

World of Hunger, Words of Healing

Jia-Yi Cheng-Levine

ABSTRACT

Here, by looking at the poetry of three Native American woman poets, I contrast a Eurocentric view of the world with the less egocentric and more ecocentric view of native peoples everywhere. The Eurocentric view which came to America with the white settlers is based on Judaeo-Christian hierarchical thinking—God on top, nature on the bottom, the human soul striving away from nature and toward the divine—and the Greek philosophical distinction between subject (soul, mind, ego) and object (body, material world). In the ecocentric worldview of native peoples the subject is in a sense decentered: the focus is on intersubjective (interpersonal) relationships and on the relationship of individual to the larger natural environment of which she is an integral part. The poetry of these three Native American women in various ways expresses the disruptions of the life and worldview of their culture(s), and the struggle to overcome this disruption. Rose deals more directly with the political and military history of the natives' displacement by white Americans, which is in fact part of the larger colonialist-imperialist devastation of the colonized (human) "environment"; Harjo and Hogan focus on the traditional stories and myths of their culture(s), showing the power of an aboriginal mythic-ecocentric understanding of the human-natural world to "heal the wounds" of cultural disruption and fragmentation, and to redress this ecological "imbalance." This strategy of returning to ecocentric roots can be seen as a vital part of the larger drama of postcolonialism as an overcoming of colonialist dualities: in Conley's poststructuralist view subjectivity becomes "geographical and ecological," which corresponds to native peoples' attachment to a "*situated place*" and sense of being positioned "*in the world.*"

KEY WORDS

Eurocentrism
intersubjectivity
Linda Hogan
Joy Harjo
Wendy Rose

ecocentrism
native American writers
The Book of Medicines
The Woman Who Fell from the Sky
Going to War with All My Relations



The ecological imbalance caused and exacerbated by colonial expansion and post-colonial development has raised concerns in all fields, at all levels, regarding the future of humanity and the earth. Many activists, scholars, environmentalists began to challenge the Eurocentric, male-dominated culture that practices and advocates the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women and non-white peoples. Native American writers especially criticize extensively the exploitation of the land and minorities because of their cultural tradition that respects the natural world and their dehumanizing colonial experiences. Suffering from more than two hundred years of oppression and cultural genocide, Native Americans have arisen from unheard to voicing themselves through different channels.

In this paper, I will focus on the social, racial, and gender oppressions as presented in some poetry by Native American women poets. I found that these poets, being both members of an ethnic minority and women, provide us with a keen observation of the injustices. I will discuss how these poets challenge the western scientific dualistic ideology that eliminates cultural diversity and exploits the environment and people of color. I will emphasize the solutions they have given us through re-examining our relationship with history and nature as well as re-valuing the intersubjectivity between human and nature in the world of technology. The importance of recovering their cultural practices, such as story telling and ceremonial dances, will demand much of the space of the discussion. I will also bring in ecofeminist principles that advocate transformative politics which criticize the industrial, capitalist patriarchy, urge a dehomocentric relationship with nature, believe in the importance of a political voice for women, and foster an ecological self that is grounded in receptivity and responsiveness.

I believe it is important, especially for women's and minority discourse, to place writers in the larger historical and social contexts from which they write to either advocate their cultural heritage, reconstruct their cultural identities, resist mainstream assimilation, or establish their own aesthetic voices. Minority discourse, coded by social and historical construction, implies a position that is culturally and politically specific because of its ideological conflicts with the mainstream culture, society, and literature. Minority writers consciously integrate personal, aesthetic, and political aspects of their subject matter into their work, creating hybrids of their cultural tradition and their resistance to the dominant culture. I will, therefore, begin by briefly describing some cultural attributes that are commonly shared by Native Americans and how they are different from those of the Europeans. I will then expound their resistance to the dominant culture and their vision of the future of humanity and the earth by using examples taken from the poetic works of Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Joy Harjo (Creek), and Wendy Rose (Hopi). All three writers have volumes of work published to date; however, for the sake of space, I will examine only one by each poet. All three volumes of poetry were published around the same time, either in 1993 or 1994, and share a similar theme and purpose.

