



**MARIA HELENA
DE SOUSA
GUEDES**

ROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE
The poetic work of Joy Harjo

À MESA DA COZINHA
O trabalho poético de Joy Harjo



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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Línguas, Literaturas e Culturas, realizada sob a orientação científica do Dr. David Callahan, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.

Ao Espírito do Vento, Criador da Respiração, com gratidão pelo dom da Vida,
pelo amor da Poesia.

Hesaketvmese, mvto, vnokeckv.

To the Wind Spirit, Maker of Breath, in gratitude for the gift of Life, for the love
of Poetry.

o júri

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palavras-chave

Joy Harjo, Americana Nativa, Índia Americana, fronteira, cultura, diversidade, responsabilidade ética, património, identidade, relação intercultural, literatura, poesia, responsabilidade política, espiritualidade.

resumo

O presente trabalho propõe-se aprofundar o conhecimento do património humano e cultural das comunidades Indígenas Norte-Americanas, por intermédio do exemplo da poesia de Joy Harjo, para melhor compreender e respeitar a diversidade da vida gerada pela Mãe em comum, a Terra.

Ao procurar refletir sobre uma visão pluridimensional do mundo, será desenvolvida uma abordagem no contexto de expressão cultural Índia Americana, ou Ameríndia, particularmente a poesia contemporânea de Joy Harjo. A poetisa de ascendência Muskogee-Creek sugere que, pela dialética de espiritualidade, os seres humanos encontrem caminhos para resolver questões e dilemas das comunidades Índias Americanas e da comunidade humana multicultural global. Seguindo este processo, vai dar relevância à dinâmica das interrelações que inclui intervenção pessoal e coletiva. Na partilha de ideias e, também, de atitudes, as pessoas podem conhecer como cultivar e educar uma consciência de responsabilidade pela dignificação e valorização da diversidade.

Finalmente, concordando que a literatura tem um papel crucial no desenvolvimento de interrelações humanas com menos tensão e menos conflitos sociais, pondo em prática a cultura dialética de espiritualidade exposta por Joy Harjo, a humanidade pode viver em comum com harmonia e justiça, em equilíbrio com todos os outros elementos e seres vivos que existem à nossa volta.

Esta dissertação é composta por uma contextualização teórica do tema e introdução, a Parte I, um estudo interpretativo da poesia de Joy Harjo, a Parte II, e pela conclusão, a Parte III.

keywords

Joy Harjo, Native American, American Indian, border, culture, diversity, ethical care, heritage, identity, intercultural relationship, literature, poetry, political responsibility, spirituality.

abstract

This dissertation aims to explore the human and cultural heritage of North American Indigenous communities, through the example of the poetry of Joy Harjo, in order to increase understanding and respect for the diversity of life supported by the sharing Mother, the Earth.

In the attempt to ponder a pluri-dimensional viewing of the world, an approach will be developed in the context of American Indian cultural expression, particularly the contemporary poetry of Joy Harjo, of Muskogee-Creek descent, who suggests a dialectics of spirituality to help human beings in the search for responses to issues and dilemmas both of American Indians and the global multicultural human community. In this process, she focuses on the dynamics of interrelationships combined with personal and collective activism. By sharing ideas and attitudes as well, everyone can learn how to cultivate and educate an awareness of responsibility towards dignifying and valuing diversity.

To sum up, in accordance with the crucial role of literature in the evolution of human interrelationships with less social tension and fewer conflicts, by cultivating the dialectics of spirituality articulated by Harjo, human beings can share life in harmony and justice at the same time as we maintain a balanced coexistence with other elements and beings.

This dissertation is composed of an introduction and theoretical contextualization of the theme in Part I, an interpretative study of Joy Harjo's poetry in Part II, and the conclusion in Part III.

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“The coercive power of language in Native American oral traditions – that ability to ‘bring into being’ and thus radically enter into reality – intersects with what has been called ‘the development of historic consciousness’ as a result of written language”.

Louis Owens, *Other Destinies*, 9

PART I

Introduction

A journey across identities

We appear to live in a world without many frontiers – trade and business without frontiers, racially discriminating aggressive attitudes and power without frontiers, lack of ethics and human social values without frontiers, a boundless lack of awareness concerning the environment, the place where we live, the air we breathe, the water we drink without frontiers, the globalized world we have all heard of. At the same time, within this world, there are many peoples for whom borders remain crucial, as we can see in conflicts in most continents.

North America seems to be one continent that is free of conflict, and yet within North America there are peoples who have lost the right to borders, Indigenous peoples who remain colonized. That is to say that many human communities have been prevented from the right to sovereignty on behalf of invaders who left behind their European homeland to pursue their dreams, while appearing to be possessively blind to embracing different worldviews.

I asked the oldest of my old ones what his opinions were of the white man's supertechnology: his flight to the moon, his atomic weapons, his present status in the Middle East. He stared into the fire for a moment, then looked up at me with a faint smile and said: 'We look upon the white man's world of wonders as trivia – and short-lived'.

Louis Littlecoon, *The Horned Snake* (quoted by Joy Harjo, *Soul Talk, Song Language*, 92)

In this process, three particular dates 1494, 1529 and 1550 relate to a crucial sequence of two agreements and a dispute: the Treaty of Tordesillas, the Treaty of Zaragoza, and *The Controversy of Valladolid*, all signed in Spain, Western Europe, events that would transform the History of ancient Indigenous peoples who were not consulted about the assignment of their homelands to others. At the same time, the imaginary border would lead to great changes in the world of that age. Not only would it divide the physical world but also human beings. Moreover, a great part of the world was colonized by peoples from different European nations throughout the last millennium, which has resulted in a

process of acculturation stained by the extinction of many cultures, a holocaust or genocide in some people's eyes, the memory of which remains visible in Native American reservations. Despite this visibility, and the visibility of American Indians in the media, what do we know of other cultures, even globally significant ones such as China, India, Turkey or Canada among many others? In general, an implicit first world superiority is presumed, blocking the possibility of really learning from the increasing diversity that we come into contact with.

Recent technological and economic advances have contributed to another era of expansion of the world, the process of globalization, its pros and cons, on the evidence of accelerated changes in the social and cultural dimensions of human beings have engendered both support and opposition to the process. Different names and arguments from those used in the past, albeit similar in their significance, involve the dialectic of globalization and diversity. Globalization is quite a recent term that through global means tends to universalize Nations' cultural patterns; however, diversity remains a fact, in the continued existence of a varied range of people and peoples or nations. Both globalization and cultural diversity interweave so commonly in our contemporary society that they often meet round the same table. But people need to be careful to avoid thoughtless disrespect for someone's cultural identity, to prevent the disadvantages of assimilation and acculturation. Globalization cannot build unity at the expense of killing diverse cultural voices in the interest of cultural totalitarianism. The unity of humankind will have to find its way among cultural diversity. On the one hand, globalization seems to require universal values and global resources; globalization creates new institutional links across borders such as international organizations, integrated markets, transnational social networks, a whole evolving system that privileges the role of information and communication conveying power, interests or autocratic representations. On the other hand, diversity does not impose a pattern, but rather requires respect and acknowledgement of the differentiation of all the various cultures. Mobility, however, carries a threat to traditional communities in the sense that the global community is growing and may destroy those structures that keep people physically and mentally healthy. Moreover, cultural identities need to go on breathing in order to maintain

human beings safe and alive. Therefore, people are challenged to create the right balance between both globalization and diversity so that all humankind may benefit. This is a process that certainly demands educating people towards responsibility with respect to judging other cultures.

In addition to this, in the context of colonized people, Bill Ashcroft (2001) says

Culture describes the myriad ways in which a group of people makes sense of, represents and inhabits its world, and as such can never be destroyed, whatever happens to its various forms of expression. Culture is practised, culture is used, culture is made. (2)

Furthermore, Sidney W. Mintz, when speaking of the Caribbean, emphasizes that culture comes from the life experience of many generations of people and that by resisting colonial domination peoples have necessarily adapted their cultures:

Culture has life, because its content serves as resources for those who employ it, change it, incarnate it. Human beings cope with the demands of everyday life through their interpretative and innovative skills ... not by ossifying their creative forms, but by using them creatively.

(quoted by Ashcroft, 2)

While human beings “cope with the demands of everyday life” they are fostering interdependent and integrating relationships which are based on cooperation, curiosity, friendship, respect, help or mutual interests in growing open communities. Thus, people become more able to create and innovate towards global understanding and harmony in a globalized world whose process of evolution results from the fact that everybody and everything has life and movement. At the same time, human beings are active, change places and interactions, hence their need to adjust themselves as well as their trajectories towards desired goals. This idea is corroborated by David Callahan as he elucidates that

“what cultures are is what the individuals who inhabit them are, and individuals inevitably change” (*Rainforest Narratives*, 104) added to the fact that

cultures contain contradictions, inequalities and inconsistencies – numerous gaps and rifts through which individuals and groups are constantly contesting and realigning priorities and possibilities.

(*Rainforest Narratives*, 20)

From this understanding our viewing of the world becomes both expanded and more intense at the same time that such a perspective inspires human beings to open their mind to diverse ways of evolving personally and politically.

In spite of diverging designations for the form of contemporary societies such as multi-, or plural- or inter-cultural there is an undeniable growing awareness among scholars of the issues related to these concerns, particularly since the 1960s. With regard to this, many theorists in the sphere of education also consider that it is important to define goals in order to avoid conflicts similar to the ones we have been observing, for example, those related with small communities of different ethnicity or immigrants. Accordingly, in his essay “La educación intercultural en la nueva escuela” the scholar Ricardo Marín Ibáñez says that:

El reconocimiento de la multiplicidad de culturas lleva a un espíritu, a unas instituciones y a una educación dialogantes, democráticas. (...) Nos enfrentamos a graves dilemas: mantener la identidad de cada cultura y superarla hacia niveles más altos para no quedar bloqueados en el pasado y abrirse a otras culturas sin que una aplaste o avasalle a la otra, sino más bien que actúen como elementos fecundantes. Urge llegar a un entendimiento cada vez más amplio y más universal, a una cultura ya no sólo nacional o continental, sino planetaria y a la vez mantener todo lo original y valioso de cada una, incluyendo por supuesto todas las regiones y todas las minorías (91).

Today, due to the effects of globalization including new technologies such as the Internet and smartphones, living in a boundless world demands an increase of multicultural awareness, and hopefully the predisposition towards respect for what is culturally different. At this point, the analysis of literary texts has a part to play, certainly in the educational process, one of the ways in which cultures socialise their members.

In this process, a transversal knowledge of American history, American Indian tribal diversity, myths, conceptions of homeland, approaches to landscape, human values or beliefs such as justice, respect, responsibility and freedom can be learnt from Native American perspectives. In the current United States of America Native Americans' sovereignty remains largely overlooked, although these peoples are American "First Nations". The disregard for their sovereignty, for their socio-political and cultural dimension in general, calls into question how far the U.S.A. may be called a free democratic country. A transversal knowledge is difficult to develop when there continue to be numerous fabricated myths and stereotypes concerning Native Americans still deeply embedded in contemporary society. Nevertheless, the commonly believed negative ideas about the wrongly designed "Indians", their physical appearance and cultural aspects are exploited as well as used for profit, through the film industry and the Media in general. Moreover, they are usually represented as exhibiting uniform behaviour or exaggerated characteristics, which is not simply disrespectful but insulting. With regard to respecting the difference of peoples, cultures and social ways of living, in his work *O Espírito da Terra*, Joaquim João C. Braamcamp de Mancelos suggests that "o futuro dos EUA como nação multi-étnica só pode ser encontrado algures entre a diversidade independente e a unidade interactiva" (38), where people can maintain their own communities, beliefs and develop healthy interrelationships, and he emphasizes: "não pela hierarquia feita à imagem e semelhança WASP e muito menos pelas rivalidades inter-étnicas" (40), because it is important to give each person or group the plain right to freedom of choice. Considering this point further, and raising a note of caution with respect to the role of "communities", João de Mancelos adds: "A comunidade é constituída por *indivíduos*, pessoas que podem desejar ou não que a sua diferença seja reconhecida" (*O Espírito da Terra*, 41).

In fact, Euro-Americans were somehow indifferent to the diversity of human beings and their cultural roots so that the supposed homogeneity of ancestry conferred on American Indians can be understood as a construct to flatten out the differences that exist not only between different tribes, but also those that exist within a single tribe. In a similar way to every recognized nation in the world, Indigenous communities have their own names which appears to be a fundamental reason for rejecting the inappropriate use of the generalized term “Indians”, derived from the Europeans’ mistaken belief they had made contact with the eastern nation called India.

Considering the heart of this matter, historian Devon A. Mihesuah (Choctaw) explains that

Indians are indeed multi-faceted peoples. Each tribe or nation has a complex past and present, and it is a mistake to generalize Indians, just as it is incorrect to generalize Europeans, Africans, Hispanics, or Asians. (...) Indians as well as their cultures and traditions change over time, in response to the conditions around them. They are not static. New ideas meld with old ones. (...)

There is debate over what to call the indigenous peoples of the United States of America. The terms “American Indians”, “Native Americans”, or “First Nations” are incorrect because these are European terms.

(AMERICAN INDIANS, Stereotypes & Realities,16)

This all relates to how native human beings are perceived, and accepted or not accepted by non-native people. A common thread connects all Indigenous peoples of the Americas and that is their macrocosmic awareness of the world based on the knowledge that all life is relative to every other element of the Universe. However, this singular consciousness has often been interpreted, even stereotyped, through fixed ideas and typified perspectives. It is not easy to understand the emotional and physical relationship between human beings and their landscapes or environments where they find cognitive and spiritual sustenance. It is true that contemporary American Indians do not live in an intimate relationship with the land as their ancestors did, but the memory as well as the spirit of that relationship still persists as part of a tribal identity. In this sense, the

American Indians' relationship with their land is unique, even the major source of cultural identity, and it also has political importance in terms of tribal sovereignty.

How the concept Identity begins to emerge

In terms of the specific interrelationship between American Indians and the land, a common cultural response has developed. Thus, American Indian writers and scholars who have been concerned with their geographical, social and cultural identity since the 1900s have cultivated their skills in literary writing so they could give expression to their peoples' voices. Besides being a way to keep their life knowledge it has been conceived as an updated strategy to demarcate identity and construct self-determination for their tribal peoples. For example, Gerald Vizenor, one of the most distinguished American Indian authors, is a member of the Minnesota Chippewa tribe and a Professor of Literature and American Studies who clarifies in his essay "Native American Indian Literatures: Narratives of Survivance" that

The name 'Indian' is a convenient one, to be sure, but it is an invented term that does not come from any Native language, and it does not describe or contain any aspect of traditional Native experience or literature. *Indian*, the noun, is a simulation of racialism, an undesirable separation of race in the political and cultural interests of discovery and colonial settlement of new nations; the noun does not reveal the experiences of diverse Native communities. The name is unbidden, and the Native heirs must bear an unnatural burden to be so christened in their own land (47).

Nonetheless, the great majority of Native Americans prefer to call themselves "American Indians" or by the names of their "First Nations", such as, for example, Spokane or Navajo. Furthermore, many Native Americans know or have always known who they are: Aacqumeh, Sioux, Creek, Muskogee, Ojibway, Lakota, Inuit, Apache. However, there are many of them who do not know what that might mean. In Jewish-American Arnold Krupat's words in *The Turn to the Native*, the dilemma that informs this situation is "how

best to continue to be Aacqumeh in a world of powerful Mericanos” (93). With regard to the most appropriate meaning of the concept “Identity” today, the writer Ward Churchill, a member of the Keetoowah Cherokee tribe, an activist for the Indigenous cause, contends that Euro-Americans created the human divide, as he explains:

The entire project – which has lasted into the present moment – has been devoted to devising “objective” criteria by which the human species may be subdivided into races according to certain “heritable” and “empirically demonstrable” characteristics. Values are then assigned to these genetically transmitted attributes in order to create the appearance of a natural hierarchy of humanity ranging upward from Negroid at the lowest level to Caucasoid at the highest.

(“The Crucible of American Indian Identity”, 45)

In the light of this, the European-American dream was taking shape and their role led them to control the world, subjecting other human beings to their imperial power. After the geopolitical divide in the early sixteenth century, then came the racial divide imposed on human beings by Euro-American interests and needs. In this process, Africans and American Indians were targets for obsessive colonial purposes. Moreover, subtle calculating strategies were gradually used and

Steadily, a national consensus was emerging to the effect that this represented the most appropriate (and final) solution to what was by then being called “The Indian Problem”. What remained necessary was for these tools to be applied systematically, through the design and implementation of a comprehensive set of policies.

(Churchill, “The Crucible of American Indian Identity”, 47)

Among those measures, military force and assimilation were implemented and they represented the starting point of innumerable moments of tension and conflict between Indigenous peoples, the federal government, and the governments of individual States. In

sum, the circumstances of oppression and harmful submission were set up. The Spring of a few became the long tragic Winter of Indigenous peoples.

Identity grounded in tribal ancestry

Many American Indians' full assimilation into the dominant Euro-American culture, and the death of ancestors, represent a loss of connection to their past. Nonetheless, even young American Indians today feel the need to search for elements of their identity, especially in the sense of belonging, for cultural and spiritual reasons. While they search for these links they have to face the dominant culture's belief in the American Indian peoples as largely vanished and irrelevant.

At this point, as has been mentioned above, literature and American Indian authors can help to publicize the truth about the issues. For example, in the novel *Wolfsong*, the Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish writer Louis Owens presents the main character, Tom Joseph, a young American Indian who appears to possess fragments of the knowledge his ancestors once had and returns to their land in an attempt to link the evidence of that place to his fragmented knowledge in order to recreate his own identity, his "self". Thus land and identity are links in a close interrelationship in which spirituality and other issues are also connected. By the end of the novel, Tom finds out that he must be open to change and influences from other cultures and across ethnic borders, and he is led to question what really determines his identity as an American Indian: skin colour, language or the values by which one lives. In this connection, Louis Owens analyses this theme in his work *Other Destinies* and asserts that

For American Indians the problem of identity comprehends centuries of colonial and postcolonial displacement, often brutally enforced peripherality, cultural denigration – including especially a harsh privileging of English over tribal languages – and systematic oppression by the monocentric "westering" impulse in America (4).

Owen's thoughts meet Ward Churchill's opinion in the sense that American Indians have been discriminated against for centuries since Europeans arrived in their land and the idea of their extinction, the makeover of full assimilation, has been spread. However, American Indians are neither a legend nor a myth of the past, as can be seen by their real life on reservations, urban places and other areas of the present-day industrial and technological developed world. Therefore, they are not a product of the imagination or a literary fiction. They know they have been displaced and lost much of their land, which is closely interconnected to their identity, beliefs, and their values, which differ from Euro-American points of view. The tension between both American Indian and Euro-American cultures lies in the middle link of their intersection because of the lack of knowledge, understanding or many other reasons that are the subject of analysis further on in this dissertation.

Krupat observes that

Identity, of course, is a matter not only of reclaiming the past but also of responding to the present, to the social, historical, and political forces that construct the 'Indian' or the 'Jew' or, indeed, the 'Aacqumeh' person in a variety of ways (94).

As tribal lands are a large number of separate territories which have become enclaves named "Reservations" in the different States of Northern America, the relationships between federally recognized American Indian tribes and the American government evolved indecisively, thus making identity issues become more complicated and so much that "[e]ven the most astute of scholars has a difficult time discerning how policies were formulated and put into effect", observes Vine Deloria, Jr. (*American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century*, 3). Consequently, American Indian identity has assumed political dimensions that are interrelated with cultural ones. Understanding the complexities of historical and cultural relations between Euro-Americans and American Indians constitutes a challenge because, as mentioned above, the distinction between these peoples is in their way of knowing and seeing themselves in relation to all the other things

in the world. Regarding this dimension of identity, in her essay “American Indian Identities: Issues of Individual Choice and Development”, Mihesuah says that

Indians who practice their specific tribal traditions and are profoundly affected socially, religiously, and politically by those traditions are often referred to as *culturally Indian* (15).

In addition, the Laguna writer, Leslie Marmon Silko in *Yellow Woman and Beauty of the Spirit* tells us about the old days when there were no boundaries to divide the land, the peoples or the other beings, or to demarcate owned properties:

The people and the land are inseparable, (...). In the old days there had been no boundaries between the people and the land; there had been mutual respect for the land that others were actively using. This respect extended to all living beings, especially to the plants and the animals. We watched our elders behave with respect when they butchered a sheep (...); when the time came, it was solemn, and the butcher thanked the sheep and reassured it (85).

