth" (Fife 62-64).

- ¹² Chrystos, "I Walk in the History of My People" (Chrystos 7).
- ¹³ "Native Girl Syndrome" is a stereotyping term used for Native girls on skid-row by a fictional social worker in Métis novelist Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* 1983; see also Klooss 1988, Lutz 1994.
- ¹⁴ Charon Asetoyer (87), supports Armstrong's statement by declaring that alcoholism still is not seriously fought against because it is a means of hidden genocide for the U.S. government.
- ¹⁵ Actually murders like that of Helen Betty Osborne are not exactly scarce. Audrey Huntley (10) enumerates quite a few similar cases and thus points out that Indigenous women are the —approved— main aim of racist and sexist attacks.
- ¹⁶ Beth Brant describes her inner battle also in her book *Food and Spirits* 1991, 13.
- ¹⁷ "[W]riting, once seized, retains the seeds of self-regeneration and the power to create and recreate the world. (...) It is at this moment that English becomes *english*." (Ashcroft/Griffiths/ Tiffin 87).
- ¹⁸ Connie Fife, "Resistance" (Fife 19/20).
- ¹⁹ There is a very pronounced process of bonding and sharing between various Women of Color in their "womanist" (Alice Walker's term) struggle for de-colonization, and there are a number of publications documenting such cross-cultural and inter-ethnic alliances; e.g.: Anzaldúa 1990, Bannerji 1993, Fisher 1980, Gómez/Moraga/Roma-Carmona 1983, Hooks 1990, Moraga/Anzaldúa 1981, Williamson 1993.
- ²⁰ See also Bohlinger 38/39 and Brant 1994, 12.
- ²¹ Utilizing small letters when mentioning the colonizer's language is a means of pointing out the existence of colonizing language structures and a sense of decolonization at the same time. (cf. endnote 17).
- ²² "Halfbreed Girl in the City School"; "From My Grandmother" (Lerner 41/42, 43/44).
- ²³ Joy Harjo "For Alva Benson, and for Those Who Have Learned To Speak" (Niatum 291/292).
- ²⁴ The merging of people and land is also described in Elizabeth Woody's "In Memory of Crossing the Columbia" (Evers/Zepeda 45).
- ²⁵ Concerning the relationship between women and earth Mary TallMountain said in an interview with Joseph Bruchac: "Have you ever seen an Indian woman sit on the earth? She just seems to grow out of it. She's growing right out of the earth. Some of the men do, too, but a woman somehow, with her curves, she epitomizes the earth. The earth is curves. That's how it is, soft and curves. Then she comes up, she's just growing out of that. That was grandmother for me." (Bruchac 1989b, 20).
- ²⁶ Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native Life Today* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1996). Cited in Harjo/Bird 194/195.
- ²⁷ Native poetry thus is able to close the "gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it." This gap, according to Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin (9), "forms a classic and all-pervasive feature of post-colonial texts." The most thorough and illuminating discussion of the particular relationship between Native identity and specific parts of the North American land(scape) individual authors come from, is given in Robert M. Nelson's *Place and Vision* (1993). Nelson analyzes three major Native American novels. He suggests the term "land realism" (instead of "magic realism") for seminal works by N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), Leslie Silko (Laguna), and James Welch (Blackfeet).

- ²⁸ Roberta Hill, “For Rose” (Harjo/Bird 309/310).
- ²⁹ Joy Harjo expresses the same thought in “3 AM” (Hobson 1988, 109): “3 AM/ in the albuquerque airport/ trying to find a flight/ to old oraibi, third mesa (...) the attendant doesn’t know/ that third mesa/ is a part of the center/of the world.”
- ³⁰ “What does pulse throughout Harjo’s work is a sense that all landscape she encounters is endowed with an identity, vitality, and intelligence of its own. This sense of life and intelligence in the land is quite different from the human emotions an Anglo poet might *project* upon landscape; the life in Harjo’s landscapes makes poems written out of the pathetic fallacy indeed seem pathetic by comparison.” (Patricia Clark Smith; Paula Gunn Allen “Earthy Relations, Carnal Knowledge: Southwestern American Indian Women Writers and Landscape” in Vera Norwood and Janice Monk, eds., *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women’s Writing and Art* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987) 174-196, cited in Witalec 310.
- ³¹ Again, the (de-)colonizing power of writing in englishes against (imperial) English is addressed by other Writers of Color, as well; e.g. by Caribbean Canadian Marlene Nourbese Philip in her poem “Discourse on the Logic of Language” (Philip 56-59), where she calls English “a foreign lan lan lang/language/l-anguish/anguish” (58), or by Chicana poet Carmen Tafolla in her poem “Right in One Language” (Tafolla 21-23), where she mouths the collision of Spanish and English and concludes “There is room/ here/ for two/ tongues/ insidethis/ kiss.” (23); see also Ashcroft/ Griffiths/ Tiffin 39, 44.
- ³² Joy Harjo, “Conversations Between Here and Home” (Green 1984, 128).
- ³³ See also Mishra/Hodge 284.
- ³⁴ Bataille 272/273; Green 1984, 313.
- ³⁵ Lee Maracle used the accompaniment of a hand-drum for a poetry reading at the Vancouver Writers’ Festival 1991, and together with Greg Young-Ing (Cree/Chinese), Jeannette Armstrong, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, and other Poets of Color, she participated in the production of a number of audio-tapes combining spoken texts (poetry) with music, e.g.: *Poetry Is Not a Luxury, The Secret War Against the Black Panthers and the Indian Movement in America* (1988), and *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (1889). Joy Harjo is an accomplished saxophone player, and together with her band, “Poetic Justice”, she produced a CD “Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century” (Boulder, Co.: Silver Wave Records, 1997).

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