Before the European invasion, Native America, in James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson's words, "was actually hundreds of Native Americas" (14). As historian J. Donald Hughes puts it, most of the Native Americans never thought of themselves as one single kind of human being "until they were forced to do so by European and non-Indian American attitudes and education" (5). When Europeans arrived in the New World, they considered it a new discovery of wilderness, while the North American continent was actually well populated. At that time, the land was teeming with wildlife and "clothed in a green robe of forests, unbroken grasslands, and useful desert plants" (Hughes 2), contrasting to the gradually industrialized landscape in Europe. Since the Native American way of life is to live *with* nature, not against it, they did not leave the land untouched, but *unspoiled*. In fact, it was so unspoiled that the Europeans considered it wilderness and therefore in need of "cultivation," utilizing technology and science available to

the Euro-immigrants.

With different attitudes towards the land, the Natives and the Europeans cultivated different landscapes around them. In many ways, most Native tribes interpret life from a perspective and set of values that are often at odds with the European imperialistic and capitalist culture. As Kenneth Lincoln succinctly summarizes, “[t]ribal life centers on a common blood, a shared and inherited body of tradition, a communal place, a mutual past and present” (93), while European civilization emphasizes more on individual development. The visions of life, concepts about time, ideas of community and individual, and especially attitudes and the concept of ownership towards the land and the environment, present the sharpest contrasts between these two civilizations.

Since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Europeans have had ingrained within their culture the concept of the “great chain of being,” which believes that everything partakes of a hierarchical order, with God at the top, downward angels, humans, and other forms of life, including inanimate matter. This concept was generated from the teachings in the Bible, which states that God created man in his own image, and, in Genesis 1:28, instructed human beings to “be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and *subdue* it, and *have dominion over* . . . every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (emphasis mine). The Judeo-Christian idea of nature, as Cherokee theologian Jace Weaver comments, is “the rejection of creation as a living ecosystem and the concept of nature as depraved, an object of exploitation and nothing more” (3). This Christian concept of creation and domination contributes to human’s alienation from the earth because, in this mode of thinking, human beings are elevated not only higher than other beings but also relate their existence to the earth from the outside.

As European Christian civilization developed and as history has testified, it has also reinforced a hierarchical order among human societies, with the white male privileged with social, economic, and moral advantages above women and non-whites. It further justified a rationale for Europeans to take control and utilize the earth’s resources as part of the responsibility of being human and to “civilize” the non-white races as the unarguable burden of the white civilization. Further, with the

scientific and industrial revolution of the seventeenth century, Europeans, heavily influenced by dualism and logocentrism, ceased to see the earth as an organic living system and viewed it as a commodity and an object of exploitation, excluding nature from human culture, non-white from European civilization. Exploitation then became natural and feasible.

While the Europeans were obsessed with the concept of hierarchy and material wealth through exploitation, the Native Americans regarded the earth as a nurturing mother who supplied the needs of all living forms. They do not place humans on the top of other living forms; instead, all forms of life, including rocks, mountains, and rivers, are part of the ecosystem, which is a carefully balanced whole. If humans have any significant role in this system, it is to maintain the intricate balance because they believe that human beings are part of a living universe, all elements of which are mutually dependent. They see the environment as sacred, and due to their respect of the earth, Native Americans have a profound loyalty to place, utilizing resources without exhausting or destroying them. Their notion of life, hence, emphasizes the principle of reciprocity. Under this influence, their concept of time is most often not linear but cyclical, reflecting the rhythm of the seasons, which again mirrors the importance of the immediate environment. Time to the Native Americans, therefore, is not a commodity with which humans accumulate material wealth; instead, time is a natural process in which all living things fulfill the promise of their creation with the purpose of maintaining cosmic balance (Hughes 18). With this spiritual understanding of and reverence for the cosmic whole, the ecology-based culture becomes natural for Native Americans.