The Blackfeet writer James Welch shows this American Indian issue from a different perspective which gives a more complete idea of the interweaving spirit of the individual and the whole, the interrelationship of the self and the others or the community, a perspective particularly related to the American Indians of the present urban multicultural world. He depicts this in his work *The Indian Lawyer*, in the role played by the protagonist Sylvester Yellow Calf, who is a reliable, well-educated and reputable lawyer prominent in the society of the political town Helena, the state capital of Montana. When Sylvester is questioned about what he believes in, what is important to him, he answers with determination:

Well, certainly Indian issues, water rights, mineral rights on reservations, alcoholism, family issues. (...) The environment, wilderness, preservation

(...) Generally, the problems poor people face in gaining a voice (51).

Nonetheless, such “big deals” are “usually handled by tribal attorneys and big law firms in Washington, D.C., on retainer” (119), says the narrator. Throughout the conversation between the Blackfeet American Indian lawyer and the American Democratic politician Fabares, the reader learns about differences of values and interests that characterize both cultures: “There’s a way of life in Montana that has to be preserved. (...) corporations are buying up family farms and ranches, they’re buying up scenic lands and blue-ribbon trout water for development”, in Fabares’ words (52). Such issues and dilemmas demand hard-working activists who believe in facing oppression and colonialist dominance with self-determination and love of the land until they reach what seems impossible in many people’s life: justice, respect, liberation and harmony.

Threats to American Indian heritage or tales of the dysfunctions of colonization

Questioning or arguing whether one’s identity is modern or postmodern, the terms colonial or postcolonial are not so important as the value of Vizenor’s term “survivance”, “set against the commitment to dominance of the West” in his words quoted by Krupat in *The Turn to The Native* (94). An arrogant position was taken by mainstream Americans towards American Indians and other minority peoples. Their culture and values were looked down on as, for example, Linda Hogan states when she remarks that she comes “from people who have not had privilege. This is because of our histories. Those who are privileged would like for us to believe that we are in some way defective, that we are not smart enough, not good enough” (quoted by Krupat, 94). The problem is that American Indians did not write languages to record their thoughts and deeds, and therefore the early contact situations only allowed the possibility of reading behaviours rather than words until the process of change brought the power of writing. The fact of having no written languages meant that American Indians’ opinions were excluded while European newcomers, missionaries and colonizers became the voices of history because they could write.

Language is essential to meet and communicate with human beings and thus it becomes fundamental to cultural and political understanding. However, American Indian languages were repudiated. For years, language was a political issue under the American federal government's historical policy of systematic suppression of Native languages for American Indian students in boarding schools. That was historical pressure on American Indians who were expected to assimilate into Euro-American society. The process of assimilation which forced Native Americans to change their cultural identity and adopt many elements of the colonizer's world was alienating in almost every sphere. The fact is that colonization established dysfunctions related to Indigenous peoples' life and community structures which differed from tribe to tribe. For example, Pocahontas's father Powhatan was the *weroance* of the Algonquian tribe. This word means being a leader in case of war, and his power is restricted; a council of women would elect or remove him from this charge. He could never be called a "king" as that concept has a completely different meaning; a British king has a very different type of power, such as to be able to sell, to exchange or give land away. In American Indian communities there was no translation for the word "sell" in the context of land, because the concept did not exist. Another illustration of American Indian cultural singularity in signified representation can be highlighted by the Seri people who live on the coast of the Californian Gulf, in Mexico; when they want to know about someone's place of birth, they ask: *Miixöni quih zó hant ano tijj?*, which means "where is your placenta buried?" and corresponds to the English question "Where are you from?" (Russ Rymer, 75). British and European colonizers could not see and understand a different perspective of the world from that of their own, the world they knew. As regards this, for American Indians, translations in general connote violence for reasons of past memories concerning the various Treaties which removed their peoples away from "their" land. The written word seemed to be more powerful than the oral word and it harmed American Indian sovereignty, identity and culture, that is to say their full heritage. American Indian identity is based on families, place, landscape and community. Therefore fragmenting policies became a great political issue for tribes, the "First Nations" of today's USA. Despite the complexity of this issue, the significance of being "Indian" should not be a product of

Hollywood movies, sentimentalized or colonising literature, or artefacts, but should derive impetus above all from an eco-spiritual and collective viewing of the world whose voice has been continuously silenced and ignored.

In this connection, the writer Beth Brant who is a Bay of Quinte Mohawk from Tyedinaga Mohawk Territory in Ontario, Canada, in “The Good Red Road: Journeys of Homecoming in Native Women’s Writing”, tells us about Emily Pauline Johnson who lived at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. She was a notable bicultural Mohawk woman as a writer, poet, actress and revolutionary who faced racism and founded the movement of First Nations women writers. Brant quotes Johnson to suggest a few aspects of the American Indian eco-spiritual view of the world after colonial contact:

There are those who think they pay me a compliment in saying that I am just like a white woman. My aim, my joy, my pride is to sing the glories of my own people. Ours is the race that taught the world that avarice veiled by any name is crime. Ours are the people of the blue air and the green woods, and ours is the faith that taught men and women to live without greed and die without fear (Johnson quoted by Brant, 91).

Despite differentiated details, culture, family, language and education are characteristics common to all peoples; however, they are understood from many different perspectives. These conceptions can either separate or cut across group identities, and in this case colonizers used them as destructive weapons. Indeed, it would still take a long time until many American Indians could reciprocate through their constructive wielding of the colonizer’s language. In this sense, contemporary American Indians’ experience concerning education, social status expectations and personal cultural development are central in leading them to a challenging world without the frontiers represented in North America by mainstream culture. Race, class and gender are obstacles created to implement the categorization of people and to express the concept of a new order as well.

Apart from its homogeneous connotation, the word “Indian” was inappropriately applied to the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, the “others” who were forced to give up their languages in order to be conjugated in the language of the privileged class. As a result of that process, in *Other Destinies* Louis Owens admits that

Contemporary American Indian writers have indeed most often permanently entered that class, possessing as they do a consistently high level of education (almost always at least one college degree) and mastery of English, a fact that certainly adds complexity to the overarching question of cultural identity (7).

According to Owens, contemporary western people still urge American Indian children on reservations to be adopted by Euro-American families, a fact which extends the process of cultural and identity loss. So, for American Indian people it also seems they are constantly giving their children away to be educated. In this sense, Sherman Alexie in the novel *The Absolutely TRUE Diary of a Part-Time INDIAN* writes about Arnold Spirit Junior, a teenager from a thoroughly poor family from the Wellpinit Reservation who “felt like two different people inside of one body (...) like a magician slicing myself in half, with Junior living on the north side of the Spokane River and Arnold living on the south” (61). This fourteen-year-old boy with a stutter, a lisp and skull problems developed his talent for drawing as a result of his difficulty in speaking. He did not give up his dreams and decided to leave the Rez school in order to go to Rearden, the “whites’ school” outside, about 20 miles from home where, as he said, “Everybody, all of the students and the teacher, stopped to stare at me. They stared hard. Like I was bad weather” (58-59). More evidence of what means to be a real “Indian” can be added when the protagonist of the novel, Arnold S. Junior, in the geology class contradicted the teacher and explained why petrified wood is not wood. His assertion on the subject was accepted just because his classmate Gordy, “the class genius” told the teacher “Uh, actually, Arnold is right about petrified wood. That’s what happens” (87). This passage illustrates how hard it becomes for Euro-Americans to accept their ignorance of Indigenous peoples’ culture and allow

themselves to interweave with American Indians' tribal knowledge so that they can enrich their own education.

In connection with this issue, it seems opportune to recall that the current western concept of "education" contrasts with that of the "oral tradition". If you do not go to school, in the European-American perspective it means you have no "education". Although formal schooling has been part of American Indian life for several generations now, the concept is different in traditional American Indian culture, because you learn at home. Somehow, American Indians were not given appropriate time to adapt to the characteristics of Euro-American culture.

In the nineteenth century, under federal American policies, American Indian families had to send their children to boarding schools where they would be stripped of their tribal identity. The expansionist expectations of the United States aimed at "educating Native youth in the ways of the dominant society, a trend that was consolidated in the 1880s as a key aspect of assimilationist technique" (Churchill, 51). Not only were children forbidden to speak their Nation's language but also pressed to change into a Euro-American type of citizen. Boarding schools constituted a violent oppressive process for American Indian children as they were compulsorily removed from their homes and separated from their family environment. Such a procedure contributed to the alteration of most American Indian cultures because children were forbidden from going home to participate in their tribal ceremonies. These procedures that were gradually leading diverse peoples both to language and culture loss were truly significant, impacting upon American Indian identities with negative damaging consequences. As English became the common language, Native American languages and customs declined, thus affecting the expression of American Indians' relationship to the physical and spiritual worlds. At the same time, mixed bloods increased as couples who met at boarding schools got married, older boys had to work on Euro-Americans' farms and girls as house servants who were submissive to assimilationist policies. Consequently, boarding schools became a constant reference in contemporary Native American literature, because not only are the United States government's boarding schools responsible for tribal language loss but colonized American Indians also experienced humiliation and were physically punished when they

tried to speak their own language. In this regard, Joni Adamson quotes the words of the Acoma Pueblo writer Simon Ortiz, who remembers: “you need to get punished and embarrassed and humiliated just about once and then you learn to speak English pretty well” (117), a terrible experience also emphasised by Krupat’s example of The Phoenix Indian School which used “a ball and chain humiliation” (*Turn to the Native*, 96). The result of the system is bluntly summarised by Churchill when he refers to the American Indian supporters of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) in 1934: “such persons were all but drawn from the ranks of those indoctrinated in the boarding schools to see themselves in racial rather than national, political or cultural terms” (53), something which contributed greatly to division among American Indian peoples.

On the other hand, many children weren’t taught Native tribal languages at home because their parents believed that speaking English would contribute to their school success. Today young American Indian students are so interested in learning their ancestral Nations’ languages that they are taking lessons at University and at home with their grandparents or other eldest members of the community. Being unable to speak their tribal or their Nation’s language is felt as a great loss of identity because it is very difficult to express American Indian tribal perspectives in the English language. At the same time, American Indian writers are engaged in the process of transforming English in order to pervade the colonizer’s language with the “moral force of tribal perspectives and traditions that would promote beneficial changes in the attitudes of individuals toward their responsibilities as members of larger human and ecological communities”, as Joni Adamson notes (117).

In contrast to IRA usurpers of tribal traditions, fortunately among many American Indian writers and poets, for example, Louise Erdrich in *Tracks* and Leslie Silko in *Storyteller*, we find testimonies about American Indian attitudes concerning the rejection of boarding schools. They did not want to attend lessons and adults did not want to let their children go to school which was many miles away from the community. Going to boarding schools wasn’t motivating at all for Native American people, and so Krupat describes this experience as “part of the Native American holocaust, and this holocaust too must be spoken and written, made known, so that the world can never forget” (96).

In spite of having gone through the coercion of boarding schools, however, many American Indians admit they felt they had learned things useful for themselves and for their people. Nevertheless, the main problem was the disrespect and indifference to what others are, the way they live or look like in the context of an arrogant totalitarian belief that the colonizers were superior to any other human being in the world.

In this sense, taking American Indians to boarding schools meant being educated to become “civilized” or “colonized”: clothes, hairstyle, names, language would be completely changed, and the reality would be an oppressive makeover. In photos of those times and those people, although they do not speak, their facial looks and expressions enable us to understand something of how severe their trauma and suffering was. Nevertheless, reading and writing in English have not destroyed the ongoing vitality of oral tradition that has been thoroughly important to American Indian literary authors such as the poets Ray Young Bear, Luci Tapahonso, Simon Ortiz or Ofelia Zepeda, and even for Rex Lee Jim, whose education at Princeton did not prevent him from writing poems in the Navajo language.

Adamson recalls Ortiz who noted that some people thought that American Indians had not resisted or they had forgotten and abandoned their feelings and character. As a matter of fact, before colonization American Indian peoples knew kindred nations’ languages and cultures apart from their own and they could speak English, French and Spanish after colonization even against their will, if we consider how they were forced to learn them, but that was a way to go on living. Yet they have never forgotten their identity and their linguistic heritage in spite of having been forced to assimilate English ways of living into everyday life, to use the new language and to suppress their tribal ones. Thus, language has become an issue of relevant interest for American Indian writers who have been expressing their concerns in their literary work.

How survival triggers a new language

From Ortiz’s point of view, the use of English was one of the strategies American Indians used to survive and never to simply replace their Indigenous tribal languages. Therefore, English was being transformed into an American Indian language sensitively

embedded in their tribal heritage, backgrounds and myths. In spite of being a person with Creek heritage, the editor of the Anthology *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, Joy Harjo, was not raised traditionally Creek and went to school where there were multi-heritage and mixed blood American Indian children like her; nevertheless, they were not allowed to speak their tribal languages. As a result of this, Harjo is not fluent in Creek and yet finds it difficult to express Indigenous tribal worldviews in English. Moreover, Adamson also admits that, taking into account the way she feels, she defines that type of language problem as a sort of “brutal border” (119). Such a difficulty as that requires an explanation for which João de Mancelos attempts to give a reason, at the same time that he also challenges us to think of further answers, as he contends:

Contudo, é legítimo especular: poderia Harjo resolver o problema de expressão se escrevesse no idioma dos Creek? Tal não me parece viável, porque, embora a autora tenha algum conhecimento deste idioma, não o domina fluentemente (Jaskoski, 1996: 56). Para além disso, os poemas de Harjo não se destinam ao círculo limitado da sua tribo, mas a toda a comunidade literária norte-americana e até internacional.

(“A Língua do Invasor e a Língua da Poesia: Joy Harjo e o Desconforto da Linguagem”, 184)

Furthermore, from such an intercultural point of view as this, it appears that the English language can be a legitimate means for conveying interaction among people of different cultures.

Although peoples under a dominant culture do not speak their heritage language, they are still grounded in their cultures, traditions, ways of living, resulting in a mingled system that can be interpreted in the light of Mikhail Bakhtin. He presents reasons to explain what he calls a “hybridizing language”. Bakhtin suggests that the languages of differing social and linguistic groups, as well as the past and present languages of oral and written genres, interact in a transforming way according to changed intentions of expression, consequently giving way to the liberation of personal speech in new circumstances and experiences, a truth that helps the writer “to liberate himself from the authority of the

other's discourse" (119), in Bakhtin's words that Adamson has quoted so as to illustrate how Joy Harjo transforms the colonizer's language.

This process of why and how to take control of the use of the language is also observed by Simon Ortiz, as Adamson mentions: "American Indian people are seizing and transforming English and making it meaningful in their own terms because the stake in the process of 'liberating' language is survival" (119). In point of fact, Ortiz conceptualizes "place" to explain that people's identity is grounded in geographical locations where tribal people's culture, stories of life, customs and oral traditions emerged from, a coherent whole that is crucial in order to transform English for American Indians' own expressive purposes.

Thus, questions arise and lead to a reflection on the kind of education many contemporary American Indians want for their children, for example, going back to tradition and if so how much tradition they wish to recuperate, or if they want to leave urban life and return "home". Many American Indians were and are still poor as well as "people without privilege" (Krupat, 94), as Linda Hogan states, so therefore it is not necessarily appropriate to speak of class, if possessions or financial capitalism are concepts that do not signify value for some. In contrast, their dreams may be quite different from the world famous "American Dream" which is deeply connected to consumerism and high "self-presentation". As is emphasized by the contemporary Laguna-Sioux author Paula Gunn Allen, "America does not seem to remember that it derived its wealth, its values, its food, much of its medicine, and a large part of its "dream" from Native America" (*The Sacred Hoop*, 211), an ignored memory that factors into individualism, oppression, lack of human dignity and human freedom, conflicts and many other problems. Since early invasion of the Americas Euro-American life has been developed in terms of ideas of rejection of their own traditional and cultural ties so that a "new world" could take shape, a kind of attitude that contrasts with the American Indian sense of continuity of their human origins and collective memory.

According to Allen, American Indian traditional beliefs and values provide an advantageous sense of identity that can maintain the connections between individuals and their communities, which can bring significant socio-political consequences to society

as a whole. She highlights the place of women in society, respecting the traditional tribal systems, as she says: "I write for the same reason that mountain climbers do what they do: because it's there (...). Eventually, I came to understand that the pen is mightier than the law books, and that the image is where the action is begotten. (...) writing is indeed a sullen art" (264). Allen supports her activist claims by increasing her community's awareness of their need to control the Media definition, contexts and images of American Indians in order to reset the truth and destroy entrenched stereotypes, an attempt to deal with the dilemma of contemporary Indigenous issues of identity.

The Minnesota Chippewa writer Gerald Vizenor presents oppositional ideas in this sphere as he seems to want a "postindian" tribal knowledge that is "rather different from a *return* to dimly known traditional ways" ("Crows written on the Poplars", 106). Interpreting "identity" as "nationalism" depends on another concept – "consciousness" – in the sense that it is important to have the understanding and capacity to see into the reasons of every action, otherwise national consciousness might bring the same dangers as tribal or ethnic or racial consciousness. In this regard, Frantz Fanon would support the opinion that national consciousness must "be enriched and deepened by a very rapid transformation into a consciousness of social and political needs, in other words into humanism" (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 148) in order to develop the Nation through valuing the human being's dignity and not merely to transfer colonial legacies to the formerly colonized people. In this connection, new questions arise concerning the meaning of the concept "humanism" today, and how real humanism can exist in a globalized world of class and racial diversity threatened by harmful racial divides. Yet, the term "humanism" has generated some controversy, particularly among many postcolonial theorists who are opposed to humanism as being a system which vaguely privileges the individual over the group, the personal over the collective, the power of the mind over the heart.

American Indians have survived out of their system through their commitment to resistance and survival, a theme articulated by many contemporary American Indian writers. In her essay "Native America and the Literary Tradition", Patricia Monture Angus announces the need to speak out to other cultures and to educate them about the

experience of racism against Native Americans because racial prejudice is affecting the recognition of American Indian literary work. In this effort, the English language actually helps American Indians “to talk out” to other cultures and, particularly, to educate them about the experience of both racism and discrimination in order to cultivate respect for the right to differentiation. American schools often enact racial prejudice because many scholars don’t recognize literary value in Indigenous authors. This provides one more example not only for many American Indians but even non-Indians that colonization is still very present. If we understand colonization both as a segregation process and a process encouraging homogeneity then our globalized multicultural world is at risk.

In her essay, “Teaching Native Autobiographies as Acts of Narrative Resistance”, Laura J. Beard considers that the problem concerns every society and community in the sense that more and more high school classes involve a diversity of students’ identities, birthplaces and nationalities, which may be one of the primary effects of globalization. At the same time, it is important for every human being’s self-balance to know who one is or where one comes from in order to feel grounded where one is, wherever one goes and whatever one does in the time and in the place one lives. Issues of power and resistance lead then to issues of ethics: responsibility, accountability and respect “so that each of us can engage actively with the social and cultural conditions that define our individual locations” (Beard, 110). While, in this regard, diversity is part of existence, if an American Indian sense of “self” is associated with tribal identity, to realise fully a sense of Native American identity is to realise one’s link to the tribe. Tribal relationships are different from European-American views of communities, for Vine Deloria Jr. points out in “Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom” that

Indian tribes are communities in fundamental ways that other American communities and organizations are not. Tribal communities are wholly defined by family relationships, whereas non-Indian communities are defined primarily by residence or by agreement with sets of intellectual beliefs (75-76).

In the essay “Native American Indian Literatures: Narratives of Survivance”, Vizenor enhances the singularity of American Indian literature “eminent in both oral performances and in the imagination of written narratives” (47) which tell about memory of creation stories, the painful knowledge of the way things happened, survival ceremonies, the humour of trickster’s narratives, and other experiences of life such as those concerning displacement federal policies of assimilation lived by the first students at boarding schools and with their families on the reservations. They enrich traditional stories or oral storytelling in the sense that they explain the relationship of American Indians to geographical places, to their native communities, moreover, keeping faithful to their spiritual beliefs, which is an essential component of Native American literature.

After the trauma of European contact and colonization, the relationship between spirituality, survival and healing resists and sustains the written word. Literature for American Indian people means freedom, survival, liberation from the still existing false stereotypes in the dominant European-American culture, and survival by growing resilience after the subjugation entailed by such stereotypes. Vizenor reminds us of these feelings heard in creation stories:

Tragic wisdom is the source of Native reason, the common sense gained from the adverse experiences of discovery, colonialism, and cultural domination. Tragic wisdom is a pro-Native voice of liberation and survivance, a condition in Native stories and literature that denies victimry.

(“Native American Indian Literatures: Narratives of Survivance”, 53)

Such feelings expressed in songs and oral stories did not find equivalent words in the language of dominance, the only language both Euro-Americans and American Indians could share, and thus Vizenor goes on to show his concern for written translations that do not adequately transmute American Indian realities, with the result that their truths are compromised, an argument embraced by many American Indian writers.