From here, I want to connect the Native American's cultural practices, all of which center around caring for the land, her cyclical concept of time/history, and her emphasis on the interconnectedness of all things, to Verena Andermatt Conley's concept of "eco-subjectivity"; both stress the importance of dismantling the colonial dualistic ideology that sustains the hierarchical system. In her study of the environment in post-structuralist thought in order to rehabilitate its ecological components, Conley proposes the concept of "ecological subjectivity."

Structuralist trends of thought bring the autonomous “subjects” and “objects” within *systems* and decenter “the human subject from the commanding position *it imagined it occupied* in the operation of the world.” Poststructuralism further questions the human subject’s plenitude, and this leads to “the renewed consideration of the ethical side of the relation between the human subject and the world in which she or he was born” (5). Subjectivity, according to Conley, thus, is “geographical and ecological” (11). This geographical subjectivity corresponds to Native Americans’ attachment to a “situated place” and therefore reinforces their sense of ecological subjectivity which seeks to harmonize human beings’ position *in the world*.

Native American women poets such as Linda Hogan and Joy Harjo draw on their centuries old cultural traditions to critically examine the causes for the contemporary environmental devastation caused by European colonial expansion and the post-colonial capitalistic corporate mentality. In their poetry, they re-establish for the reader an ecological subjectivity that levels the hierarchy that we humans create in our consciousness. With three novels and several books of poetry published to date, Chickasaw poet/novelist Linda Hogan in her newest collection of poetry, *The Book of Medicines* (1993), gives a world that is hungry for love a poetic remedy to help appease that longing. In her opening poem, “The History of Red,” Hogan talks about the “order of things” and how that order was “turned inside out/by a country of hunters/with iron, flint and fire” (9). Hogan seeks order out of the chaotic world through “Love,” which “like creation, is some other order of things” (11). Although the order of the cosmos was broken by human greed, Hogan does not want to seek revenge with blood (the red), but with love—the medicine that heals. In order to re-piece the world together, Hogan goes back in history to find the roots of destruction.

In the first part of the book, “The Book of Hunger,” the reader is ushered into a world filled with hunger, despair, and environmental devastation, as well as into the Native American’s history of painful survival mainly due to forceful relocation and removal of their survival source, the buffalo. The world in those poems is fragmented; so are the humans in it. The homocentric world, Hogan tells us, is full of destruc-

tion and scars. In the first poem, "Fat," the poet criticizes how modern civilization is built on the "fat" and "blood" of the Natives. "Fat" represents the plentitude of the earth that is symbolically embodied in the fat of whales, an endangered species due to humans' merciless killing of them for commercial purposes. The fate of the whales resembles that of Native Americans—both face extinction due to capitalistic greed. In many poems, Hogan foregrounds the ironic fact that, in such a bountiful land (as symbolized by the fat of the animals such as bear and whale), humans, especially America's native inhabitants, often feel hungry: hunger for food, for history, for recognition, and for an identity that is nonhomocentric.

The recurrent theme of fat appears in different animals such as the bear. In "Bear Fat," the narrator recounts the gradual destruction of the wilderness through violence ("gun") and domestication ("tame it/or tried to make it love them"). In the world of alienation, bear fat was "the light," the narrator "saw through" into the hungry world. Through the fat of the animals, the narrator begins to regain strength for survival. At the beginning, the narrator, feeling one with the bear, feels confined and is "afraid of the future" (19) since human greed increasingly invades the natural world. The human narrator, like the one in the first poem "Fat," with her ecological, relational, sympathetic self, feels the fear that terrifies the bear. At the end of "Fat," with her ecological self that relates to other beings, the narrator feels synchronized with the whale and she can "hear it singing," which sounds like "a mountain rising,/lovely and immense" (16). She further sees herself "in the shine of" the whale (16), as she submerges her consciousness in the ocean of other animals' consciousness. In both "Bear" and "Bear Fat," the narrator further transforms herself into bear, and the bear/narrator no longer holds fear, but is capable of examining what is lacking in history that needs to be retold in order to bring life back to earth. It warns the humans that, "we are safe/from the bear/and we have each other,/we have each other/to fear" ("Bear" 26). The poem takes control out of human's hand and gives it back to the bear, who has appeared to be a merciful figure that forgives and helps mankind piece the broken history together.

The human narrator "I" in many poems becomes one with the animal she is seeing and feeling: a lion, a whale, or a bear. The merging of human and animal consciousness reflects the Native American cultural attribute that respects all living forms and the partnership among humans and non-humans. For instance, in "Crossings," the narrator recounts the time when humans and whales co-existed harmoniously on land. Human civilization, however, made the land unlivable for the whale, and the narrator sees that the whale "did not want to live/in air" (28) with us. Able to speak "across elements," the narrator, with the love of a mother for a child, tells the whale to "Go" (29). Here, Hogan's narrator is not confined in the western concept of a hierarchical order; rather, she is able to cross physical confinement and communicate with other forms of life—a spiritual Native American belief that has long been denounced by scientific European civilization as superstition due to its pantheistic nature.

Animals are omnipresent in this section. With a knowing eye, octopus, deer, bear, lion, crow, buffalo, and whale watch us humans destroy the world through war and greed. With our cruelty to other living things, Hogan describes humans as darkness disguised as men with human skins ("Skin" 32-33) and we have fallen "into the straight, unhealed/line of history" and "into pitiless fire" (33). In the poem, "Map," Hogan criticizes how, through colonization, men "brought hunger/from other lands," cleared the forest, and created a map of emptiness for the world (37-38). Animals like the buffalo know that "song and prayer/were paths life would follow back/to land" ("Return: Buffalo" 20-21). Our rootlessness can only be situated again by regaining our respect for the natural world, especially for the animals. Through ceremonial songs and dances, we might discover paths leading back to a kinder world unspoiled by science.

Encoded with creation myths, stories and ceremonial songs, the second part of the book, "The Book of Medicines," presents us with poems that teach us to love, to listen, and to respond to rhythms of nature. Hogan wants us to "re-colonize the colonizer" with love and "return all lies to their broken source" so that "[t]he closed bundles of healing" (84) can begin to open. In "Grandmother Songs," Hogan em-

phasizes again the importance of songs and stories in reviving Native American culture and in guaranteeing humans' continued survival on this land because songs were "the pathway where people met/and animals crossed" (57)—again, another important motif for Hogan: to find a pathway where people and animals can co-exist and cross each other without fear. Through oral tradition that is passed down, the narrator finds her connection to "an older history" that provides healing words (58) through the line of women. The narrator says in the poem "Sickness," "these words are proof/there is healing" (63). When healing becomes possible, the images of map and skin, which in the previous section represent the emptiness and darkness of the world, reappear and manifest a different kind of meaning. Here human skin remembers and bears visions, and the map outlines the roads for the narrator to travel and find her connection with the wilderness.

The words "remember" and "listen" appear in many poems in this section. The significance of remembering is to find connection with the past and seeking wisdom "before the time of science," "before the ruined time" (84-85). Through remembering and listening, stories are told and history and wisdom are passed on. The one that we need to listen to the most is the Mother Earth who is calling her children to return to harmony and peace. The feminine side of human conscious with respect to nature can insure our survival only when men and women converge like "rivers,/entering a larger sea/greater than the sum of all its parts" ("Two" 75). Hogan's vision of the healed world does not advocate another hierarchy to replace the current one or to give women privilege over men; it is one where two genders are balanced so that neither side suffers from oppression. She asserts in her poetry that only when we begin to listen to Mother Earth can we see patterns of life and interconnectedness of all living things; only when we understand the importance of gender balance and respect the feminine principles of human civilization can we survive in this fragmented world and build a just future.