From American Indian women's sensitivity

Language is naturally crucial to the communication of people's thoughts and culture. Moreover, in the view of the diverse American Indian cultures, words are sacred and powerful. Different perspectives on the world and different cultural understandings face the problem of appropriate communication strategies. Louis Owens, in *Mixedblood Messages*, emphasizes American Indians' self-determination and self-authorization concerning this issue:

In literature by contemporary Indian authors, we find characters who constantly face this dilemma of an identity constructed within the authoritative discourse of the non-Indian world. In order to be recognized, to claim authenticity in the world – *in order to be seen at all* – the Indian must conform to an identity imposed from the outside (12-13).

This dilemma might be solved by women, because in many American Indian communities, women are responsible for important aspects of the oral tradition in its ceremonial and ritual aspects. With regard to writing, American Indian women “[p]oets who have located a means of negotiating the perilous path between love and death, between bonding and dissolution, between tribal consciousness and modern alienation must light on the transformational metaphor to articulate their experience” in Allen’s words (162). Articulating the balance between despairing of reality and the hope that life requires, reconciling the opposites, strengthens the female spirit of resilience. American Indian women have been misunderstood and stereotyped by Euro-Americans. Therefore, Native women have been developing their ability to write their own stories, because they believe it will encourage a change for the better, a call to others to resist the commodification that characterizes negative globalization and to commit to the values learned from tribal traditions and Indigenous people. A new system of language is tacit in this process of creating spiritual word power which is linked with writing. In spite of being connoted with the Euro-American culture of superiority, American Indians have had the courage to accept it and overcome its complexity as they have understood that writing

can help the process of resistance. Through this skill a new strategy could be drawn up in order to share and speak out their beliefs, an innovative way to construct liberty or to accomplish the decolonization of American Indian peoples, desires that are common among contemporary American Indian writers, particularly women. With regard to this, Kateri Damm, quoted by Patricia M. Angus in her essay “Native America and the Literary Tradition”, writes:

Through the power of words we can counteract the negative images of Indigenous peoples. We can fight words with words. Then, with the weakening of colonial attitudes we can move together towards greater cultural, artistic and creative forms of expression that reflect the changing faces who we are. Along the way, our identity as Indigenous writers, whether mixed-blood or full-blood, will continue to inform our work and strengthen us spiritually and politically. We will look with two sets of eyes and hear with two sets of ears and we will speak from the place where we stand with full confidence in the power of our voices. Indigenous literatures will resist the boundaries and boxes. In reality, more of our varied voices will be raised in art, literature and music and the definitions of who we are will be forced to change. Our different voices will create a new harmony. More importantly we will open the borders to each other (40).

Decolonization and liberation are political and very complex processes, not without suffering. Moreover, American Indian people, women in particular, still bear the memory of violent and discriminatory practices of federal policies in their mind and heart. Thus, American Indian women write poems of liberation and survival to motivate the denunciation of a world full of prejudice as well as the moral corruption of European-American society whose lifestyle and practices mean destruction, human and environmental abuse, injustice, murder, lies or alienation. Jeanne Perreault argues that, while the debate between those who support and those who reject the concept of “memory in the blood” continues, it is inadequate to the task of understanding the role that memory actually plays in Native Americans’ poetry. In the poetry of Joy Harjo, writes

J. Perreault, memory “as a praxis” (266) is conceptualized in the spiral that she uses to explain that everything you do has an effect and is interrelated. Her concept of memory emerges from the mixing of individual memories with the collective memories of stories and spirituality, which suggests a contribution to understanding the connections between the world of American Indian heritages and the world we are part of today, for example, in the way as Harjo invokes its cosmic elements in the prayer poem “Reconciliation”:

Oh sun, moon, stars, our other relatives peering at us from the
inside of god’s house walk with us as we climb into the next century
naked but for the stories we have of each other. Keep us from giving
up in this land of nightmares which is also the land of miracles.

We sing our song which we’ve promised has no beginning or
end.

Joy Harjo (*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, xv)

Harjo points up, in *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language*, the value of community when she states that important things develop around the table: “Many revolutions, ideas, songs, and stories have been born around the table of our talk made from grief, joy, sorrow and happiness. We learn the world and test it through interaction and dialogue with each other” (19). She uses this metaphor to characterize the collection of essays by stating “We wished the collection to be as solid as a kitchen table and imagined creating that kind of space within the pages of a book, a place where we could speak across the world intimately to each other” (21). One of the most apposite issues dealt with is that of the education of children and young adults, of great concern to writers and poets, especially women, “gathered to speak regarding the future of the children in a world apparently governed by the greed of multinational corporations and to share ideas in presentations of speeches, songs and stories as well as a rich array of food” (20). In what constitutes a metaphor, the “kitchen table” is understood as a strategy or an effective traditional resource to get problems solved, because different people can communicate when they share a meal. Similarly to other communities and cultures in the world, the

concept “kitchen table” contains a spiritual significance among American Indians in the sense that it symbolizes communicating many diverse features of their life experiences. In this regard, a good deal of connecting happened nightly in the Salish Metis American Indian writer Lee Maracle’s kitchen where American Indian women shared their concerns about tribal community and read stories and poems to each other.

We also share the questions of any artist doing her work within any culture. That work demands truth telling, for any poet, writer, or artist in any tribal community must certainly measure herself against the truth. We, too, appreciated the differences between us, and recognize that though the differences may sometimes be difficult (which can include old tribal enmities and divergent customs) these were to be appreciated, for our differences add dimension to any knowledge. We wondered about other native women who were in the kitchens and streets throughout the hemisphere. What were they singing, speaking, and writing?

(Reinventing the Enemy’s Language, 23)

Despite the fact that many American Indian writers suffer discrimination as they are bilingual and do not speak English as a first language, thus possibly showing a different linguistic accent and expressions, Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, a poet from the Spokane tribe of Washington state, decided to celebrate the diversity of life experiences shared by long silenced and marginalized American Indian women who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, presently denominated as belonging to a multicultural society, and gathered to create a collection of diverse literary texts transforming real space into the pages of a book of healing and reconciliation, of survival and resistance, an anthology: *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language*, written in the dominant idiom, English, once used to trade (past) and now a bridge language (present), for “something is emerging and coming into focus that will politicize as well as transform literary expression”, as Gloria Bird notes (22). This work suggests that American Indians are making their trail towards a promising future and a welcome rainbow. Their dream is to achieve a strong spiritual position in the

world through a process of feeding memory to reaffirm ancient heritages which will strengthen both their cultural identity and their dignity.

This important contribution to Native American literature and culture recalls how significant women's role is in American Indian culture, including today. Moreover, the present time is linked to the past. For example, take the quite recent event related to a two hundred-year-old story passed orally from grandmothers and other elders in the Shoshone-Bannock tribe. A great woman, Sacagawea, a teenage captive of the Hidatsas, was sent to be an interpreter for the explorers Lewis and Clark in their expedition to the Northwest Pacific from 1804 to 1806. She had to lead them hundreds of miles west of her homeland, to what is Idaho nowadays and, due to the fact of being a tribeswoman, she made possible these explorers' contact with the American Indian peoples whose territory they passed through. This experience lived by that woman continues today, commemorated on the first U.S. coin that honours a Native American individually and collectively. Her great-granddaughter, Randy'l Teton, a twenty-three-year-old Shoshone-Bannock/Cree woman is the image that represents Sacagawea on the coin. In his article, the Yaqui author Ben Winton tells us further interesting details to enhance the fact that "regardless of history, two centuries later the lives of Sacagawea and Teton have irrevocably intersected, changing the future for Native people – Native women, particularly – forever" (90). Such a deed represents an important symbol to the American people with its official acknowledgement of Indigenous people's crucial role in the expansion of the United States. Teton is a modern young American Indian woman who feels happy for herself and, above all, she looks to what the coin will do for Native people as she admits that "It's a shining light for all Native people. The 21st century is a time for all Native people to do what is right for all our ancestors. If it weren't for the coin and my education, I might still be living on the reservation" (Winton, 90). On the one hand, this Shoshone-Bannock/Cree young woman is proud of having been educated to become a citizen of the U. S. A. but her personal pride is raised higher when she links it to her ancestral heritage, thus highlighting her American Indian identity. Moreover, Teton hopes that this event will strengthen all American Indian peoples' sovereignty. As a matter of fact, the concepts of awards and values don't weigh the same as in European and

American society. American Indians welcome them and feel happy for they are gifts, but they feel even happier to share them with their community. On the other hand, this event is rather mistrusted among many American Indians, who cannot see Sacagawea as a reliable tribal ancestor, and thus a positive symbol of the American Indian cultural legacy, given her cooperation in an expedition destined to contribute to the invasion of American Indian lands. Moreover, everything that can be known about Sacagawea has been transmitted through oral story or the Euro-American version written by Lewis and Clark in their journals on the expedition. With regard to this, some American Indian women writers are presently working on this truth because “We don’t hear her voice. (...) And to know them you have to have an intimate relationship with the tribe”, Harjo admits (Harjo and Winder, 13). In addition, Cherokee writer Diane Glancy wrote *Stone Heart: A Novel of Sacagawea* to release her voice from the silence so that Sacagawea can be heard as she recounts the path she has travelled, for example: “Once you were Shoshoni, then Hidatsa, then Charbonneau. Now you’ll speak horse in Shoshoni for the white man”(13). In her interview broadcast by BookTV (2003) Glancy explains how it was very hard work until she arrived at the river bank where the young teenager Sacagawea left the tribal community to accompany the explorers, as that was the time she could hear her voice. About this experience of bending time, Harjo affirms that memory or the human “spirit” can travel back to the pasts of other people with whom we have a connection (and even projected forward for that matter):

The connection is dynamic. (...) And that’s the difference, because where I come from, that particular spirit lives. Your spirit can travel back – or forwards, depending – and connect, because it’s there and part of you.

(Harjo and Winder, 11-12)

Thus, Harjo articulates that time is both an endless and yet very present being; it is circular and moves the same way as words and people, all interconnected throughout stories.

Sharing what people do is part of the collective, it is memory perpetuated in words, which is why storytelling has always been important in the lives of American Indian

peoples. They feel proud of their oral traditions as they are stories that bring visibility to their communities' culture. From their point of view, storytelling is more than just a form in the sense that it involves different beliefs about both truth and knowledge; stories educate people's wisdom and skills in the harmonious dialogic way of searching for solutions or taking decisions about life in the community.

In regard to such a feeling of his Indigenous ancestors' survival, Vizenor brings out the power of oral words, because they are sacred in the sense that they contain a significant spirit of life of which they are expression, image and sound. Therefore, even the rhythmic breathing or the silences between spoken words in the way of American Indian oral tradition do not mean the same as written language:

Native American Indian survivance is a sentiment (...) common sentiment of survivance (...). Native survivance is heard in creation and trickster stories, dream songs, visions, and other presentations in thousands of Native languages in North, Central, and South America. Some of these diverse oral narratives have been translated and published (...) written translation (...) is not a representation of oral performance, and even the best translations are scriptural reductions of rich oral nuances”.

(“Native American Indian Literatures: Narratives of Survivance”, 53)

The work of many Native American authors is not categorized within the “boundaries” of the European-American concept of literature. There has been a vast increase in books being published by Native American authors in the last thirty – forty years: Navarro Scott Momaday, James Welch, Louise Erdrich, Leslie Marmon Silko, Diane Glancy, Ella Cara Deloria, Lee Maracle, Louis Owens, Sherman Alexie, Gordon Henry, Tomson Highway, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, Wendy Rose, and many other significant authors who write Native American literature – novels, poems, life stories and biographies of well-known leaders, sacred stories or plays. In her essay “Native America and the Literary Tradition”, Angus ponders the characteristics of literary work, raising the question: “What is great English literature?”(22) and wonders whether the emergence of a written storytelling tradition among American Indians is part of the literary tradition. She asks: “Plain and simple, is it

literature?" She does not worry about Native American writers' appropriation of the "colonial language" because this is how they can tell things their way, through their eyes, and in their voices. Angus, who uses English, a language she learned compulsorily, is thus able to communicate her experience creatively "across the many nation lines and languages of Native America" (22):

What is also overlooked is what my people have done with language! We have taken a language that does not speak for us and given it a new life. Perhaps we break all of the structural, style and grammatical rules. But we have learned to use a language which was forced upon us to create powerful messages which convey to you our experience. I do not call this a problem. I call it creativity. It is time my people give themselves credit for the great things we have accomplished against great adversity, rather than continuing to accept and embrace our exclusion. I am proud of my people (23).

In the same way, in the interview "The Circular Dream" with Laura Coltelli contained in *The Spiral of Memory*, Harjo shared the creative process behind her poetry, an ongoing process that matures during an often long trail of memory and which she feels empowers her heart, for her the crucial original source of language, as she says:

I begin with the seed of an emotion, a place (...) speaking words, listening to them, watching them form (...) an often long journey (...) the blur of the memory of the sun on someone's cheek, a certain smell, an ache (73).

In identifying the language of poetry with ties to oral tradition, Harjo suggests that writing American Indian poetry goes beyond the boundaries of conventional literary text and art canons, and it shows the poet's ability to establish an emotional dynamics that explores the pain or the pleasure, the facts or the dreams, associated with American Indian existence. This is a point to be analysed later in this dissertation, how Harjo explores the role of the artist in society, the quest for love, memory, family, identity, loss, sovereignty,

the significance of being human, just, environmentally aware, tolerant, friendly and liberated, because according to her a poet should become truly engaged in her role as an active citizen and as a person who expresses positive feelings. Harjo belongs to a generation of women writers who lived throughout historically intense moments: the Vietnam and Cambodia wars, the rise of the American Indian Movement, the Wounded Knee event, the Civil Rights Movement and the changes brought to women's lives by Feminist Movements. Harjo is writing political poems but they are also personal. She exceeds the boundaries of conventional personal poetry to transform it into collective poetry that is characterized by the use of rich language and innovative combinations of cultural diversities, both autobiographical and political experiences. At the same time, in her essay "Politics and the Personal Lyric in the Poetry of Joy Harjo and C.D. Wright", Jenny Goodman mentions Denise Levertov who contends that writers of poetry are as sensitive to the personal and the public as one, so that categorizing their poems would be impossible because the "didactic would be lyrical, the lyrical would be didactic" (35). Moreover, Goodman attempts to analyse the way to distinguish the rhetoric of poetry from other kinds of rhetoric, and she asserts that the "task of reading contemporary poems rhetorically is an especially challenging one, considering the framework of many discussions surrounding recent American poetry and especially the personal lyric" (38). In this context, it could be suggested that poetry does not always mean personal expression of emotion.

In identifying a tendency toward ignoring or simplifying certain interpretations of literary work such as poetry, Jenny Goodman both as a critic and a poet contends that "innovations in poetic form can heighten and even change poets' and readers' consciousness of the language and other symbols that frame public life"(36). She explains her assertion concerning rhetorical points of view in the hope of accounting for the particular ways in which poems make meaning without causing a separation between public and personal poetry, but rather considering the appropriate contemporary poetic language to balance politics and poetry. Based on Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory, Goodman considers the "particular ways in which literature persuades" (37) people, encouraging readers to an understanding of the relationships between rhetoric and

poetics whose roots are in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Aristotle's rhetorical theory enables us to understand language as a process. In that process the speaker uses language to persuade people to move toward action in public places. On the other hand, Aristotle's *Poetics* offers arguments as to how to analyse poems as made objects that result from the poet's art skills. With regard to this assertion, Harjo's words support her argument against forcing explanations onto literary works as she says: "poems can exist by themselves. They do not need explanations. The prose accompaniments are part of the overall performance. I am always aware of several voices and each has its own root of impulse and quality" (Harjo and Winder, 32). At this point, it seems relevant to consider the social dimension of the text in the way David Callahan contends that

Literary analysis is a response to one of the complex ways in which human beings make meanings out of life. As such it is personal, as a novel is personal, but it is also social, as a novel is also social.

(*Contemporary Issues in Australian Literature*, 7)

Furthermore, according to Burke, art is implicated in politics, a belief related to literary forms that Goodman emphasizes by quoting Burke's comprehensive definition of rhetoric, "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (38), despite his warnings that we need to control an extremely historicist approach because it might result in negligence of language's dynamics in the literary text. In contrast, within an American Indian context art is not centrally considered in the dimension of beauty and aesthetics but rather how helpful it is to people. Barbara Kingsolver, to take one of many examples, questions whether we "should proclaim that art should be political" although she agrees that "literature should inform as well as enlighten" (*Small Wonder: Essays*, 213). As a tool of communication and of making sense of the world revealed through experience, language is thus closely connected to being in the space of life. The poet transforms it into an important aspect of existence. As such poetic language is both a literary and political expression of the cultural and social moment which the writer's consciousness perceives. The last three decades of the twentieth century were characterized by wars, dictatorships and social movements among people

who felt injustice and discrimination; the members of these groups and the contemporary generations of writers all together gave larger visibility to the diverse situations represented by displacement, poverty, oppression and constantly evolving political landscapes.

Language and poetry become mediators of worlds and transform them either as borders or as a process of liberty. In the light of this, Joy Harjo has created a dynamic poetry in a way that transforms language into art to tell us about the civil war which occurred in Estelí, Nicaragua, as she shows in lines thirteen, twenty-two up to twenty-four, thirty-eight and thirty-nine of the poem “Ressurrection”:

We are all in a balloon that’s about to split

(...)

I rock in a barrage of fever

feel the breathing sweat of the whole town stop, pause and begin again.

(...)

We all watch for fire

For all the fallen dead to return

and teach us a language so terrible

it could resurrect us all.

(In Mad Love and War, 17-18)

Accordingly, everyone’s story becomes visible and understandable in the violent devastating space of war in that mountain town near the border with Honduras. Furthermore, poets and writers need to adapt myths to contemporary human and world paradoxes in order to turn them into the objects of social judgment. All human beings take part in experience and their physical senses are accordingly activated; verbs used to signify sight, touch, smell, and hearing recur constantly. A personal experience may be defined as lyrical because it generates emotions, whereas the political refers to the separation of power in social interactions; at the same time, all social interactions involve

power whether used consciously or unconsciously. In this sense we may say that human beings and their life stories articulate both a poetics and a politics.

Contemporary American poetry is often written by activist poets who are involved in political and social struggle and therefore we may say that it is political poetry. For many, however, all writing is political because it deals with human beings and our perceptions of the world, so it is inevitably bound up with questions of power, hierarchy and society. Reading from a rhetorical perspective, Goodman hopes her criticism on contemporary American poetry “can account for the particular ways in which poems make meaning but that does not impose a false dividing line between poetry and public discourse” (36). A different “Language writing” and “Language poetry” springs from “poems that also exceed the boundaries of the standard private lyric” (40). Goodman mentions Harjo as an innovative poet because her writing emphasizes generational experiences and also seeks an intimate communication with readers. Moreover, writers are “acutely conscious of the ways in which their poetic expression is shaped by the available literary and political discourses of their cultural moment” (40). Goodman makes another important point concerning contemporary women poets and that is their relationship with avant-garde movements, since they do not fear whether their ideas are surprising or shocking.

Furthermore, feminism focuses on the belief of justice in the sense of collective responsibility instead of attributing blame individually. More than calling for equal rights, feminist activists are concerned about women’s oppression and other conceptions of feminism, a position M. Kay Harris highlights in the sense “that all people have equal value as human beings, that harmony and felicity are more important than power and possession and that the personal is political ... which means that core values must be lived and acted upon in both public and private arenas” (quoted by Riley, 93).

At this point, from feminist worldviews to multicultural views on race and ethnicity can be observed the wide and deep engagement of prominent North-American women writers and poets, such as Barbara Kingsolver who argues for the environment, but also partakes of the visions of Adrienne Rich’s social justice, Toni Morrison and her work supporting greater attention to the realities of African American women, or Joy Harjo, who perseveres in her attempt to write about the life experiences of her unjustly and

unethically treated people in order to aid survival and healing as a way to find or provide “anchorage” for American Indians in the present. Getting the facts right, they are examples of writers who form and share the same thread, a common activist effort to bring to light diverse issues concerning the life of the community or to awaken as well as to develop people’s awareness so as to adopt a new way of seeing, living and interacting with their surrounding world. It is important, today more than ever before, to recognize people’s individual and institutional responsibilities for the improvement of social values and dreams such as justice and equality, based on interaction, respect and responsibility, added to the “ethics of care” (Riley, 94). Otherwise, the world will go on socially and humanly devalued, emptied of civility, a world of separate people living apart without healthy human interrelationships.