Creek poet Joy Harjo shares a similar vision with Hogan's in her latest book of poetry, *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*. This collection extends from a Native American woman's personal experience, in

relation shared community history, to a connection with the human struggle against oppression and for freedom. Stylistically, the collection is full of prose poetry; each poem is followed by a short narrative that explains the origin of the poem. The prose poetry resembles the element of storytelling prevalent in tribal cultures. Harjo recalls the tribal stories of her ancestors in order to continue the epic search for healing mentioned in Hogan poetry.

The Woman Who Fell from the Sky starts with a prayer, "Reconciliation," to reconcile the polarities between myth and reality, past, present, and future, kindness and hatred, love and war, oppression and justice, male and female, tribal rituals and spoken words, as well as the four directions of the earth, in order to weave the web of life that sustains "the land of miracles." With the reconciliation of polarities comes harmony, balance and wholeness. In this prayer, Harjo also writes her own creation story. It is not a European single male god that created things; this god, who can be either male or female, longs for relatives and imagines herself as a woman with children, "to continue the web of the terrifyingly beautiful cosmos of her womb" (n.p.). The emphasis on the need for relatives again returns to the tribal culture that emphasizes community. The key words here are "web," "cosmos" and "womb"—all of them resemble the circular system of the universe and Native cultures' connection to that system. This god, in addition to having no sexual identity, is also emotional about human foolishness because s/he identifies with human sufferings. The god becomes a brother, a sister, and even a lover who shares the same house with "us." Given this kind of identity, the position of god is decentered in the house that humans, animals, and stars share. Besides, the song sung in the prayer promises "no beginning or end"—again a circular image. The only way to reconcile the broken strands of life, the prayer suggests, is to reweave the world with kindness and love.

With this preparatory prayer, the book starts with "The Creation Story," which begins with "I'm not afraid of love," the source of healing in Hogan's poetry. Creation takes love, and Harjo's creation is words that bless the house shared by all. As Native Americans believe that words have the power to create and heal, as Hogan repeatedly

emphasizes in her poetry, Harjo believes that her words of love and power can prevent wars and disasters.

Not only does Harjo incorporate stories in her poetry, she also transforms the story to reassert the tribal woman's identity in both the Anglo and Native worlds in the poem "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky." In this poem, the woman who fell is an ordinary woman, not willing to be "disturbed by the wreck of culture/she was forced to attend" (6). She is given a name, Lila, and she chooses her path in life. Lila finds her "sound of destiny" (9) and decides *for herself* the direction of her life, both in the mundane and arcane worlds. With a named woman that appears to be ordinary, Harjo stresses that the strength of life lies in daily struggle, which every Native American woman undertakes as a heroine. The woman's life is narrated synchronically and achronically, a way of telling that resembles ceremonies practiced by the Native Americans. By telling the story, Harjo as a poet assumes the role of a medicine woman who practices rituals and possesses the power of words that creates living things and stories. From this act, Harjo subverts and overthrows the biblical idea of creation as well as its invisible male god, and announces that Lila had seen God and could tell you God was neither male nor female and made of absolutely everything of beauty, of wordlessness (7). The act of retelling the tribal creation story denounces the Christian origin of things and intends to reverse the broken order of things.

Another mythic story is told in "The Flood," in which the lake watermonster comes back into people's beliefs and mingles with the female narrator's life. The story about the watermonster was carried in the memories of the people as they were removed from Alabama to Oklahoma, but forgotten as the people "had nothing to live for" (17). The disappearance of the watermonster story symbolizes the dispossession of tribal people, culture, and memory. The female narrator first believes in the existence of the watersnake, but she also forgets about it when the industrial culture takes over. It is "imagination" that brings back the legendary watersnake into her life and becomes her husband, a partner who shares life with her for the rest of her life. With the return of the legendary comes the return of her own tribal tradition and the

Native's life becomes worth living again. Like Hogan's narrator who often identifies herself with the animals and is able to speak across elements, Harjo's protagonist also demonstrates her ecological, dehomocentric self which is connected to other forms of beings.

Stories imply the reciprocal relationship between the stories and humans. While stories do not exist without human communities, human communities do not exist without stories, whose similar function in healing has also addressed by Hogan. The act of conversing also plays a crucial role in "The Myth of Blackbirds." In this poem, when the narrator feels disoriented in the capitol of white society, the stars tell her how to find her own self "in this disorder of systems" (28) and the narrator finds heaven when she can "converse with eagles" (29). The act of conversing with nonhuman entities, such as stars, represents a heterarchical relationship in the cosmos, as Hogan does with the animals.

In addition to reviving her oral tradition in written text, Harjo also criticizes how colonization and neo-colonial industrial development detach the Native Americans from their oral legends and tribal tradition. The condemnation of colonization and industrialism is vividly portrayed in "A Postcolonial Tale," in which colonization is presented in the industrial product, TV, which "separates the dreamer from the dreaming." As TV tends to tell the stories and picture the images for us, people start to lose the power of imagination and lazily rely on the images TV provides. Harjo critiques that "all the people of the world" are trapped in the "whiteman's sack"—this sack refers to the whiteman's advancement of technology that alienates humans from the natural world. Postcoloniality, therefore, troubles not only Native Americans, but also all humans who are blindly assimilated into the technological culture of the white. Facing ideological, cultural, and economic colonization, the poet writes, "[w]e found ourselves somewhere near the diminishing point of civilization" (18). Post-colonial development has negated not only Native Americans' lives, but others as well.

As mentioned earlier, Native Americans believe in the world of spirits and do not view time as a linear procession. Both Harjo and Hogan are able to see the fluidity of the world and the interface between

the world of mortals and the world of stories, and, thus, to transform it into poetry that will educate their audience about the tribal reality in which myths and the mundane world coexist. The ability to see past and present synchronically entitles her to envision a future when love can sustain life. As Harjo blurs the boundaries between past and present, legendary and real worlds, she weaves the polarities of life together with love. In a poem written for the birth of her granddaughter, "The Naming," Harjo finds the ground of reconciliation with a grandmother whom she hardly felt at peace with before she died. Forgiveness and reconciliation are found at the night of the birth of Harjo's own granddaughter. While hunting for a right name for the baby, the poet finds that the grandmother who did not have peace in her life is "blessed with animals and songs" (12). Animals and songs symbolize the tribal and ecological identity that runs in the poet, the grandmother, and the granddaughter's blood. As the baby is born in a night of storms, full of rain, "[t]he earth is wet with happiness" (12). With the promise of fertility and life the rain brings to the earth, the poet welcomes her grandmother back into her life again—the tribal tradition thus can be lived on through a line of women, like Hogan has believed in her work.

Also like Hogan, Harjo converges the divergent realities existing in the contingent contact of the tribal and Anglo worlds. She also reconciles the contradictions by entering and resolving the conflicts with love and tolerance so that she can achieve an internal equilibrium. As we can see from both poets, their poetic world is very much influenced by the physical landscape surrounding them and the internal landscape that shapes their identity as Native American women living in an industrial society. The Anglo society devalues tribal civilizations and attempts to fully assimilate the Native communities as it has done since the day of the initial contact. And the root cause of Native community's suffering from economic, social, and cultural disadvantages is the loss of the land to the government. It is worth mentioning that, although the issue of colonization is not often directly dealt with in Hogan and Harjo's poetry, the concern of assimilation and the criticism towards the "conquest" of America are recurrent themes that run through their works. The reasons for war are colonization and imposed assimilation,

and the solution is love. These women poets address the detrimental impact of colonization on American Indians' lives by describing the death of the buffalo, and the negative impact of the removal act and relocation. They document the resistance against assimilation by telling stories about the stolen land as well as recalling myths and memories of their tribal traditions.