In addition to these visions, particularly from Joy Harjo’s perspective, her poetry designs a world free of “binaries”, a world that includes and sustains people without dividing them for exclusion/discrimination purposes or categorizing them according to their ethnic group, gender, class or access to resources for our human condition reminds us that “We are earth and water, just as we are fire and breath. We are each evidence of male and female power, all the way back to the very beginning” (*Soul Talk, Song Language*, 98). Seeing and living in a society like that, in which a part of the whole diversity is disrespected, devalues and segregates people, so that Harjo and other contemporary American writers share a non-hierarchical attitude towards a world connected to patterns of justice and grounded in the honest interrelationship of words and facts. Through writing or speaking and doing they are contributing to making a better world and supporting human beings’ need to create a new way of learning as well as interacting healthily with everything and everyone, since the whole world around is universally interconnected: people, animals, plants, the Earth’s resources, and the sky – the universe. In the light of this, as citizens of the world, people need to develop a dynamics of social change, so that they become aware of each one’s responsibilities, interdependence, respect, and relationship with the environment. Thus, we are inculcating an “ethics of care” (Riley, 94) on which an equitable just life can rely. They are the basic roots for a more tolerant and wise conception of social justice. In this regard,

feminist movements have increased our awareness of several issues - harmony, justice, equality, the personal and the collective - as responses to theories concerning justice both as a concept and as a practice, in the sense that it is necessary to benefit all individuals despite their different positions within society and through a process that recognizes them as active members of the whole.

In point of fact, from the late twentieth century on, ideology and theory appear to grow side by side so that political liberalism conjugated with justice and equity for the common good of humankind reinforce the perspective of the feminist social justice presented by contemporary American women writers in their literary work. Accordingly, in the essay "Contemporary Feminist Writers: Envisioning a Just World", Jeannette E. Riley suggests some reflective guidelines to discuss such complex questions, which shows how hard it might be to reach a coherent goal peacefully, especially due to the several installed interests of those who are in control of power. It seems then that, by moving the process forward through activist strategies such as literary work, just rights can be achieved. Regarding this, Riley writes about the feminist theorist Jane Flax's position concerning this issue as she comments that "Flax believes justice should incorporate reconciliation of diversities, reciprocity of authority and decision making, recognition of the legitimacy of all people, and a balance of judgment" (Riley, 92). In this sense, if justice is conceived as a process, it will strengthen the spirit of feminist social justice and respect the characteristics of interrelationship and interdependence that emerge from feminist literature as critical social elements. Practicing justice as a process, the interconnection of individual responsibility increases towards collective responsibility, human beings live life meaningfully and in balance among diversity. That is how personal and political, or private and public, perspectives respect each other's values. A just society recognizes the interdependent articulation of all its citizens and the environment on the understanding that all their members are social actors who interact and react to attitudes or behaviors of others and to their living circumstances. Unsurprisingly, literature plays an extraordinarily active role in this world.

The power of words for an interconnected multi-valued human world

This dissertation represents an attempt to reflect on Joy Harjo's poetry in terms of its characteristics which can engage readers by tackling truth, mythic memory, inter/multicultural relationships, respect and other human values, cultural beliefs or liberation at the same time as she sets off for ancestral tribal land roots and knowledge, a journey to regain communal identity, and other diverse concerns that move on like a "spiral" from personal to collective and then to a global dimension. There is a sense of humanity and of community that pervades her poetry, and she knows she is the voice of silenced or often wrongly visible minority people, "part of a community of writers that represent groups traditionally excluded from the literary mainstream" (Goodman, 40), Harjo says:

I've been especially involved in the struggles of my Indian peoples to maintain a place and culture in this precarious age. My poetry has everything to do with this. I came into writing at a poignant historical moment. I was lucky to be a part of a major multicultural movement with other writers.

(quoted by Goodman, 40)

Harjo's poetry invites listeners and readers to sit together round her table and see how the interrelationship of words and deeds can enlighten human beings to converge on harmony as well as influence their attitudes to help the world evolve better and justly. Moreover, in the Introduction to the anthology *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, Harjo opens the discussion through what we can call dialectical human spirituality, which posits a new theory to explain the principles on which people exist as human beings all together sharing the same home and the same condition of being human. Believing firmly in the theory of dialectical human spirituality certainly means attempting to find a way to solutions for the problems and dilemmas of the global human community. In this connection, Harjo's theory is that all change results from the convergence of the diverse social and cultural forces which come into conflict because of spiritual needs. Therefore she challenges our awareness, asking us to listen to the circumstances where people grow

and live: “We learn the world and test it through interaction and dialogue with each other, beginning as we actively listen through the membrane of the womb all to the drama of our families’ lives” (19). She wants to make sure we grasp the significance of tribal nations’ sovereignty and survival and its connection to the political lyrical nature of this collection of stories and poems written by American Indian Women from diverse tribal communities:

This anthology is only a beginning. ‘Reinventing’ in the colonizer’s tongue and turning those images around to mirror an image of the colonized to the colonizers as a process of decolonization indicates that something is happening, something is emerging and coming into focus that will politicize as well as transform literary expression.

(Reinventing the Enemy’s Language, 2)

In fact, a difficult distressing process is being forged. It is the poet’s responsibility to tell the cultural truth and that means we cannot separate the words from our political circumstance in the world we belong to: “I know everyone has their own definition of what constitutes poetry” but the hope contrived by this anthology is “that [it] will bring together the collective voice of nations” and “will strengthen the link between Tierra del Fuego and the Arctic Circle” (*Reinventing the Enemy’s Language*, 30-31).

In the beautiful text “Global Roots” (*Soul Talk, Song Language*), there is evidence of Harjo’s continuous search for political and social justice in a world of progress, yet also a world of have-nots and underprivileged. She shares her concerns on multicultural and global issues, on scientific experiments and human beings’ basic needs in this unequal world. Speaking of a particular experiment, she says:

This study probably cost more than a block of new homes for the elderly. Why not come up with a cure for hatred or judgment? We’d all get along a lot better if we’d respect each other. The wise ones don’t judge people by the color of their skin, by accumulation of wealth, or by inborn traits. It’s how we treat each other (human, frog, etc.), and how we take care of

our many gifts, that matters. I wonder what Makko Frog would say about this? He's probably laughing about those poor rams prancing about on high doses of estrogen, in the name of science.

(Soul Talk, Song Language, 88)

Accordingly, Harjo's judgment emphasizes the cosmic dimension of human beings – human beings are worlds within a world. It is a challenging appeal to people and their understanding of the cosmic multicultural relationship and interaction of the world and worlds, of past and present, as Harjo illustrates through the following story, as told by the Japanese cellist Yo-Yo Ma:

Years ago in Japan, a wise man told me that if you look deeply enough at anything thought of as local – be it music, an idea, a tradition, a craft – you find that the local thing has global roots. We think of ancient people as being so isolated, yet here is the trade route along which religions and music and musical instruments and foods and goods all travelled. Of course, people travelled with them, and the people and the goods and the ideas and everything else had enormous influence on one another.

(Soul Talk, Song Language, 88)

In terms of reinforcing Harjo's beliefs, we are all part of a web of networks, an interwoven and intertwined world of diverse cultures and diverse languages intersected by a dominant *lingua franca*, English, "*the enemy language*" (*Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, 21), the language used between people throughout a globalized multicultural world, a language that enables people to learn diverse knowledge about many different worlds so as to help us, potentially, to develop in awareness, albeit painfully, compassionately, and tolerantly. Yet Harjo uses the English language as a globalizing transformed tool in order to renew the power of words as an attempt to expand the truth of the American Indian cultural heritage. Thus, a better understanding of the American Indian literature can be guaranteed to all the diverse readers and listeners who need to approach the American Indian views of the world.

The present globalizing world requires new dynamics if human beings truly believe we can all enjoy healthy life in a world at peace. In this regard, activism for both American Indian rights and culture is then expected from literature, from contemporary poets and writers, from other artists of all the creative performance arts, such as music and drama. The fact of expressing opinions differently from those that are officially accepted indicates manifest political activity that brings the poet, poetry and communities together. At the same time a convergent power emerges if people put the theory of dialectical human spirituality into practice, for that can transform injustice and give both new energy and new strength to help people become wiser as well as apt to share similar feelings and emotions as most other human beings.

Furthermore, Dean Rader in *Speak to Me Words* asks how far poetry intersecting wider discourse could help to understand and forge a new hope for a truly positive and constructive world where American Indian and Non-American Indian people interact as equal human beings. As he says: "Native poetry might just be the best possible genre for expressing Native American concerns in a way most closely connected to Native ways of being in the world" (11-12). In the light of this, American culture and the whole world would certainly become much healthier. That is the way, as Harjo recognizes her role as a poet of witness, a responsible dissenter, a model activist, because she believes that the more people endeavour to tell the truth, the more equitable and humane humankind can become. In an interview with Angels Carabi (1996), and quoted by Jeannette E. Riley in the essay "Contemporary Feminist Writers: Envisioning a Just World", Harjo reiterates her ideas about the role and position of the poet:

I don't think that a poet can separate herself or himself from the world that she or he lives in. The poet is charged with the role of being the truth-teller of the culture, of the times. I think that this is true for any poet in any culture. I have done other kinds of writing – stories, for instance – but there is something about poetry that demands the truth, and you cannot separate the poem from your political reality. It's all part of the same continuum (97).

The above assertion clearly leads to the conclusion that a poet who believes that poetry is a tool for social change and collective healing has the ability to make listeners and readers feel an experience rather than to simply hear it described. Women poets have always spoken poetry, but after the emergence of feminism, women have had new opportunities to get and increase education, read and develop writing, travel and publish their work. As a result, poetry has brought new attitudes, multicultural and different perspectives of the world and human experiences that have often been invisible.

PART II

Following the Wind for Truth,
Blowing the Sounds for Justice,
Breathing for the power of Language...

Making choices and taking decisions

I think listening has a lot to do with it, listening, giving yourself a lot of space, choosing not to stay safely in what you already know, which means searching for a truthfulness. What you already know is often what you're fed, through television and movies. I think you have to venture out beyond that, by listening, by learning.

(Joy Harjo, *The Spiral of Memory*, 93)

Joy Harjo, as all of us, exists in terms of multiple identity flows, in her case: woman, Native American / American Indian, tribal, Muskogee, Creek, mixed blood, citizen, writer, artist, poet, storyteller, activist, feminist, musician. However, this raises the question of how she manages to reconcile political citizenship and cultural citizenship, to write in terms of the demands of these different identity positions.

Moreover, the term American Indian identity in the singular is inappropriate and problematic. A socially constructed ethnic identity in the U.S.A. and worldwide, the "American Indian" and later "Native American" suggests a unified racial category to describe hundreds of peoples of different languages and cultures. At the same time, Harjo's work envisions a world that values and joins people, a world that is connected to an ideal of truth and justice, and in which a pan-Indian consciousness is implied. Throughout her poetry Joy Harjo argues about social concerns, for example, people's need to create a new way of seeing and interacting with the world around them in which such joining will become more possible.

In this regard, Harjo asserts that when people travel, go out and cross the borders, they bring back new ideas, life styles, beliefs, cultural understanding, values and change, something different from ephemeral consumerism. Based on the assumption that both Hawai'i and New Mexico are "Indian Country" or "Native Country", Bill Nevins, a cultural journalist and a poet from New Mexico, who interviewed Harjo in August 2008, asked her opinion about American culture and if she considered the existence of a separate culture

beyond the U.S.A.'s "borders and boundaries, politically and culturally" (Harjo and Winder, 52). Maintaining her focus on "truth", Harjo's answer was blunt:

I've always called the U.S. culture the 'over-culture' and don't consider it a true culture. Beliefs, social institutions, arts, and traditions construct culture. The United States is made up of many cultures. There is no such thing as a melting pot. There are various cultural streams that are renewed, slowed, cut off, or otherwise changed. The over-culture is a culture of buying and selling.

(Harjo and Winder, 52-53)

In contrast, her poetic energy translates powerful references grounded in the earth, ancestors, myths and traditions. It is in continuous dialogue with the multiple heritages of the past and everything around human beings, a collective engagement that contrasts with the still young culture of the United States.

Joy Harjo was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and grew up in a family of brave women who were artists and singers. Her mother, a French-Cherokee woman, was a singer, and she kept regular contact with her dear grand-aunt Lois Harjo, who was a painter. She left home at an early age and went to school at the Institute of American Indian Arts, a boarding school in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to study painting. After graduation she joined an American Indian dance troupe and had different jobs. However, in the early 1970s she found her voice as a poet when she was a student at the University of New Mexico, where "Poetry approached me in that chaos of raw inverted power and leaned over and tapped me on the shoulder", she says (*How we Became Human*, xix). As a student she had the opportunity to hear American Indian poets and writers, for example, Leslie Marmon Silko or Simon Ortiz, as well as non-Indian poets, e.g., Galway Kinnell. She eventually graduated with a B.A. in poetry in 1976. Attending the University of Iowa writers' workshop, she took classes under the direction of Silko, earning an M.F.A. in 1978. In addition to teaching at several institutions, Harjo has worked for the National Association for Third World Writers, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National American Public Broadcasting Consortium. Harjo has received many honours such as the American

Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation, the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Poetry Award, the American Indian Distinguished Achievement Award, and a NEA fellowship. She has lived in Los Angeles and Tucson, and she usually moves between homes in Honolulu, Hawai'i, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Harjo has taken part in many diverse intercultural, national and international Poetry and Writing Festivals, meetings, workshops and conferences, for example, "2013 PEN World Voices Festival", University of Tel Aviv in December 2012, Switzerland, Holland, just to name a few.

Her work has taken her all over the world, since she defines the poet's role as a "journey for truth, for justice" (xxvii). Harjo explores the role of the artist in society, her quest for love - a healing strategy, the links among the arts, what builds family, what being human means. From her poems and interviews we learn she believes that in the material world everything that is in motion means life, is in a state of change. This belief comes from the way how she is in the world, in the sense that she quickly moves from one place or time to the next and she changes a voice to another one, and thus life experiences are transformed in different ways. In the "Preface" to her book *Secrets from the Center of the World* Harjo admits the existence of "[an]other motion, subtle, unseen, like breathing" which can come into a person's being and become equivalent to what you see, feel, hear or become conscious of. The same way as when we travel, people and things change, they are not static, so do the "stories change with light, with what is spoken, with what is lived" (*Secrets from the Center of the World*, Preface). Her love of space and landscape, and her deep concerns with spirituality, survival, the limitations of language, the search for freedom, justice, balance and self-realization are central to her poems, for example, *In Mad Love and War*, which focuses on politics, tradition, memory and the characteristics of poetry; or *She Had Some Horses* which incorporates prayer-chants and poetic animal imagery; or the collection of prose poems *Secrets from the Centre of the World* which contains the important theme of landscape: including a photograph for each prose poem of the American Southwest, aspects that emphasize how important landscape and words, oral tradition and storytelling, are within the American Indian world view.

Another striking detail in Harjo's multi-focused artistic character is the fact that she plays her favourite musical instrument, the saxophone, often described as being remarkably close to the human voice. Playing a musical accompaniment to her poems enriches them because of the rhythm, sounds, intonation and repetition that accompany the spoken or/and sung words. It expresses a call to participation and sharing. In her book *Soul Talk, Song Language*, in an interview with Rebecca Seiferle (2008), Joy Harjo reminds us that she and American Indian peoples "come from root cultures in which song, poetry, stories, art was something that belonged to all of us" (Harjo and Winder, 29) for the reason that "We need expression to feel connected, not just to our communities but to who we are down deep, past the eyes and the gullet, to the heart and the incredible depth past it" (Harjo and Winder, 29). Listening to the saxophone, an instrument created by the Belgian musician Adolfe Sax, to whom she is always grateful, suggests the presence of deep human feelings, those feelings that humans keep in the centre of their body, "the heart", and when you take some of your energy to breathe and blow the saxophone, a sweet deep sound comes out and you feel more alive, either when you play or when you listen to it. At the same time, you have to make use of the breath which is an essential part of every human being's existence. Images, sound, voice, rhythm all together challenge body and spirit to create new energy in the output of a new language and "your voice and the horn carry the melody, which is like the poetic line" (Harjo and Winder, 58), a sort of healthy ensemble, a collective harmony. At the same time, Harjo admits that she still wants her "poems to stand up on their own" (Harjo and Winder, 30). In addition, and despite being highly controversial among musicians of its inventor's era, the saxophone brought innovation and change to the world, part of the broad process of transformation Harjo supports. The world changed as the saxophone transformed the web of connections between people, a view corroborated by Harjo's assertion: "the sax eventually made it across the Atlantic, found a place in jazz and American music" (Harjo and Winder, 88). It has brought together people of diverse ethnic communities and cultures including Harjo's community and family, particularly her paternal grandmother Naomi Harjo who "played sax in Indian Territory" (89). From another standpoint, the style of jazz music harmony can be compared to oral tradition when a repetition of chunks of

words or sounds occurs, as if memory moved between the material world and the world of dreams. Thus, this instrument now makes up part of American Indians' home, plays a multicultural language and helps Harjo to draw attention to the issues she claims responsibility towards.

Spiritual word webs

Harjo's book *How We Became Human, New and Selected Poems: 1975 – 2001* is beyond a mere compilation of her poems as the whole work results from the support and contribution of various people she has met in diverse circumstances in different places and at different times: "this includes all who have ferried me to and from airports, have cooked and cleaned and carried the trash, for all those who continue to read, think, and dream in poetry" (xv), to whom she adds her family that "is huge and grows each journey I make into the World. There would be no poetry without them" (xvi). The selection starts with poems from her early work *The Last Song* where the concept of homeland is a strong constant presence, bringing images of connection, legacy, heritage, continuity. She reminds us of our real relationship with the world around us, of our interdependence. In the poem "The Last Song", for example, the dialogue firmly situates us in Oklahoma and refers to the poet's connection to "home" through a metaphor:

how can you stand it
he said
the hot Oklahoma summers
where you were born
this humid thick air
is chocking me
and i want to go back
to new mexico

it is the only way
i know how to breathe
an ancient chant

that my mother knew
came out of a history
woven from wet tall grass
in her womb
and i know no other way
than to surround my voice
with the summer songs of crickets
in this moist south night air

oklahoma will be the last song
i'll ever sing"

(How We Became Human, 9)

Oklahoma possesses intense and meaningful relevance for Harjo. She refers to the landscape, the State of Oklahoma, as a "place" as well as a "home" for a community that has a long history of dispossession by the federal government. Tribal people from Oklahoma were removed at least three times: the first time by the Indian Removal Act of 1830 to another Indian land which is known today as Oklahoma; the second time for boarding school system reasons, and a third time their displacement was caused by the relocation programmes of the 1950s. As can be seen, the European newcomers did not hesitate to colonize already inhabited lands, forcing the local communities to migrate to other places. They were forced to move away from their ancestral homelands in the east to the present day Creek Nation in Ocmulgee, Oklahoma. In Harjo's words,

The poet cannot be separated from place. Even placelessness becomes a place. The world of conjecture, scholarship, and philosophical discourse is a place or series of places, based on land and how are lives off that land.

(How We Became Human, xxiii)

The male voice present in the poem suggests the environmental characteristics of the region of Oklahoma which contrast with those of New Mexico, the place he comes from. The sun's heat is used as an image that symbolises the difference of identity from one

land to the other. On the other hand, the female voice does not seem to agree or disagree with her listener as it appears that she just supports her point of view by emphasizing her strong connection to the land, both her family's homeland and the homeland of her ancestors, reiterating "the idea of human identity with the land that so strongly informs the works of Native American poets from other regions", according to Robert M. Nelson's considerations on this theme in his essay "Dawn / Is a Good Word" (212). Nelson goes on to explain this "kin" relationship between the woman and the land, the space of her ancestral history, aspects of American Indian spiritual cultures concerning all that moves under the sun and their interconnections. Harjo speaks in order to persuade the listener and/or reader to follow her and share these gifts of her people's homeland, Nelson suggests:

She invites us to read 'her' - the source of both the 'ancient chant' and the very breath of the narrating 'I' of these lines – as either the speaker's biological mother or the earth, whose womb holds a 'history' that some humans cannot help but call their own (Nelson, 212)

Furthermore, the male character might return to his own homeland but she knows her roots will belong to this "ancient chant" forever, and therefore she acknowledges to everybody that

Oklahoma will be the last song
I'll ever sing

(How We Became Human, 9)

Here the poem explores the concepts of ancestry and place of origin, suggesting that living new experiences as when you travel to different worlds, which means discovery, and return are interrelated, and the use of the metaphor "moist south air" points toward a hopeful guarantee for the survival of American Indian identities.

As a Creek and Cherokee diaspora member, Joy Harjo does not mean that just Tulsa, Oklahoma is the place of birth but also parts of Georgia and Alabama, sites of the historic

Creek Nation. Relocation and dispersal, voluntary and involuntary, mean that all these places together with New Mexico and Hawai'i are identified by Joy Harjo as "home". Wherever she is in the world, Oklahoma will always be the first home, the place of her personal roots, the place where she appeared and where she will return to. It represents a memory, a collective concept that she carries within herself, a kinship, a very tribal ancestral identity, one of the whole and the whole, songs and stories she heard and nourished, healed, taught or helped her to grow up. These are all evidence of "home" in the same way "[t]he kitchen table is the turtle's back on which this work is accomplished" (*How We Became Human*, xxvii), as Harjo says. As Indigenous peoples, American Indians' performance of their identity is closely linked to their ancestral stories, songs and poems, as well as to the landscape which they inhabit, the same landscape that develops their being as well as their doing: ceremonies, songs, dances in which words are re-enacted in daily life. The landscape is a source of inspiration, an influence upon the myth and imagination of its writers and about which they express social, personal and collective ideals. Thus, they form connections with society, place, community, spirituality, family, local knowledge and creativity. Landscape provides the necessary connections for life; it informs who people are and how they are. It connects American Indians to what the Laguna poet Paula Gunn Allen refers to as the universe of medicine (*The Sacred Hoop*, 72). From Allen's point of view ceremony and myth are interrelated and she explains that myth is the prose that records peoples' origins and spirits, while ceremony means the re-enactment of those stories. Landscape thus tells the story of people's roots, of their history, their native life experience, their physical and spiritual culture that is expressed through reverberating and interweaving language. Effectively, in the interviews contained in *The Spiral of Memory* Harjo admits that she tries to interpret the "cloud language, cricket singing talk, and the melodic whirl of hummingbirds" (99), as their ways of expression are closely connected to their circumstances, the surrounding world and people that altogether perform the close contact that results in a truthful human communication process. Myth stories were created to explain the ambiguities of human beings and the interconnection of animals with human beings was a spontaneous representation found not only by tribal American Indian peoples but also by all peoples

from ancient times in order to carry and deal with the problems of human life or mysteries that are difficult to understand. Particularly for American Indians, myths are an expression of their culture concerning their constant interaction with the world. All animals, plants, stones, all things on Earth have spirit and human beings' strength or weakness was found in connection with those other beings. In the light of this, Harjo reveals she is able to observe worlds that appear to be invisible, and thus she finds "myth" is a resource for her poetry because it is the origin of all stories or "rather, the shifting, dynamic template of spirit from which a people or peoples emerge", she says (Harjo and Winder, 74), and thus her readers and listeners and she herself are taken to "the mythical world around or inside and feel things directly out of it" (*The Spiral of Memory*, 137). Such a sense of interweaving that moves relationships and consciousness everywhere signifies how Harjo can feel the power of myths in the Hawaiian landscape, which reminds her of her own tribal stories so much, because "The myths, stories are still fluid and are present in the mountains, fields, rivers and oceans. They are in the names, the dances, in everything", she admits (Harjo and Winder, 29), a whole web whose threads demand good care, protocol and respect not to be broken, but rather to maintain their energy healthy and wise.

Furthermore, in an interview with Laura Coltelli, "The Circular Dream", Harjo tells us about a "land-based language" (*The Spiral of Memory*, 70), as she herself calls it, and in the way she explains the relationship between the motion of the Earth ground and the birth of a child in the poem "For Alva Benson, And For Those Who Have Learned To Speak". She wrote this poem to honour Alva Benson, an American Indian student at the University of New Mexico, a member of the organization Kiva Club and an activist who struggled against the destructive exploration of Black Mesa to extract coal and uranium. This woman, who died in an accident, gave birth to her daughter in the land of the volcano "Loowit", the "northwest tribal name for Mount Saint Helens" (*How We Became Human*, 210). In the first lines of this poem, Harjo draws the image of the ground that speaks at the time of giving birth to the child, at the same time that she also speaks of the mother who can hear and answer in Navajo and thus develop a conversation with the land itself:

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.

(She Had Some Horses, 8)

The expression “And the ground spoke” enunciates the dialectic between the land and the language spoken by the mother, which suggests that language does not exist by itself and isolated but it comes from the land and enhances the spiritual link of the relationship between the land and the people. This is a very particular aspect of American Indian cultures that Harjo reiterates when she quotes the Spokane American Indian writer Gloria Bird: “In our stories ... our relationship to the mountains as characters ... is one of human-to-human” (*How We Became Human*, 210).

On the other hand, Harjo suggests a catastrophe caused by the earthquake which resulted in destruction but, at the same time, also brought the birth of new life according to the analogy that she draws when she speaks of the child and the body which “went on talking” in the second stanza of the poem:

Or maybe it was the Indian Hospital
in Gallup. The ground still spoke beneath
mortar and concrete. She strained against the
metal stirrups, and they tied her hands down
because she still spoke with them when they
muffled her screams. But her body went on
talking and the child was born into their
hands, and the child learned to speak
both voices.

(She Had Some Horses, 8)

At the moment of giving birth the land was also giving continuance to life and to the Navajo tradition and language. Language is thus deeply grounded and this means it is heritage. With regard to this, Harjo shows evidence of her responsibility as an activist since she is helping American Indian readers and listeners to recall and maintain myths of creation and the Earth itself, emergence stories which forge a way to resist destruction, a way to survive and rebuild identity. It can also suggest a way of resilience against colonization, its money and greedy power, combined with oppression. In the same way as mothers endure their hard task of giving birth, a task that imposes pain so do American Indians live through a process of resistance and love. This is a feminist point of view concerning women's activities that make living possible, besides bearing and rearing children.

At the same time, Harjo tells us that "the child learned to speak / both voices", a piece of information which expresses that American Indians have to learn the colonizers' language composed of written words. However, the child resists by listening to the voice of her ancestors as well as of the land thus strengthening the value of storytelling and oral tradition, the language of spoken words:

She grew up talking in Navajo, in English
and watched the earth around her shift and change
with the people in the towns and in the cities
learning not to hear the ground as it spun around
beneath them. She learned to speak for the ground,
the voice coming through her like roots that
have long hungered for water. Her own daughter
was born, like she had been, in either place
or all places, so she could leave, leap
into the sound she had always heard,
a voice like water, like the gods weaving
against sundown in a scarlet light.

(She Had Some Horses, 8)

In contrast to her experience of traditional, tribal life learning, the urban people did not know the cyclic language of the Earth and its mellifluous sounds of harmony and healing, a language of birth, renewal and fecundity, as well as of motion against destruction, starvation or many other human problems. The “land-based language”, according to Harjo, enables the Earth ground and the land in which living energy is embedded and the people to understand each other, to communicate by listening and speaking in the same “harmonic motion”. The volcanic action of “*Loowit*” or Mount Saint Helens and the mother’s contraction, both give birth to a new world, another world that will follow the cyclic time steps of life, over and over again, throughout the Earth’s life, as she mentions in the last stanza of the poem:

The child now hears names in her sleep.
They change into other names, and into others.
It is the ground murmuring, and Mount Saint Helena
erupts as the harmonic motion of a child turning
inside her mother’s belly waiting to be born
to begin another time.

And we go on, keep giving birth and watch
ourselves die, over and over.
And the ground spinning beneath us
goes on talking.

(She Had Some Horses, 8-9)

In the interweaving progress of so many different grounds with diverse people and assorted languages another world emerges and evolves in multicultural relationships.

Diversity sharing claims respect

Harjo’s perspective on the world in general is that: “We have always been multicultural” (Harjo and Winder, 63) in the sense that people and places have been open to all sorts of influences through contacts and interrelationships as they exchange gifts,

goods and share moments, and then the increasing mobility due to the evolution and expansion of the means of communication and transportation. That is why Harjo focuses on the fact that “All kinds of influences washed through”, adding that “This has been going on since the world was created” (Harjo and Winder, 63). In fact, the modern world is more multicultural but multiculturalism is not necessarily an innovative process; however, it is important to remember that people’s consciousness needs to be re-inspired and renewed in order to acknowledge the chain of biodiversity of the Earth and all its links. With regard to this, Hawai’i offers a particularly multicultural landscape, and it is one of Harjo’s “homes”, a place she feels a special link to. In Hawai’i Harjo found ancestral links, because there are many Indigenous people there. Indeed, because of the displacement caused by the USA’s governmental policies of American Indian removal, many people, “over five hundred indigenous nations and cultures” (Harjo and Winder, 64) spread all over the continent, even to Hawai’i, to escape death and in search of survival. These peoples teach us an American Indian view of the world about reciprocity: “We live in give and take. That’s basic human law, and many Indigenous cultures still practice it” (Harjo and Winder, 64). The ocean, with its deep mysteries one can learn to trust, and other blessings such as rain arriving from the Pacific, the pollen blowing, running horses, the plants and their roles, all things and people on Earth concern the American Indians’ view of balance and wellness by the intertwining of all living systems, commonly known as biodiversity nowadays. In addition to this truth, Harjo reminds us of coca, corn, tobacco and other plants’ value, as they are alive “beings and require respect and singing if they are to be helpful” (Harjo and Winder, 65). For example, tobacco is a “powerful plant” and “the power gets angry when misused” (Harjo and Winder, 65) because it causes lung disease or cancer and other serious illnesses like strokes and heart problems. According to the Muskogee story of the tobacco plant, tribal people discovered its sweet smell when its leaves were burnt, which showed it was of high value, so they agreed to use them in ritual ceremonial times. As Harjo explains in her notes to the collection of poems *How We Became Human, New and Selected Poems: 1975 – 2001*, the Creeks “gave it the war name *hitci*” (232), because of its strong power only comparable to the spirit of warrior. The kind of ceremonial way of sharing gifts identifies people and acknowledges

who they really are and their culture, their true indigenous origins, their sincere thoughts or feelings – important values as Harjo says in the last lines of the poem “Protocol”:

When we meet at the gates of power you honor me with pikake and maile
and a chant that allows me to paddle with you into the water
so I will not be known as a stranger.

I offer you coral and tobacco and a song that will make us vulnerable
to the shimmer of the heart, allow us to walk the roots
with our peoples through any adversity to sunrise.

This is how I know myself.

This is how I know who you are.

(*A Map to the Next World*, 116-117)

In Indigenous cultures, just as in Japanese, Nepalese and other cultures across the world, the act of giving and taking is so valuable and honourable that children are told about this procedure in terms of ceremony, a ritual through which they learn to share naturally simple but very important things – water, food, kindness, because good values must be preserved and children are the new generation, that is to say, they mean the continuance of life. In an interview with Lorie Roy (2009) in *Soul Talk, Song Language*, Harjo explains why the protagonist of her book *For a Girl Becoming* is advised about the ritual act of protocol, and the reason is that “It is important that the child reading about and participating in the story understand that protocol means respect. It is respect for oneself, gifts, and everyone’s place in the world”, Harjo claims (Harjo and Winder, 66).

Harjo’s poetry reflects multiple fields and areas of action. As a daughter of tribal American Indians, she thinks and also realises that Hawaiians and Muskogee people have much in common. They even share stories that link them to each other. Therefore Harjo deeply feels and witnesses Hawai’i being destroyed. Life follows a cyclic process that matches with the spiral of memory and time in the relation to the myth of creation which conveys knowledge about transformation concerning the mystery of life and death. This cyclic evolving process is focused in the poem “Rushing the Pali” where the words are images of a spiritual reality that contrasts with the other geographic reality composed of

the beautiful paradisiac landscape. Harjo wrote it between 1999 and 2001, it is part of her work *New Poems* in which she shows her concerns about the endangered environment, the Earth revealed as a threatened paradise alongside with other causes of social political tensions. The Pali represents the memory of the past which is connected to both Chief Kamehameha's warriors and O'ahu warrior who fought in order to unite the islands, unsuccessfully though. Today the Pali is the name of one of the most important roads on the island of O'ahu, a highway which links one side of the island to the other. This modern asphalted commodity in terms of connecting places and people is also a symbol of technological progress and an image of the speedy mobility in our present world. Conversely, it changed the land in a way that human beings will never be able to replace what was destroyed nor will create such beauties as the land of Hawai'i shows: "a perfect creation" in symbiosis with its inhabitants who wonder "how we came to be / here, next to the flowers / teased by winds / who travel freely back and forth / from the other side", just as Harjo says in the poem. In this connection, the Hawaiian word "Pali" means "cliff" but alongside this meaning it is also related to something that generates tension or conflicts, as in the poem:

There's not enough time,
no puka to squeeze through
the head, then the shoulder
then the rest of it
a perfect creation
with hands, feet, and
a mystical heart.
It's too late.
I've promised a ride
to hula, and then
I am to paddle
to Kewalo
and back in sprint time
that is after the cleaners

and a few phone
calls to figure out how
to remove
mildew from synthetics.
There is holy woven
through all life
if that is so then even in the rush
can be found
mythic roots for example how
this island was formed
from desire and fire
from the bottom of the sea
and how we came to be
here, next to the flowers
teased by winds
who travel freely back and forth
from the other side.
I am attracted
by the songs of the holy
curling indigo,
sea turtles alongside the canoe
or a mist of elegant consciousness
floating above the clatter
of annoyance.
There was dawn and the color
of ashes just before the sun
when the spirits of dancers before us
joined and the earth moved
lightly because she was
moved.
Singing is behind it.
We can sing ourselves
to the store or eternity as surely

as we were born into
this world naked and smeared
with blood and fight.
No time to keep putting off
these thoughts of the holy
first one petal, and then
another, like sunrise
over the Pacific
until there is a perfect human.
And the rain over the Pali
as we slow for a stop,
and then the traffic starts
all over again.

(How We Became Human, 195-197)

The process of life creation and survival occurs in a spiral of time that starts quickly as “There’s not enough time”, “It’s too late”, “and back in sprint time”. These express the gradual diversified growth and increase of people and everything. As a continuous multicultural landscape “There is holy woven / through all life” that shows obvious evidence of its origins “even in the rush”, the world and the Earth move and shake while the undesirable elements like mildew, a very small fungus, are destroyed as a result of crude oil spilled in the sea water, an ecological catastrophe and evidence of the industrial and technological development of the Euro-American power. This suggests a metaphor in the sense that colonizers, Euro-American states’ governments, have neglected and ignored American Indians by considering them just another racial minority who can be destroyed as a side effect of “development”. Such tensions caused by displacement, oppression and death cannot destroy the American Indians’ strength because “There is holy woven through all life” and dreams that carry much energy. Death gives way to Life and new opportunities to generate new life, which resists just like sea turtles and also springs the same way as the winds spread the pollen into flowers and plants so that they produce seeds, and thus reproduce themselves. Personal motion, a pervading magnetic power, compels Harjo to take responsibility and do something for the Hawaiian peaceful

but oppressed people: “I am attracted by the songs of the holy indigo”, an action which soon awakens the collective consciousness “and the earth moved lightly because she was moved” and something new is being born “when the spirits of dancers before us joined” to face all angers, tensions and riots with compassion, hope and love as when you were born, and you had to struggle for life, an ongoing movement that must not be cancelled just as by the end of the poem Harjo emphasizes, “No time to keep putting it off”. The links of time – space - myth – life – death are so perfectly interconnected that the result becomes the whole, spirit and matter:

until there is a perfect human.

And then rain over the Pali

(How We Became Human, 197)

In this process a new cycle of life is taking place, a new hope in the change of those violent and annoying circumstances of life. The whole poem suggests that loss is followed by renewal occurring through a process of transformation that is common among humans and thus the need to maintain an awareness of this mystery.

Still concerning the mystery of creation, the elements air and water are always present through the images of breath and rain within Harjo’s poems as they constitute links to American Indians’ traditions and cultures added to the link of ceremony. Human beings exist because the Earth, this home where we were born, where we come from, supports our life and thus it deserves respect and ethical care. In the poem “It Is Raining In Honolulu” it is remarkable how Harjo works the dichotomy birth/death to mean both sides of life and uses the metaphor of the dance of rain and the power of water to mean new life forms on Earth and new hopes. In their everyday experiences of life people face dangers and difficulties but also joys. Such a ceremony engages people in the interconnection and interweaving of all things and beings, and Harjo calls them to participate, as she tells the story:

There is a small mist at the brow of the mountain,

each leaf of flower, of taro, tree and bush shivers with ecstasy.
And the rain songs of all the flowering ones who have called for the rain
can be found there, flourishing beneath the currents of singing.
Rain opens us, like flowers, or earth that has been thirsty for more than a season.
We stop all of our talking, quit thinking, or blowing sax to drink the mystery.
We listen to the breathing beneath our breathing.
This is how the rain became rain, how we became human.
The wetness saturates everything, including the perpetrators of the second overthrow.
We will plant songs where there were curses.

(How We Became Human, 194)

Everybody respects the moment, keeps silence in order to enjoy the secret and sacred process: altogether, the Earth and the human beings drink the same water, the same source that feeds their life. By the end of the poem in the lines “We listen to the breathing beneath our breathing. / This is how the rain became rain, how we became human”, Harjo suggests that everybody is conscious of a time of change when people feel they are alive and know they go on living because a new life is being born or generated. It is the moment to celebrate “how we became human” which means how the people started being able to tell things, observing, speaking, being witnesses and using a language of responsibility as activists, and being spiritually and emotionally involved in doing something to transform their social living conditions, even if using and appropriating the English language, according to the last line but one of the poem, the same language of “the perpetrators of the second overthrow”, the colonizers that caused American Indians’ displacement. However, according to the Earth’s laws, all people are integral members of the universe, both evil and kind characters take part in the abundant meal the Earth offers, and all of them inextricably interwoven help themselves round the same table. In this sense, water brings benefits, healing, harmony and it helps people to be able to transform hate into compassion and love. In addition, because “All acts of kindness are lights in the war for justice” (“Reconciliation”, *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, xv) Harjo emphasizes the good power of water which can clean with “songs where there were curses”, so that water gives back positive strength to the body and the spirit.

The dichotomy construction/creation versus destruction/genocide is closely involved in Harjo's work in the concept of displacement. Concerning American Indians' views of belonging and connection to the land, "[d]isplacement is a spiritual condition" (*The Spiral of Memory*, 75), therefore there is both a physical and a spiritual link to the landscape where their houses are not only synonymous of spiritual roots but also the place where Indigenous people can find the table, a crucial component to release the human heart. In this regard, Harjo explains that "A house can be a home (...) Natives' houses were taken over and destroyed" (Harjo and Winder, 66), but their heritage is alive, because there is something particular that feeds people and pumps their blood to the heart just as Harjo says in the poem "When the World as we knew it ended":

But then there were seeds to plant and the babies
who needed milk and comforting, and someone
picked up a guitar or ukulele from the rubble
and began to sing about the light flutter
the kick beneath the skin of the earth.

(*How We Became Human*, 199-200)

As a poet, Harjo feels her heart takes her where she has to go, travelling and meeting people, getting to know original stories and speaking them out, making each story part of a larger place and the "poem then becomes a home, sometimes with a glimpse, an eye toward the story of origin, or a place for the human understanding" (*The Spiral of Memory*, 76), moments of tension which demand from the poet the need, such as she affirms, "to learn that my home is within me. I can take it everywhere. It's always there" (*The Spiral of Memory*, 76). In the light of this, a highly significant perspective is contained in *Secrets from the Centre of the World*, as Harjo posits it at the beginning of the prose poem: "My House is the red earth; it could be the centre of the world" (2), and not only for her or for other human beings but also for other members of Earth such as, for example, the crow which "understands the centre of the world as greasy scraps of fat" and then "perches on the blue bowl of the sky, and laughs" (2).

Ethical care against tension

As a Creek poet, humour is both part of her culture and that of other American Indians, even at times of misfortune, as she notes in the last lines of her poem “Anchorage”:

Everyone laughed at the impossibility of it,
but also the truth. Because who would believe
the fantastic and terrible story of all of our survival
those who were never meant
to survive?

(She Had Some Horses, 5)

According to Harjo’s belief in the power of words and the voice as “the instrument of the spirit” (Harjo and Winder, 46), her voice emphasizes the need to have a good sense of humour as a strategy to resist and survive, because they all know the survival story was both true and very sad, so sad that it “had to be funny” (*The Spiral of Memory*, 35). As Harjo explains, “it’s like a big joke that any of us are here because they tried so hard to make sure we weren’t, you know, either kill our spirits, move us from one place to another, try to take our minds and our hearts” (*The Spiral of Memory*, 21). The poem “Anchorage” tells stories, stories of people, of women and all those who, unfortunately, suffer injustice as a result of adverse events or other types of tension they have had to face:

And I think of the 6th Avenue jail, of mostly native
and black men, where Henry told about being shot at
eight times outside a liquor store in L.A., but when
the car sped away he was surprised he was alive,
no bullet holes, man, and eight cartridges strewn
on the sidewalk
all around him.