By employing storytelling and myths in poetry, Hogan and Harjo achieve what Hogan tries to do in her collection of essays, *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*, to show us both "our place" and "a way of seeing" (12): our place in the cosmos and an ecological way of seeing the world and positioning human subjectivity. In a healing ceremony that Hogan attended, she learns that her part of telling (her own story) is the first part of the ceremony because it is the story "that finds its way into language, and story is the very crux of healing, at the heart of every ceremony and ritual in the older America," and the ceremony itself includes not just our own prayers and stories of what brought us to it, but also includes the unspoken records of history, the mythic past, and all the other lives connected to ours, our families, nations, and all other creatures (37).

While Hogan and Harjo recount the old myths to find healing words, Hopi poet Wendy Rose, in her *Going to War with All My Relations*, examines from another angle the roots of destruction of the environment and of the Native American communities. Rose looks directly at American history since the first white-native contact and the loss of Native American cultures due to their forceful removal and the genocidal massacre(s) carried out by the U.S. government. The loss of history and culture is sharply presented in the opening poem of the collection, "Auction," which criticizes how Native American culture and people have been auctioned off for nothing and have become exotic and extinct tribes, and they have no say in the construction of history. In another poem, "Notes on a Conspiracy," the narrator states "Who would have thought we could be ended" (11). As the tone of regret is evident and strong, Rose continues her protests against destruction in the following poems by recounting the forgotten history of the Native Americans.

In many poems, Rose criticizes how the landscape is altered by

the invasion of technology and science, which makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. In a poem about Thanksgiving, the narrator presents us a much polluted world, in which water is "black and brackish" (20) and train tracks are "made toxic with money," and missiles are "ready to slash open/the innocent march" (21). What remains for Native Americans, Rose remonstrates, seem to exist only in museums, where even Native Americans, due to the deprivation of their own culture, are forced to go there to learn about their own ancestors. In "Calling Home the Scientists," Rose denounces "scientists, equaters, and diagrammers," who excavate the ancient Native American sites often for their own material gains (4). She wants to free herself to nature and leave "the sky and mountains to cover me/and the earth, nameless,/below" (4). In another poem, "Lab Genesis," the poet wants to take the ancient bones out of labs and experiments and let the bones relive in nature. No longer wanting to live "Through the museums and in the books" ("Dancing for the Whiteman" 71), the poet calls her people to recover their culture and to remember the dances and songs, like Hogan and Harjo have pleaded. On the subject of exploitation of Native American culture, Rose attacks the popular cultural practice which distorts the images of her people. For instance, in "The Mormons Next Door," she describes how "they were trying/to nibble my bones, gnaw/at my tribal tongue" and "to disembowel my soul/and fore me to give them/my face to wear for Halloween" (42). Their culture and tradition has become nothing but entertainment or jokes for the ignorant public.

Rose attributes the invasion of technology and misuse of indigenous people to the history of colonization and industrial, capitalist expansion. The conspiracy and wars white men have waged against people of color, women, and the earth backfired at themselves. While other countries, such as Japan and Baghdad, were destroyed by bombing and nuclear weapons ("Trophy in Two Acts: On Hiroshima and Nagasaki" and "Yellow Ribbons: Baghdad 1991"), white men suffer as well:

Look—how like a furious gun
 he finds himself drowned
 in the blood of dead nations.
 Look—how he suffocates

in his own poisonous air. ("Notes on a Conspiracy" 13)

As the poisonous air crosses the geopolitical boundaries and leaves unrecoverable damages on the living entities and the earth, Rose wants to be a "warrior" in the company of "all my relations" (vii) to save her people and the earth.