(She Had Some Horses, 5)

Although the pronoun “I” means the first person, it does not refer to the storyteller, but to one of those prisoners. It appears that Harjo decides on her invisibility throughout the poem so that the main focus of attention is on the characters, thus the human being in each of them, and the group, becomes visible. This suggests Harjo’s strategy to develop the individual’s responsibility and, simultaneously, to call attention towards a more balanced social justice, as if she was using oral tradition practices, so that readers and listeners ought to pay attention to the facts as in storytelling:

We keep on breathing, walking, but softer now,
the clouds whirling in the air above us.
What can we say that would make us understand
better than we do already?

(She Had Some Horses, 4)

Harjo pursues the story engaging each person’s responsibility, awareness, care and respect for an issue that is more collective than personal, and therefore it becomes important to be shared:

Except to speak of her home and claim her
as our own history, and know that our dreams
don’t end here, two blocks away from the ocean
where our hearts still batter away at the muddy shore.

(She Had Some Horses, 4)

In this poem not only does the reader encounter the language spoken by a group of people, a community or a nation, “as we make our way through this world of skewed justice” (*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, 29), but also other sounds, which are part of the story, like the sound of gunfire, or the sound of men’s voices that are in the room. Besides, in this poem, everything suggests various forces or worlds moving in a convergent way towards the story, so that the story becomes a whole world composed of

image, voice, sound, information, knowledge, experience, memory which “was always more than paper” (*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, 43), just as in the dynamic of oral tradition. Harjo uses a multicultural language closely linked to political concerns. According to Jenny Goodman, poets such as Joy Harjo can “expand conventional notions of poetry and public discourse through innovative combinations of experimental poetics, political statement, and autobiographical lyric” (40). At the same time, as an artist who can sensitively interweave poetic and political language, she leaves her meanings for both literary readers and ordinary readers who share political experiences, for example, the struggle for liberation and recovery of their lost identity. Harjo reminds readers and listeners about having ethical attitudes in life and feeling responsibility to those who suffer. The poetry of American Indian minorities or outsiders and marginalized people appears to be always necessary and always a useful political tool to fight for liberation. In her work “Poetry is not a Luxury”, the feminist activist and poet Audré Lorde, to whom Harjo addresses the poem “Anchorage”, says that poetry “is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before” (*Sister Outsider*, 38). What emerges as evidence of a constant crossing of borders is the way Harjo expresses personal and social problems, the way she feels the needs of people in trouble, particularly all those whose sense of self is debilitated and sick because of hunger, violence, injustice and hatred, no matter their ethnicity and cultural background since they are part of the universal group of human beings. Furthermore, she admits that she “first came up to Alaska in the early eighties to go to the jails and prisons and help prisoners with poetry” (Harjo and Winder, 108). In the 1980s Harjo visited four different penal institutions, including a women’s prison, full of discriminated against silent human beings who were looking forward to speaking, singing and telling about their suffering. There were white men, who had gone to Alaska to work on the pipelines, but most of the prisoners were Afro-Americans or American Indians, people of poor social living conditions, without money for lawyers, and most of them were arrested for being people abandoned to their misfortune in hazardous places. Other individuals go through frequent difficulties in their life and are completely marginalized as if they were invisible or not important. Social problems referred to in this poem such as,

for example, alcohol, discrimination, violence or poverty were the reason for the tears, shame, desperation and lack of hope of most of the prisoners locked in those jails, people with a heart who were able to feel and recite poems. Taking into account the three times Harjo visited these places as she informs us in the section of Notes at the end of her book *How We Became Human, New and Selected Poems: 1975 – 2001*, Harjo admits that she “learned intimately the power of spoken and written word, how steel bars, fear, and oppression can be relieved by songs, poetry, and stories” (208). She noticed that every time she visited the jail more and more participants, all men, would sit around and talk, laugh, show a sense of humour, which means they were being human.

Anchorage is a city in Alaska, described by the poem’s speaker who says “This city is made of stone, of blood, and fish” (*She Had Some Horses*, 4), which works as a hint of the place’s profile and its most important details: the ground and the life of human beings and other beings, for example, fish. In addition, this last word of the first line of the poem also informs of the existence of water, certainly the most necessary element to create life:

There are Chugatach Mountains to the east
and whale and seal to the west.

(She Had Some Horses, 4)

At the same time, Harjo reiterates the cyclic duality life-death in order to remind the readers of Mother Earth’s moments of change, which often include serious catastrophes. As a warning, she tells about the fragility of human creations such as, for example, all the concrete buildings in the city of Anchorage which, in March 1964 was severely devastated by a very powerful earthquake, an irremediable situation for a lot of its inhabitants who didn’t survive. In the light of this, another aspect that defines American Indian cultures is their perspective on time which is circular and not linear as Euro-Americans perceive it. Accordingly, Harjo shows evidence of that particular characteristic here in this poem: the present is the past and the past is the future. Besides the social problems referred to in this poem, which are connected to alcohol, discrimination, violence and poverty, Harjo

starts by recalling ecological knowledge in terms of giving advice about future catastrophes, frequently caused by powerful mysterious energy, which might occur and destroy human lives and their houses:

It hasn't always been this way, because glaciers
who are ice ghosts create oceans, carve earth
and shape this city here, by the sound.
They swim backwards in time.

Once a storm of boiling earth cracked open
the streets, threw open the town.
It's quiet now, but underneath the concrete
it is the cooking earth,
 and above that, air
which is another ocean, where spirits we can't see
are dancing joking getting full
on roasted caribou, and the praying
goes on, extends out.

Nora and I go walking down 4th Avenue
and know it is all happening.
On a park bench we see someone's Athabaskan
grandmother, folded up, smelling like 200 years
of blood and piss, her eyes closed against some
unimagined darkness, where she is buried
in an ache in which nothing makes sense.

(She Had Some Horses, 4)

Harjo evokes an expanded identity through this poem, in the sense that in the same way and at the same moment when tribal people were relocated, storytelling helped them to get adapted to the new landscapes and showed that for every action there is a reaction.

From their tribal culture American Indians have learned to accept who they are as people and as communities, and difficult times have taught them to strive for balance and harmony, and thus to respect their gifts and the others' gifts, too. In spite of having been confined by assimilation policies, American Indians reacted bravely and persistently in their resistance in order to survive. In this connection, descendants of American Indian families, who moved to large cities such as, for example, Chicago and Los Angeles in the 1930s – 1950s, are still living the consequences of displacement and acculturation which have often not been positive for human beings' dignity.

Poetry, a major guardian of human beings' sense of self

Nowadays, both the spoken and the written word, oral stories and written narratives or poems, are resources that can help the evolution of communities in modern technological globalizing times. On the other hand, contemporary American Indians often feel they must also go back to the starting point, to the story of knowing who they are and how they came to be. In this sense they are providing support and guidance to go forward into the next step that is who they are becoming. That means, a story behind the story of the history of American Indian communities will go on and on into the next generation, and therefore, the identities of their selves and their nations are kept. Considering Kenneth Burke's theory of rhetoric referred to by Jenny Goodman (42) the political dimension of literature results in public responsibility and awareness for the reason that beliefs and values are shared and persuade people to regain confidence in their identity and the path of their life. If so, stories become living beings and they survive because they are being told over and over again whether recorded in the oral tradition or written down in contemporary literary ways. According to Harjo, "writing can help change the world" and this process is meaningful, it works like sound waves as she says, "Sound is an extension of all, and sound is spirit, motion. Everything, anything that anybody says, it does go out and makes change in the world", therefore it becomes public and very important, "very political" in the sense that "political means great movers (...) it does help move and change consciousness in terms of how different peoples and cultures are seen, evolve" (*The Spiral of Memory*, 31). Furthermore, the oral tradition flows in Harjo's mind

and her poetry is accessible to both literary and common readers, a kind of language full of a spiritual view of the world, particularly remarkable when that world carries difficulty and tension. With regard to this, Goodman emphasizes the fact that even “[s]peaking of things that would normally go unsaid is a way of describing not only poetic freedom but political freedom as well” (44), especially when the ways of saying such things are often rejected by mainstream American culture.

To Indigenous communities, Mother Earth’s things such as a rock, a tree, or a cloud are all seen as relatives provided with spirit and thus are seen as “kin” in relationship to each other. The relationship of natural living to the whole world is important. Therefore, the presence of these spirits is to be acknowledged and preserved alive; they cannot be excluded from the work even of a contemporary writer. This particular aspect is an essential part of American Indian identities, a reality you cannot separate, as you cannot separate human reason from emotion because the brain and the “heart” are parts of the whole body. Moreover, myth and the spiritual world remain key elements in the balance and harmony between both physical and intellectual worlds. It is important to preserve and develop American Indian literature, Indigenous communities’ literature, to help define cultural identities. American Indian people of modern times have got both cultural and political citizenship, as a result of their assimilation (albeit often a disguised segregation) and acculturation, but have never really wanted to assimilate to Western ways of separating selves from the surrounding world.

Citizens of American Indian origin identify themselves by tribal town, clan affiliation, tribal affiliation, then Indigenous ancestry, for example, Muskogee/Creek Nation, recognizing the identity and deeds of ancestors, the place of birth, and their ancestors’ place of birth, and the meaning of relationship to the birthplace and to the landscape. Everything is interrelated. Mixed blood tribal identity has appeared and increased in urban areas in the U.S.A. and far away from ancestral homelands, which has raised another complex issue for many American Indian people, including Joy Harjo whose mother was of Cherokee and French ancestry. Her father’s mother was of full Creek descent, from a nation of tribeswomen and tribesmen who were well-known speakers and leaders, and she also descends from Menawa/Monahwee ancestors. Her great-great-

grandfather Monahwee and the Red Sticks fought the seventh president of the U.S.A., Andrew Jackson, at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. Her Creek ancestors were well-known speakers and leaders.

Although Harjo's educational and cultural experience has been mainly urban, she feels she is "a global citizen in these times", by which she means that looking "at the context: human spirit versus the spirits of the earth, sky and universe. We are part of a much larger force of sense and knowledge" (Harjo and Winder, 31), a view that is different from the standard European-American view that perceives the human being as the unique centre of the world. Apart from gender or ethnic origins, Harjo solves problems through reference to a common feature that is human character, because we are all human beings and necessarily linked by a significant homogenous consciousness, which means we do not live in isolation, we are moved by spiritual strength, a sort of inner fire whose origins are common to all living things on Earth that is the home, space and landscape of all human beings.

Harjo often feels the need to return home, to landscapes where she can find the energy and the balance to go on living in harmony with herself and others including the community, and it does not matter whether the others are American Indians, African Americans or other human beings who come from other directions. In this context, as a woman and as a poet, Harjo has recreated the concept of "home" as a decolonizing process of getting people together and helping the development and evolution of a community.

My journey on this earth in this life is marked by a path of red earth that leads from the mounds at Ocmulgee in what is now known as Georgia, to the Battle of Horseshoe Bend site at a curve in the Talapoosa River in now-Alabama, to the Mvskoke Creek Nation in now-Oklahoma, to the grounds of Indian school in now-New Mexico, and since that collection has taken me to the red earth of O'ahu. It makes a distinct path. It is the color of blood, it is the color of a collection of stars, it is the color of life, of breath. And, as anything in life that is a vital part of us, it needs to be fed with songs, poems; it needs to be remembered, hence, this collection

of poetic prose and photographs.

This earth asks for so little from us human beings.

(*How We Became Human*, xxiii)

Both approaches to home and community are basically interconnected and crucial to American Indians' identity. Besides Hawai'i, Harjo finds home in other places, other landscapes. In the book *In Mad Love and War*, the prose poem "Rainy Dawn" tells about Joy Harjo's personal identity, a family context grounded in different communities. In the first lines of this prose poem, the expression "looking south and west from the hospital, the approximate direction of Acoma, and farther on to the roofs of the houses of the gods who have learned there are no endings, only beginnings"(32) suggests the constant presence of the concept of identity; as does the poem "A Map to the Next World" in which Harjo approaches the quest of loss of identity when she reminds that "Monsters are born there of nuclear anger" added to the fact that American Indians "no longer know the names of the birds here, how to speak to them by their names", links in their identity that are very important to the people (*A Map to the Next World*, 19).

The name "Dawn" becomes a name that bears a certain ancestral cultural burden as well as a space where tribal identities, traditions and experiences as different as these of the Acoma and the Muskogee people merge. Harjo reminds us that "ancestors lined up to give you a name made of their dreams cast once more into this stew of precious spirit and flesh" (*In Mad Love and War*, 32) suggesting that the child carries in her existence as in her name the promise and the hopes of tribal culture and tradition. It also appears that ancestors establish the harbours of their experience and wisdom to which the young, and still innocent generations can anchor, a safe home. When mother and daughter "both stood poised at that door from the east, listened for a long time to the sound of our grandmothers' voices", it indicates they are linked to their female ancestors who had once believed in the continuance of their people's life as Harjo shows in the use of the pronoun "it" in the last sentence "Then was your promise to take it on like the rest of us, this immense journey, for love, for rain" (*In Mad Love and War*, 32). The birth ceremony is celebrated in this poem as "the mythic world is re-evoked and ritualized", says Laura Coltelli in the introduction she wrote to the book of interviews *The Spiral of Memory* (9).

She explains it is a dynamic process to reaffirm ancient heritages and moves forward in a constant renewal of memory links between the world of myths and personal / community events. In 1986 Joy Harjo and Simon Ortiz's daughter was turning thirteen years old when her mother wrote this story, a poem for her and with her name: "Rainy Dawn". Harjo expresses her concerns about the time of transformation from girlhood to womanhood and, since memory is both individual and collective, she tells her daughter: "I had to participate in the dreaming of you into memory (*In Mad Love and War*, 32). Harjo here tells a true story that seems to outline the future continuity of the collective American Indian identity, a great responsibility to revitalize hope and to strengthen belief in the American Indian people's survival. It emphasizes the great importance of storytelling as a crucial means of transferring American Indian identity from one generation to the next and across two generations, and forthcoming generations.

In this connection, the cultural values of "dawn" are highlighted in the poem. In his essay "Dawn / Is a Good Word, Naming an Emergent Motif of Contemporary Native American Poetry", Robert M. Nelson recalls that "in 1973 (...) a child was born to Joy Harjo and Simon Ortiz. They named her Rainy Dawn. Both Harjo and Simon were already becoming powerful voices in the very young field of published contemporary Native American poetry" (207). In 1992 occurred the "Returning the Gift" festival in Norman, an important event for American Indian peoples as it gathered together a very large number of different communities, and Rainy Dawn became a mother:

In that same year another elder of Native American poetry, Carter Revard, celebrated the birth of Rainy Dawn's daughter, Krista Rae, in 'When Earth Brings', a poem that appeared first as the final poem of his 1993 collection *An Eagle Nation* and again in the *Returning the Gift* anthology published a year later. (...) it is good to take this historical and familial context into account when reading it, for at least two reasons. For one, Revard directly invokes this context by naming 'Joy', 'Simon', 'Rainy Dawn', and 'Krista Rae' in the dedicatory epigraph to the poem (For Joy and Daisy, grandmothers; for Simon, grandfather; for Rainy Dawn and Chris, parents; for Krista Rae, child; and for all our relatives). A second reason is that Revard has crafted the poem's controlling motif and core theme, "dawn", to function as what I want to call a *merge site*. By this I mean that in Revard's use of the term, dawn becomes a place where, and a time when Harjo's Creek

and Ortiz's Acoma and Revard's own Osage origin traditions not only intersect but also merge in the image of a grandchild who is both metaphorically and literally Dawn's offspring, the next living generation of the People.

(Nelson, 208)

This passage explains the importance of family links and the birth of new generations, stories in the stories, an integral part of contemporary American Indian communities' heritage. It symbolises the interconnection and growing of tribal relationships in which more stories can enrich their culture, and the birth celebration of American Indian poetry of different traditional communities and backgrounds. Also, the metaphor "dawn" combines ideas of emergence, survival, return, renewal and hope. This birth celebration and the gathering of several great contemporary poets who come from different traditional tribal communities (Chickasaw, Acoma, Creek, Navajo and Osage) are images that represent a cyclical movement. The name "Dawn" connotes diverse images/symbols of American Indian cultures such as, for example:

- the sunrise means the time when the sun emerges from the Earth horizon and from the land, which means light and the start of another day, the first signs of new hopes;
- the red colour means the American Indian ethnicity, life and character;
- the birth of an individual, a human being, a plant;
- the renewal of cultural awareness and collective identity.

All these meanings come to work as metaphors that can represent the dream of return and the vision of the journey back home for American Indian people, such as Linda Hogan explains in the introduction that she wrote for the book of her poems *Calling Myself Home*, and which is quoted by Nelson in his essay "Dawn / Is a Good Word, Naming an Emergent Motif of Contemporary Native American Poetry":

For American Indian people the journey home is what tells us our human history, the mystery of our lives here, and leads us towards fullness and strength (...) an identification with my tribe and the Oklahoma earth, a deep knowing and telling how I was formed of these two powers called ancestors and clay (...) they are home speaking through me. Home is in

blood, and I am still on the journey of calling myself home (208).

In this context of strong links to tribal community identity, Nelson emphasizes the powerful meaning in the American Indian view of the word “dawn” as a time when young people or children find out something new or still unknown and he adds: “Early on, the motif also incorporates a second tribally nonspecific element: the idea of Native identity becomes grounded in place, in the land” (Nelson, 210).

Harjo’s family story teaches us the concepts of ancestry and place of origin, of discovery and return, the way they are interrelated, and highlights the use of the metaphor “dawn” as one guarantee for the survival of American Indian identities. In this connection, the English word “dawn” becomes transformed into a powerful American Indian word in the sense that it expresses the springing up of a new generation that brings the continuance of the community, the ongoing of life, heritage, memory, all in all, the proceeding of the spiral of life. In the anthology *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language* Joy Harjo accounts for that truth when she says “It is with the birth of children that history is given form and voice” (56). It appears that the most meaningful metaphors that appeal to American Indian poets are usually those that combine elements of tribal tradition with their contemporary experience of life. This also applies to Harjo, in the sense that she finds ancient understanding in the moon, journeys, relationships, womanhood, airports, highways, urban areas, Indian bars, city streets, reservations, rodeo grounds, powwows, and in her poems she articulates the ancient and the contemporary facts of life, hers and others’, personally and collectively. The fact of being an American citizen and an American Indian represents a circumstance of life that implies a dual or multiple perception of the world.

These ideas can be associated with the poem “3 AM”, particularly the concept “travel”, an important theme in Harjo’s poetry. It represents a significant reference in human beings’ life with regard to American Indian spiritual images and their connection to the land. Trails, journey, maps, flight are images of travel which bring close contact with the past, not so much from a nostalgic view point or emotional wish to return to old customs, but rather as a source of memory alive. In this poem Harjo’s voice claims “Old Oraibi,

Third Mesa” is “a part of the center of the world” (*How We Became Human*, 8). She certainly means it is the place of origin of someone, a community or a tribal people. According to Robert Nelson,

In the narrator’s present, ‘home’ – Indian country, represented in the text by two ancient sites: ‘Old Oraibi’ and ‘Acoma’ lies west of where they are. The villages of Old Oraibi and Acoma are generally considered to be the two oldest continually occupied sites in North America. Early in the poem, ‘Oraibi’ functions as a generic Native American origin place, recognizable as such to Hopis but also to Creeks (210).

In the first lines of the poem Harjo takes us to the airport in Albuquerque, a place of diversity associated with people in transit at the same time that it works as a symbol of technological progress and social development, an image of a globalized country, a space where human beings may experience varied feelings such as, for example, fear, excitement, insecurity or allowing our imagination to fly with respect to our personal future or the country and its communities. Harjo has frequently travelled through this airport, where she certainly lived and learned multiple stories, (tragically, Louis Owens even committed suicide at Albuquerque airport). In contrast, she presents the reverse of such a symbol by turning towards the past as she tells us that she and Ortiz want to get to the mythical American Indian (Hopi) ancestral communities in Third Mesa, where there is no airport; however, it offers another perspective of the world, a space where human beings can certainly feel that they are safe and at home. From the future, Harjo departs to the past in order to live the present and, in the form she starts this poem, she establishes a disjunction between different ways of connecting the world.

in the Albuquerque airport
trying to find a flight
to Old Oraibi, Third Mesa
TWA
is the only desk open

bright lights outline New York
Chicago
and the attendant doesn't know
that Third Mesa
is a part of the center
of the world

(How We Became Human, 8)

It is symptomatic that the TWA attendants did not know where Third Mesa was situated, despite its being in the next state, Arizona, and despite the Hopi reservation being a well-known site to anyone interested in American Indians. There seems to be a lack of skills in social human relationship, too, as the attendant does not try to suggest a solution for these passengers who want to travel from Albuquerque, New Mexico to Old Oraibi, Third Mesa, even if it does not have an airport. Then, Harjo goes on telling the story in a style that is remarkable, because she speaks in a flowing without punctuation marks as if simply recounting a normal event in the daily life of American Indians:

and who are we
just two Indians
at three in the morning
trying to find a way back

(How We Became Human, 8)

Besides, the phrase "just two Indians" suggests a metaphoric number of minority people among the majority of non-American Indian people who might be in the same departure lounge or queuing at the check-in desk at the airport. Despite the fact that it is 3 o'clock in the morning, which might seem "too late", this time of the night can be seen as an early hour before dawn, when the sun rises, an image for the creation of a new nation. Therefore, it may be understood as a prediction about a return that will soon happen: "trying to find a way back" and that can mean a (re)discovery of identity. This fact is so

important that Harjo calls us to share the moment, the event, the emotion, when she says:

and then I remembered
that time Simon
took a Yellow Cab
out to Acoma from Albuquerque
a twenty-five dollar ride
to the center of himself

(How We Became Human, 8)

Effectively, Harjo introduces the element of return which is central to tribal culture, apart from locating American Indian identity both geographically and ancestrally in personal origins that are for the exemplary Simon Ortiz, “the center of himself”. At the same time, American Indians are closely connected to mainstream lifestyle, as the symbols of Euro-American culture show us, for example, when Ortiz takes a yellow taxi and pays twenty-five dollars to get to his place, his original world where he feels perfectly acknowledged and in a different position from that of his other world. Finally, the last lines of the poem,

3 A.M. is not too late
to find the way back

(How We Became Human, 8)

act as a metaphor to suggest that hope is still present with respect to reaching harmony; there seems to be an evolution of consciousness in terms of both a personal and a collective American Indian identity. Harjo manages to set place and time, as well as people, all together in motion and in an interwoven relationship, just as we know traditional tribal culture encourages.

According to Robert M. Nelson, New Mexico and Oklahoma are not only different landscapes, different geographies, but life and living experiences are different, too. “Such differences of vision are the basis of differences in cultural identities, and in ‘last song’

such a difference underlies the dialogue between the female and male voices about how life gets lived in northeast Oklahoma” (212) as was mentioned earlier in this work with respect to the poem “The Last Song”.

In an interview with Marilyn Kallet (1993) included in the book *The Spiral of Memory* Harjo explains that she feels “any writer serves many aspects of culture, including language, but you must also serve history, you serve the mythic structure that you’re part of, the people, the earth, and so on – and none of those are separate” (111). Her feminist feeling and sensitivity strengthen her role as a voice of truth and justice, the voice of the poet who writes about ordinary life stories that must be told in order to achieve balance. Only balance between “Love and War” can help the continuing existence of Indigenous tribal peoples in the Americas as a whole and coherent people, a belief that Harjo communicates in the “Eagle Poem”:

And know there is more
That you can’t see, can’t hear,
Can’t know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages
That aren’t always sound but other
Circles of motion.
Like eagle that Sunday morning
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky
In wind, swept our hearts clean
With sacred wings.
We see you, see ourselves and know
That we must take the utmost care
And kindness in all things.

(In Mad Love and War, 65)

American Indians are the original inhabitants of the “Turtle Island”, a good reason why they have the right to combat political measures that have sought to extinguish them. In this connection Harjo contends that her work could be understood “as being a prayer for our continuance” (*The Spiral of Memory*, 123) as she speaks up for issues such as

questioning the meaning of being a “Native American” in the twenty-first century, the diverse worlds where American Indians live today, the language they speak, their roots, stories, traditions, memories, and tensions that affect individual and communal identity in the present.

Harjo’s poem from *In Mad Love and War*, “For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, Whose Spirit Is Present Here And in the Dappled Stars (for we remember the story and must tell it again so we may all live)” (7) shows evidence of a sad moment in the contemporary history of American Indians because Harjo tells us about the murder of an activist for American Indian rights in the 1970s, Anna Mae, to whom she speaks as if Anna Mae was alive and facing the poet/speaker,

You are the shimmering young woman
who found her voice,
when you were warned to be silent, or have your body cut away
from you like an elegant weed.

(In Mad Love and War, 7)

In Harjo’s notes about this poem we are informed that “In February 1976, an unidentified body of a young woman was found on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota” (*How We Became Human*, 217). It is a recent past that Harjo brings into the present approximately twenty years after its occurrence. Not only does she honour a Micmac American Indian woman, Anna Mae, with this epic poem, but also helps American Indian peoples to remember the United States government’s policies and their Federal Bureau of Investigation officials who desecrated a human being’s body. In a footnote printed below the poem, Harjo gives information about this casualty. In fact, their political actions went too far in terms of disrespect for Anna Mae, both an American citizen and a human being, who was dead, and who thus could not defend herself when they cut off her hand in order for it to be mailed to Washington DC for fingerprinting.

You are the one whose spirit is present in the dappled stars.
(They prance and lope like colored horses who stay with us

through the streets of these steely cities. And I have seen them
nuzzling the frozen bodies of tattered drunks
on the corner.)

(In Mad Love and War, 7)

On the one hand, this metaphor symbolizes Anna Mae's spirit who lives among the stars in the universe, a space above our world, transcendental, inaccessible to human power, and, on the other hand, the belief in this is so spiritually deep that it might offer encouraging advice for American Indians who live in urban areas. People are encouraged to speak out and tell the truth about their own suffering or victimization. The more they persist in doing this, the more equitable and humane humankind ought to become. By telling the truth about this fact, Harjo attempts to allow American Indians and other people to remember the discriminating, indifferent, cruel reality and actions of the American government. As a traditional speaker, she assures the reader and listener that

(It was the women who told me) and we understood wordlessly the
ripe meaning of your murder.

As I understand ten years later after the slow changing
of the seasons
that we have just begun to touch
the dazzling whirlwind of our anger,
we have just begun to perceive the amazed world the ghost dancers
entered
crazily, beautifully.

(In Mad Love and War, 8)

Furthermore, in the essay "Contemporary Feminist Writers: Envisioning a Just World", Jeannette E. Riley et al. argue that such an action represents not only "the violation of a single individual, but also the dehumanization of Native American peoples throughout history" (97). That explains why this poem is epic, just for the reason that it represents the memory of a whole community or nation that contains history and history holds memory, life and the living experiences of ancestors. Anna Mae's story means a powerful

memory that develops awareness of the resistance and survival of American Indians. Striving for the truth as a means of protest and power, Harjo encourages the awareness of an ethics of care, of respect and responsibility for a better world and a better environment, so that such horrors and unhappy experiences may be avoided and not repeated. Therefore, the poem's conclusion desires readers and listeners, particularly American Indian ones, to pursue that aim with determination and persevere in their legacy, heritage and identity survival.

Harjo's poet's role as an activist for the achievement of justice is central in the poem, a voice that refuses anti-American Indian politics and insists on focusing on the imperative need for reaction, as Rhonda Petit says: American Indians must "acknowledge the past and present atrocities and the fear and anger they cultivate. Then, they must proceed from a point of love, the kind of love that recognizes the interconnection of all things and beings" (quoted by Riley, 97). Between the "Mad Love and War" of this process of justice, Harjo manages to accomplish the desired balance and harmony. Harjo involves the heart in the community and she tells the truth as well as her total disagreement concerning such transgressions, both dishonest and disrespectful actions and policies; thus she finds love as the power that can transform and regenerate injustice, a love power that besides sustaining and balancing can soothe and bring into harmony people's life on Earth as well. In regard to this, Riley agrees that "Harjo's vision of justice merges connection with the environment, the emotional center or one's humanity, and the community" (98). The same view is expressed through words, knowledge and increase of awareness such as Harjo tells us in the poem "The Everlasting" about the activist Ingrid Washinawatok; she starts the poem through warning as a way to claim the readers' and listeners' attention to the story:

This is not Poetry. Poetry cannot exist here
in the field where they killed her.
(...)
The wound in the earth where they took her
is being tended by rain
and flowers.

Oil companies will soon dig crude there,
With their machinery, their money,
And instant cities of missionaries and soldiers
Will beget a countryside
Of children of missionaries and soldiers.

This is the story of the new world, revealed
In the songline gleaming in the dark. It is thin, breakable.

It can be broken into the smallest chips of bone and tears.
It can be put back together with sunrise and flint.

(How We Became Human, 188-191)

A dual perception of the world which American Indians have to face is evidence of two diverging realities in this poem where tensions are violent and destructive. It's the poet's role, the American Indian voice's power, to modulate the anger and bring both balance and reconciliation in order to build a whole meaningful convergent perspective to reach harmony. Metaphor is important in this process to achieve balance between American Indians and the industrial and technological world of Euro-Americans.

This feminist point of view concerning the importance of speaking out the truth as an act of responsibility and justice introduced by Harjo echoes the words of an author quoted by Goodman in her essay "Politics and the Personal Lyric", Denise Levertov: "[t]he political poetry of contemporary America is more often written by active participants and social struggle than it was in the past" (53-54) resulting in an "osmosis of the personal and the public" (Goodman, 35). This procedure can help the process of justice to evolve and might change the reader's attitudes when interpreted from an educational perspective. Contemporary poets have developed awareness and feel continually responsible for the human and social plight as their goal is to accomplish justice, a difficult political issue. From their experience, they observe and take part in the action through the literary production that is poetry, in the sense that, what is personal becomes public. Moreover, according to Levertov, contemporary poets who are engaged in this process wish to be

able to prove this kind of theorem: “The didactic would be lyrical, the lyrical would be didactic” (Goodman, 35), which is entailed in not forcing a gap or line between poetry and public discourse since it is important that poems make meaning and not just sound. In this sense, social change can be achieved through poetry if “innovations in poetic form can heighten and even change poets’ and readers’ consciousness of the language and other symbols that frame public life” (Goodman, 36).

Harjo believes that the values highlighted in her Indigenous community culture are close to the meaning of being a human being. It is important to feel proud of living well and with dignity and be remembered as having accomplished something. Deeds and words work together, opposites come together, and the poet interweaves wars with love, but love emerges through wars, oppression, suffering and shows evidence of its real power in the generational process of survival. In the light of this, the poem “Grace” was written by Harjo as an introduction to her book *In Mad Love and War* and addressed to Darlene Wind and James Welch:

I think of Wind and her wild ways the year we had nothing to lose
and lost it anyway in the cursed country of the fox. We still talk
about that winter, how the cold froze imaginary buffalo on the stuffed
horizon of snowbanks. The haunting voices of the starve and mutilated
broke fences, crashed our thermostat dreams, and we couldn’t stand it
more time. So once again we lost a winter in stubborn memory, walked
through cheap apartment walls, skated through fields of ghosts into
a town that never wanted us, in the epic search for grace.

(In Mad Love and War, 1)

American Indians have experienced hard life, injustice, and much oppression throughout the long period of their colonization, although “Unlike in the private lyric poem of personal isolation, the past in ‘Grace’ is not a closed-off space of grief and loss, and it surely is not a time and place to which the poet nostalgically yearns to return” says Goodman (49). Memory is always present because identity is the strongest value, rather than victimization. Past and present go together. This is not a poem of one’s single life,

but it means the whole American Indian shared experience, history and culture that is necessary to transform into something better, to make a better world “so once again we lost a winter” (*In Mad Love and War*, I). The balance, the search for harmony, finds a way through conciliation, compassion, love, a heart full of kindness in “an epic search for grace” (*In Mad Love and War*, I).

As a strategy to develop the process of justice towards the main goal, that is achieving self and collective balance and harmony, Harjo recalls the traditional tales. She uses elements from American Indian oral tradition and storytelling as a resource to understand the experience of rejection and fear in the urban areas, the town(s) that “never wanted us” (*In Mad Love and War*, I). Therefore, the poem’s characters are real and they recall the stories of their ancestors and their personal true experiences become linked to a larger story through references to the horror of the past in order to move towards hope and commitment for the future. The tricksters Coyote and Rabbit are used by Harjo who compares herself and her friend Darlene Wind to their sense of humour because it is necessary in order to face fear with the hope of achieving release and healing:

Like Coyote, like Rabbit, we could not contain our terror and clowned our way through a season of false midnights. We had to swallow that town with laughter, so it would go down easy as honey.

(In Mad Love and War, I)

Harjo explains that Coyote and Rabbit are trickster figures that work as “prototypes for humans (...). Rabbit is neither male nor female, rather an androgynous figure who walks the edge” (*How We Became Human*, 216). The Rabbit also gives meaning to incongruities in the world and dilemmas of life experience through transformation, that is, to the relationship between poetics and politics or art and political meanings. As Goodman admits, “There is a bittersweet incongruity between Native American myths and memories and the physical world in which the poem’s two characters travel” (50). Harjo and her friend Darlene do not belong to the temporary apartments where they are staying, and they live in the land of their ancestors just as she recounts in the last stanza of the poem:

I would like to say, with grace, we picked ourselves up and walked into the spring thaw. We didn't; the next season was worse. You went home to Leech Lake to work with the tribe and I went south. And, Wind, I am still crazy. I know there is something larger than the memory of a dispossessed people. We have seen it.

(In Mad Love and War, 1)

Streams of energy in praise of memory

My family is huge and grows each journey I make into the world. There would be no poetry without them.

Joy Harjo (xvi)

In the introduction to her book *How We Became Human, New and Selected Poems: 1975 – 2001*, Harjo informs readers of one of the details concerning the Muskogee feminine world where women can be painters and artists because “to make art (...) is to replicate the purpose of original creation” (xviii). That is why roots play an important role in women’s contemporary ways of living. Although Harjo did not experience the forced removal from the old Creek Nation, she remembers that journey in her own migrations, starting from the place where her ancestors were born (Georgia today) to where she was born in contemporary Tulsa, the heart of the modern Creek community. In the poem “The Flood” those migrations are referred to time after time:

It had been years since I'd seen the watermonster, the snake who
lived at the bottom of the lake. (...)
(...)

This story is not an accident, nor is the existence of the watersnake in the memory of the people as they carried the burden of the myth from Alabama to Oklahoma. Each reluctant step pounded memory into the broken heart and no one will ever forget it.

(The Woman Who Fell From The Sky, 14)

Harjo goes on telling us about the “stories of the battles of the watersnake” that will continue being told forever and we hear about the traditional stories of the water snake of the Creeks and other matrilineal tribes of the south eastern United States, during the years of removal: “Embedded in Muskogee tribal memory is the tie snake or *estakwvnayv*, a large blue watersnake who can transform himself. He represents the power of the Lower World”, Harjo explains (*How We Became Human*, 223). She got the knowledge of these stories that her ancestors carried from one place to the other and, in her poet’s role, she preserves this traditional oral education by telling the stories again, renewing a spiritual strength that is carried within them.

As Paula Gunn Allen notes, American Indians refer to their tribal creation myths, they re-enact them through ceremony and remind themselves who they are and where they come from. Displaced and lost, living in reservations or in cities, urban areas, all sort of landscapes now claim American Indians’ identity. With regard to this, “The Creation Story” is a poem from Harjo’s book *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* which presents a version of Creation Stories; according to the Muskogee culture, it is believed that human beings emerged out of the ground that opened up. It is important thus to understand that human beings are part of the whole, and the whole is the Earth and the universe.

Nowadays, people see environmental catastrophes, drought, floods, earthquakes, conflicts, wars, crime, and social changes which constitute an altogether problematic world that should remind everyone of their human condition. In American Indian cultures the “words” are sacred and storytelling has the potential to help find the path toward calm, as Harjo reflects in the poem “The Creation Story”:

I’m not afraid of love
or its consequence of light.

It’s not easy to say this
or anything when my entrails
dangle between paradise
and fear.

I am ashamed
I never had the words
to carry a friend from her death
to the stars
correctly.

Or the words to keep
my people safe
from drought
or gunshot.

The stars who were created by words
are circling over this house
formed of calcium, of blood

this house
in danger of being torn apart
by stones of fear.

If these words can do anything
if these songs can do anything
I say bless this house
with stars.
Transfix us with love.

(The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, 3)

In spite of feeling a lack of appropriate words, Harjo shows her concerns toward others, for example, through being the right guide, the spiritual link in difficult ways or feeling responsible for her community's life so that the language of love reconstructs all the damage caused "by stones of fear" (*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, 3*), a metaphoric expression which has connotation of the political or governmental agents, or Euro-American power. Harjo believes and is grateful for the spiritual power of poetic language,

the sacred words that help American Indian peoples resist and survive. Nevertheless, there are circumstances that transcend human capacities and the words are insufficient, inapplicable or even ineffective in helping to change a difficult part of the cyclic process just as Harjo admits, for example, “to carry a friend from her death”. But, she believes in the spirit of light, that is to say, memory added to resilience that involves her and her community:

The stars who were created by words
are circling over this house
formed of calcium, of blood

(The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, 3)

In *Soul Talk, Song Language*, Harjo says that creation stories were her first attempt to interweave oral and written languages, because she wanted “to make a book reflect an oral experience of poetry, in written form” (6). The prose poem “The Woman Who Fell From The Sky” contains a story about physical myths, myths of our contemporary world represented by the two main characters: Lila, the woman who “fell from the sky” (5) and Saint Coincidence who “thought he recognized her as she began falling toward him from the sky in a slow spin, like the spiral of events marking an ascension of grace” (*The Woman Who Fell From The Sky*, 5). Lila “was rather ordinary, though beautiful in her walk, like one who has experienced freedom from earth’s gravity” (*The Woman Who Fell From The Sky*, 5), and therefore she appears to be real, someone who has experienced the contemporary hazards of life in the modern Euro-American developed world. Moreover, Harjo appears to be a witness of Lila’s connection to the earth as she suggests of her ancestors in the fifth and sixth lines of the first stanza: “whose names are as ancient as the sound that created the first world” (*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, 5). Then, in lines three and four of the third stanza of the poem, she informs us about the urban space where the story occurs and gives a hint of the troubles or problematic issues Saint Coincidence had already experienced, “And he had nothing to lose anymore in this city of terrible paradox where a woman was falling toward him from the sky” (*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, 5). The title of this poem is often repeated in the poem which seems to

be crucial to understand its meaning, for example, the resistance to European-American culture, the dream of liberation, of change and a better world, or equitable living facilities, but also a different possibility or decision to accept change and the start of a new life, rising up after having fallen. In this sense, the phrase “fell from the sky” works as a leitmotif to highlight American Indian issues: land, identity, language, culture, or sovereignty, since Joy Harjo is aware of her world and its diverse interrelationships, and knows these issues need to be constantly discussed and observed in order to increase the struggle for American Indians’ beliefs, to help social change that is of the utmost importance:

Lila also dreamed of a love not disturbed by the wreck of culture
she was forced to attend. (...)

(...)

Johnny was named Johnny by the priests because his Indian name
was foreign to their European tongues. He named himself Saint
Coincidence many years later after he lost himself in drink in a
city he’d been sent to to learn a trade. Maybe you needed English
to know how to pray in the city. He could speak a fractured English.
His own language had become a baby language to him, made of the
comforting voice of his grandmother as she taught him
to be a human.

(...)

Saint Coincidence went back to wandering without a home in the
maze of asphalt. Asphalt could be a pathway toward God, he
reasoned, though he’d always imagined the road he took with his
brothers when they raised sheep as children. Asphalt had led him here to
the Safeway where a woman was falling from the sky.

(The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, 6-7)

American Indian issues are always on top of the table as they are important themes of discussion when American Indians meet and get together. Furthermore, in the first line of

the poem “Perhaps the World Ends Here”, Harjo asserts “The world begins at a kitchen table” (*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, 68) as eating to live is basic to human beings’ survival. With regard to this, Harjo suggests that people need to discuss issues concerning American Indian life, because it is also at the kitchen table that different kinds of wars started and ended, where fighting strategies have often been discussed, and Harjo recalls her ancestors’ traditions and contemporary experiences in American Indian communities: everything can happen at the kitchen table where words are spoken, songs are sung, stories are exchanged, dreams and nightmares, laughs and pains, success and failure or love and frustration, therefore, past and present are shared round the table, a world with many worlds around it, a unique intercultural world in the sense that many human beings with many different stories of life make memory and history become alive, and the kitchen table becomes language.

At the end of the poem “The Woman Who Fell from the Sky”, Harjo reminds the readers and listeners about the importance of returning home to the land for survival, for love, for an opportunity to change the world:

She fell and was still falling when Saint Coincidence caught her in
his arms in front of the Safeway as he made a turn from borrowing
spare change from strangers.

The children crawled safely from their mother. The cat stalked a bit
of flying trash set into motion by the wave of falling–

or the converse wave of gathering together.