Like Harjo's prophecy on an inevitable war, with the title of the book, Rose indicates that a war against destruction is necessary in order to re-establish a new order that can maintain a balance among different genders, races, and species. Like both Hogan and Harjo, Rose's "relations" include all entities that exist in this cosmos—again, a dehomocentric world view. In "Notes on a Conspiracy," the poet knows that a war is unavoidable, but she "will not go to war alone." She seeks strengths from "the great old visions/of cougar and bear, or rattlesnake" and listens to their songs (11). She calls her people to "wake up!" and to "Gather and glue your bones/with aboriginal skill" and "pull yourself and the sky together" ("Coarsegold Morning" 50). From the despair of being "sold out" at the beginning of the volume, Rose demonstrates strength she gathers from the bones of her ancestors and the songs of animals. Her poetic persona is strengthened by her ecological sense of self that relates to all forms of living entities. Her war is not to further divide the world, but to destroy the destructive forces that upset the balance of the universe. With all her relations, Rose, like Hogan and Harjo, is fostering a new partnership that respects people and culture of all races, and all living forms.

The poetry by Hogan, Rose, and Harjo reorient American society with a new, and yet centuries old, cultural direction that respects the land and strives to maintain the balance of the whole ecological system by decentering white "man's" subjectivity in a hierarchical system ordained since the days of the Bible. With the colonial mindset that dualistically separates culture and nature, white and nonwhite, human and nonhuman, European civilization detaches humans' existence from nature to justify control and exploitation. The poets discussed above call us to de-colonize nature, to challenge the Eurocentric, male-dominated culture that practices and advocates the exploitation of

nature and the oppression of women and non-white peoples; to re-examine our relationship with history and nature; and to re-value the intersubjectivity between human and nature in the world of technology. By exploring how one's identity and subjectivity is socially, naturally, and culturally constructed, these poets expound how the destruction of their land threatens their identity and survival. Being Native American, these poets confront a common threat of cultural genocide and voice a shared vision of an ecologically balanced and just world, by dismantling the homocentric worldview that has reduced the natural world to nothing but commodity.

These Native American women's poetry reminds me of ecofeminist ideology which recognizes ecological diversity, which naturally includes racial and cultural diversity and differences. The unwillingness to recognize the interdependencies of social, economic, and ecological systems in the dominant society consequently reduces the minority groups' habitable space. Without a sense of ethical obligation towards the environment and minority groups alike, the dominant class destroys culture and nature through the spread of capitalism. With the advancement of capitalistic and technological mentality that controls most environmental policy-making institutions, capitalistic ideology dominates the public, private, social, economic and cultural space in which people live, interpret, and give meaning to their subjectivities and to the world.

As ecofeminists strive to do, these poets do not advocate the obvious dualistic separatism of male/female, western/eastern, culture/nature. Hogan and Harjo seek ways to bring order back to the chaotic world by breaking down dichotomies and by re-drawing a cultural paradigm that accepts differences and converges possibilities, while Rose further critically excavates the root of destruction and questions the institutionalized racism that has colored our knowledge of the past and human civilization as a whole. In this world of hunger, these Native American women poets give us words of healing, to help us search for wholeness of life. By harkening to those poetic voices, we may learn how to re-orient ourselves with the environment and cultivate a renewed sensibility to the natural world.

WORKS CITED

- Conley, Verena Andermatt. *Ecopolitics: The Environment in Post-Structuralist Thought*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Harjo, Joy. *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*. New York: Norton, 1994.
- Hogan, Linda. *The Book of Medicines*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1993.
- . *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*. New York: Norton, 1995.
- Hughes, J. Donald. *American Indian Ecology*. El Paso: Texas Western Press/U of Texas, 1983.
- Lincoln, Kenneth. "Native American Literatures: 'Old Like Hills, Like Stars.'" *Three American Literatures: Essays in Chicano, Native American, and Asian American Literature for Teachers of American Literature*. Ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. New York: MLA, 1982.
- Merchant, Carolyn. *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Olson, James S., and Raymond Wilson. *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1984.
- Rose, Wendy. *Going to War with All My Relations: New and Selected Poems*. Flagstaff: Northland Publishing Co, 1993.
- Weaver, Jace. "Notes from a Miner's Canary." *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*. Ed. Jace Weaver. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996. 1-28.