(The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, 9)

This poem’s metaphorical richness is used in the service of the desire to achieve liberation and harmony after loss, particularly the need to recover land. Lila and Saint Coincidence represent dreams and stories that did not have a chance to continue, to grow, because greedy industrial and technological evolution destroyed them.

In this connection, in the first line of the poem "A Postcolonial Tale" Harjo speaks of the need to persevere with the dream because "Every day is a reenactment of the creation story" (*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, 18). This poem shows present and past images, in the sense that Harjo is constantly observing the violence of a greedy society, acts of colonialism, racism and discrimination in a land inhabited by contemporary American Indian people whose ancestors were victims of violence, being injured or killed in that same land, and whose bodies are part of that ground. Thus, the land has been the space for both oppression and opposition when analyzed from social and historical points of view, issues that

No story or song will translate the full impact of falling, or the
inverse power of rising up.
Of rising up.

(*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, 18)

But, Harjo goes on encouraging herself and the others in the sense that the American Indian dream is alive because there is a strong intersection between human beings and the land and, simultaneously, the language that interweaves with the land as well:

Everything was as we imagined it. The earth and stars, every crea-
ture and leaf imagined with us.

The imagining needs praise as does any living thing. Stories and
songs are evidence of this praise.

The imagination conversely illumines us, speaks with us, sings with us.

Stories and songs are like humans who when they laugh are
indestructible.

suggesting a time in the future that is confronted with a present of alienation, cultural assimilation, stereotyping, urban danger and domination, a world masked by the greedy

urban European-American culture, a displacement reflected at the beginning of this poem and particularly spoken of in the poem “Crossing the Border”

Once we abandoned ourselves for television, the box that separates the dreamer from the dreaming. It was as if we were stolen, put into a bag carried on the back of a whiteman who pretends to own the earth and the sky. In the sack were all the people of the world. We fought until there was a hole in the bag.

When we fell we were not aware of falling. We were driving to work, or to the mall. The children were in school learning subtraction with guns, although they appeared to be in classes.

We found ourselves somewhere near the diminishing point of civilization, not far from the trickster’s bag of tricks.

Everything was as we imagined it. The earth and stars, every creature and leaf imagined with us.

(The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, 18)

The last part of the poem reflects intercultural tribal knowledge as, according to Harjo’s Notes at the end of her volume *How We Became Human*, was reformulated “to go with a song form based on a northern style Plains powwow song” (223), a kind way to grow hope and feel grateful for their beliefs of survival and recovery:

The imagining needs praise as does any living thing.
We are evidence of this praise.
And when we laugh, we’re indestructible.
No story or song will translate
the full impact of falling,
or the inverse power of rising up.
Of rising up.
Our children put down their guns when we did to imagine with us.

We imagined the shining link between the heart and the sun.
We imagined tables of food for everyone.
We imagined the songs.
The imagination conversely illumines us, speaks with us, sings with
us, drums with us, loves us.

(How We Became Human, 105)

The social and historical circumstances of people's lives raise the question of human beings' position in the world, as we are just a small part of the whole family that includes all the other species, for example, plants and animals. Regarding this, Harjo speaks of maps in her poems, because she believes that mapping words can help understand people's relationship to all living things. Besides, they can be a sort of guiding information, a supply of advice and warning words just the same way as common maps record knowledge of voyages in the known and unknown world, in the oceans or in the sky.

In the aftermath of a kitchen table made of language

In the essay "Poems as Maps in American Indian Women's Writing", Janice Gould informs about the way of writing stories analogically to a mapping system such as some of the examples she mentions among many American Indian writers who use the idea of "map" as if they wanted to show the path in their poetry and writing such as, for example, Linda Hogan, "Map", Marilou Awiakta, "Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother's Wisdom, Trailhead – Where Path and Stories Begin", Kim Blaeser, "Trailing you", or Janice Gould, "Alphabet", which uses the metaphor of a trail to plan part of a journey very carefully and in deep detail. In this sense, Joy Harjo also reveals her themes and worries through charts, trails and maps (22).

In her poem "A Map to the Next World", Harjo shows evidence of her interest in the use of this metaphor to provide direction or to describe a landscape which she knows, remembers or longs for. Considering states of being and feeling, she offers ways to know herself and American Indian people as human beings, people with a "heart", emotions,

feelings, conscious spirit, and as people with a purpose; it is her responsibility to emphasize her concerns in the hope of advising readers and listeners to follow her directions as well as to understand and perceive the world she writes and speaks about, to read and comprehend her signs, symbols and her metaphors, with both heart and mind. In "Politics and the Personal Lyric in the Poetry of Joy Harjo and C.D. Wright", Jenny Goodman argues about literary rhetoric in contemporary American poetry through the ideas of Kenneth Burke who "consistently makes clear his belief that art is implicated in politics" (37), and thus, "Attitude, or consciousness, is the realm in which literature persuades" (38). As regards this, Harjo maps a spiritual approach to American Indian issues analogically, so that she suggests ways or paths in the attempt to lead readers and listeners to feel as if they had been to that place and experienced an emotional, spiritual journey to familiar landscapes. In this poem Harjo attempts to interweave the oral tradition with writing, the same way as she has done before in the prose poem "The Woman Who Fell From The Sky", a story whose characters experience life in contemporary urban places (*The Woman Who Fell From The Sky*, 5). Accordingly, she looks for answers to today's problems by searching through history and the known world, examining and exposing the acculturation and dehumanization of our minds in order to help people live and find the lost balance, their beliefs, values and the harmony of the world, and she begins the poem by expressing her dream:

In the last days of the fourth world I wished to make a map for
those who could climb through the hole in the sky.

(A Map to the Next World, 19)

Thus, her dream is to help other people find their direction. She wants to share her knowledge as well as to describe, inform and explain certain kinds of spiritual and material things through words so that people know or remember how, where, what, and who they belong to just like roots tied into the deepest place. The poem goes on:

My only tools were the desires of humans as they emerged from the killing
fields, from the bedrooms and the kitchens.

For the soul is a wanderer with many hands and feet.

(A Map to the Next World, 19)

Sensitive people try to find or create a balanced world among so many great social and political tensions where spiritual links or ties are undetermined, even forgotten. Thus, Harjo explains that

The map must be of sand and can't be read by ordinary light. It must carry fire to the next tribal town, for renewal of spirit.

In the legend are instructions on the language of the land, how it was we forgot to acknowledge the gift, as if we were not in it or of it.

(A Map to the Next World, 19)

In addition to this, Gould in her essay "Poems as Maps in American Indian Women's Writing" contends that "[m]any Native people persist in believing that the land does not belong to us; we belong to the land" (25), which means that references are found in the place where people come from and everything else is ephemeral, just as Harjo posits it:

Take note of the proliferation of supermarkets and malls, the altars of money. They best describe the detour from grace.

Keep track of the errors of our forgetfulness; the fog steals our children while we sleep.

(A Map to the Next World, 19)

By giving this advice Harjo might be claiming readers' and listeners' attention to the shadows of the past represented in the isolated words "nuclear / anger" of which the present shows evidence through loss, theft, oppression, despair, hunger, and displacement to places that become sources of problems, "Monsters", which cause serious difficulty, even the impossibility of returning home, as the following lines indicate:

Flowers of rage spring up in the depression. Monsters are born there of
nuclear
anger.

(A Map to the Next World, 19)

In this sort of poem comprehended as a map the focus is on the choice of the common or unique characteristics of a place, a landscape, a situation that moves, awakes, or even challenges memory, knowledge, dreams, thus making the map recognizable. Today we see “Mother Earth” is no longer a living, breathing, knowing creation as people appear to be unable to view the world as it truly is. Instead, humans have reduced the planet to an artifact that results in a map of disasters, catastrophes, destruction, famine, and emptiness that Harjo depicts this way:

Trees of ashes wave good-bye to good-bye and the map appears to disappear.

(A Map to the Next World, 19)

It is such a frightening, immense image that everything, map, place, people and other beings lose their sense of integration, their identity with respect to life and landscape. This loss of direction, a way to go, is increasingly prevalent, bringing sorrow and regret:

We no longer know the names of the birds here, how to speak to them by
their personal names.

Once we knew everything in this lush promise.

(A Map to the Next World, 19)

Humans dominate the world, in the process creating loneliness, danger, insecurity, threats to life or they seem to integrate a different identity, an inappropriate relationship with the Earth just as Harjo calls our attention when she emphasizes:

What I am telling you is real and is printed in a warning on the map. Our
forgetfulness stalks us, walks the earth behind us, leaving a trail of paper
diapers,

needles, and wasted blood.

An imperfect map will have to do, little one.

(A Map to the Next World, 19-20)

Such a circumstance brings despair because it sounds as if life has been trapped, threatened, even killed, and without escape or solution. Even conception is shadowed by the same rhetoric:

The place of entry is the sea of your mother's blood, your father's small death
as he longs to know himself in another.

There is no exit.

(A Map to the Next World, 20)

In order to make things more clear, Harjo appears to be very worried about the world the way it is, so she is giving as good information as possible, hoping to persuade by showing common knowledge. It is instinct that connects to what is true she suggests. Therefore, she uses a metaphor focused on the image of the human body, as if she wanted to involve the reader or listener in such a reality:

The map can be interpreted through the wall of the intestine – a spiral on the
road of knowledge.

You will travel through the membrane of death, smell cooking from the
encampment where our relatives make a feast of fresh deer meat and corn
soup,
in the Milky Way.

(A Map to the Next World, 20)

Beyond the map of industry, technology and the map of scientific knowledge, human beings need to be conscious of the map in their own body, the one that takes them back to a more original knowledge, and to remember that human beings are part of the whole

and not a mere separate creation. Readers and listeners must not forget that “imperfection” is part of the human condition, thus knowledge is imperfect but, in the same way as “the wall of the intestine” is encoded and genetic knowledge, in Gould’s words, it is by being human, alive and mortal that humans are “connected to what has come before and what will come after” (“Poems as Maps in American Indian Women’s Writing”, 32). By this comprehension people find the way to the next world which may be a more perfect, just, balanced world:

They have never left us; we abandoned them for science.

(A Map to the Next World, 20)

At this point, Harjo comes to terms with the spiritual dimension of human beings, our metaphysical world that is reached after a mystic journey: birth and death, and the re-encounter with those who “have never left us”. Thus the circle of connection remains unbroken, the maps guide and take people home where freedom is achieved and people can experience renewal, healing, and absolute knowledge:

And when you take your next breath as we enter the fifth world there will be
no X, no guidebook with words you can carry.

(A Map to the Next World, 20)

because, as she suggests, you find your way into spiritual truth, a profound sense of place. It means that if readers and listeners understand this dream they will see the true meaning of being human and follow their mother’s memory:

You will have to navigate by your mother’s voice, renew the song she is singing.

(A Map to the Next World, 20)

According to American Indians’ beliefs, memory is in human beings’ blood which allows us to recognize our “first language” – a way to healing,

Fresh courage glimmers from planets.

And lights the map printed with the blood of history, a map you will have to know by your intention, by the language of suns.

When you emerge note the tracks of the monster slayers where they entered the cities of artificial light and killed what was killing us.

You will see red cliffs. They are the heart, contain the ladder.

A white deer will come to greet you when the last human climbs from the destruction.

(A Map to the Next World, 20)

Time is a spiral, and the world is viewed within American Indian oral tradition, when Harjo recalls events that have already occurred, and are now, and will be occurring again in the future in this space or in other spaces:

Remember the hole of our shame marking the act of abandoning our tribal grounds.

We were never perfect.

Yet, the journey we make together is perfect on this earth who was once a star and made the same mistakes as humans.

(A Map to the Next World, 21)

Tolerance is required of humans in the sense that we need to forgive our imperfections and heal our hearts. Respect for time and space is another aspect to be considered as we might make mistakes again. For this reason, Harjo puts the word in Mother Earth's voice and advises readers and listeners to increase awareness to "make our own maps" and be responsible because maps cannot tell us all we need to know; they are language, and language is made by coming to terms with needs:

We might make them again, she said.

Crucial to finding the way is this: there is no beginning or end.

You must make your own map.

(A Map to the Next World, 21)

Chants for the strength of spirit

A dream is coming true although it does not result from a materialistic view but rather from a desire of the human being's spirit and mind which increases love working for the belief in equity, in a new humankind. One world coexists with another different and opposing in its significance, that is to say, the world of power: money, profit, colonialism, social and political power, patriarchy, discrimination, racism are all interrelated values of the present global community. The language of such spaces is often articulated through hatred and fear, which is not the Earth's language spoken by human beings who live in close interrelationship with the universe, seeking for balance and harmony with the Earth, the sky and their elements, at the same time that they feel gratitude for the wind, water, fire and land. Throughout her work "She Had Some Horses", Harjo reveals how much it is necessary to find ways for the strength of the spirit, healing and development of understanding in order to improve the circumstances of life in which human beings must confront fear, hatred, excitement and love. In spite of being part of our existence as human beings these paradoxes, particularly when they are intensified, require balancing strategies. In this sense, Harjo uses traditional American Indian songs or prayers as wisdom, mythic stories such as the myth of the Thought Woman to represent the world as a web of life.

In these poems, Harjo uses the image of the "horse" not only because horses are symptomatic of spiritual strength, good character, courage, freedom, friendship, helpful and able to interact with human beings, which are characteristics that make them very powerful. She also uses horses as a means of connection to American Indian mythology, ritual or ceremony and creates a powerful symbolic space, a space in which horses and

human beings metaphorically argue about the issue of land, the land that is described in the poem "She had some horses" as "maps drawn of blood", "skins of ocean water", "fur and teeth", "who cried in their beer", who waited for destruction" but also "for resurrection". The tension of oppression in the image given by "horses with eyes of trains" or "who licked razor blades", "who spit at male queens" other horses "afraid of themselves", "who were afraid to speak" or "who waited for resurrection" (61-62). Harjo presents differences and links in traditional tribal chants and creates dialectic story to show different perspectives of the same landscape, a world of distinct hostile languages, those horses "who told the truth" and those "who lie" (62).

In his essay "Como Roubar Cavalos aos Caras Pálidas", João de Mancelos posits the impact of horses on American Indians when Euro-Americans invaded their nations at the same time that he makes known how Euro-American colonializing soldiers believed they and their horses were unstoppably powerful and crucial in those lands. In connection to this, he explains that a whole body represented in both soldiers and horses riding together "pareciam aos ameríndios fundir-se com o próprio animal, formando um único ser, fantástico e aterrador" (122), an image of such an awesome power that, as João de Mancelos corroborates by quoting Tindall, could "instill the greatest fear in the enemy and make the Indians respect the leaders of the army" (122). In this connection, the Cherokee writer Diane Glancy depicts experiences lived by tribeswomen and tribesmen during the Trail of Tears which indicate the effect of the power of the enemy's horses, even after two hundred years of contact with white people (*Pushing the Bear*). Furthermore, in American Indian beliefs horses are beings that have spirit and show their human side with their opposite polarities, that is to say, throughout their cycle of life they also feel high and low levels in their mood, characteristics common to human beings which support a kinship shared by both Non-American Indians and American Indians.

In the light of this, Harjo expresses the paradoxes of life in the image contained in her poem "Hieroglyphic":

I have seen heaven in a woman's eyes the color of burnt almonds.

I have seen hell in those same eyes, and I have jumped.

It's all the same.

(In Mad Love And War, 53)

alongside her concerns about the whole human condition, as she introduces her readers and listeners to through the metaphor “These were the same horses” which signifies the key to solve the puzzle:

She had some horses.

She had some horses she loved.

She had some horses she hated.

These were the same horses.

(*She Had Some Horses*, 63)

Accordingly, João de Mancelos sums up this contribution towards balance among the diverse human interrelationships as he says:

“These were the same horses”, uma espécie de conclusão ou apanhado que harmoniza num todo os diferentes – e às vezes até contraditórios – tipos de cavalo.

(*As Faces da Terra na Poesia de Joy Harjo*, 309)

With regard to achieving understanding and justice, Harjo tells us more stories from which human beings can learn how to see the truth of the different surrounding world views and how to grow responsibility and consciousness. “The Woman hanging from the thirteenth floor window” is a poem about women’s life, women who live in urban places, for example Chicago, which means poor living conditions for marginalized peoples, racist cultures that need to be transformed into beauty and survival. Harjo informs that she began this poem on a trip to Chicago when she went there to visit some friends and see a “King Tut” exhibition. It was dusk when she arrived to a part of the city which showed a common picture, globally similar to other urban places inhabited by people without

privileges, the evidence of hidden truth, “a color like lost dreams, air tasting like a borrowed hope and always the ragged pool tables where kids acting twice their age shoot pool downhill all day” (*The Spiral of Memory*, 16). Harjo recalls something that becomes a particular and crucial fact about this story. A chaotic center of the world, the whole of it was contained in a metaphor, a myth, a sacred place in the shape of a very common commodity, an old rocking chair in what looked like an abandoned neglected space. This provided part of the impact of her visit to the Indian Center in Chicago, which could be a symbol connoted to mainstream culture, for from that center of the world she perceived a vision. Whenever Harjo remembers that chair, she sees “a young woman nursing a baby or an old man (...) or anyone [she] may have seen or not seen in that rocking chair” (*The Spiral of Memory*, 16), diverse people who move and live with their hopes, their often contradictory experiences: laughing or crying, euphorically or desperately trying to get rid of nightmares in their life routine, different worlds in one whole common world.

Chicago is a diversified contemporary urban space that Harjo chooses for the plot of this story, although it could have been anywhere. This is not a story of one person but of a family, a community, other women, a people who have the same dream: “She thinks she will be set free” (*She Had Some Horses*, 13), and of the fact that hope also belongs to others in the sense that

(...) She is all the women of the apartment
building who stand watching her, watching themselves.

(*She Had Some Horses*, 13)

Harjo suggests that woman wants to break the silence and become visible in the city alongside other stories observed throughout Harjo’s journey of the human condition, as she tells us:

(...) It was in the farther
north and she was the baby then. They rocked her.

She sees Lake Michigan lapping at the shores of

herself. It is a dizzy hole of water and the rich
live in tall glass houses at the edge of it. (...)

(She Had Some Horses, 13)

Considering the two antagonistic meanings of “Lake Michigan” and the twisty chair where the woman was rocking as if she was “letting the steady rhythm calm her” (*The Spiral of Memory*, 16), Harjo feels the presence of difference in opposite worlds. The key word is in the image of the rocking chair that symbolizes the vision of spirit present in Harjo’s memory demanding to be remembered and recognized, as she says in the poem:

(...) In some
places Lake Michigan speaks softly, here, it just sputters
and butts itself against the asphalt. She sees
other buildings just like hers. She sees other
women hanging from many-floored windows
counting their lives in the palms of their hands
and in the palms of their children’s hands.
She is the woman hanging from the 13th floor window
on the Indian side of town. Her belly is soft from
her children’s birth, her worn levis swing down below
her waist, and then her feet, and then her heart.
She is dangling.

(She Had Some Horses, 13-14)

At the same time, the chair twists like snakes do and that suggests other significant experiences of life:

The woman hanging from the 13th floor hears voices.
They come to her in the night when the lights have gone
dim. Sometimes they are little cats mewing and scratching
at the door, sometimes they are her grandmother’s voice,
and sometimes they are gigantic men of light whispering

to her to get up, to get up, to get up. That's when she wants
to have another child to hold onto in the night, to be able
to fall back into dreams.

(She Had Some Horses, 14)

two worlds are metaphorically represented in relation to justice and social political divide: the rich and their glass houses in the beautiful landscape and, on the other side of the city, the Indians who, besides living in their poverty, feel discriminated against, violated and angst-ridden as if they were going to fall into pieces like their fragmented life, a world depicted by Harjo in the first lines of the poem:

(...)

with a swirl of birds over her head. They could
be a halo, or a storm of glass waiting to crush her.

(...)

She is a woman of children, (...)

(...)

She is her mother's daughter and her father's son.

She is several pieces between the two husbands

she has had. She is all the women of the apartment

(She Had Some Horses, 13)

In terms of reaching understanding in the way Harjo articulates it, in which memory is alive, her choice of Chicago appears to be necessary to corroborate the disjunction between American Indian and Euro-American views of the world. In the past Chicago was chosen among other North American cities as the appropriate place for the celebration of modern America through the great Exhibition of 1893. The American myth of economic power could be seen at this new industrial and technological place in the sense that "The promoters of the exposition presented it as an expression of America as the New World" (Kroeber, 10). Everybody was invited except for the American Indians, the first inhabitants of that land, who were nonetheless used as exhibits in ethnological tableaux. American Indians go on resisting, however, as Harjo says in her poem "Returning from the Enemy":

We had to leave our homes behind us,
just as we were left behind by progress.
We do not want your version of progress.
There are other versions, says Spider who does not consider making
webs
To sell to the highest bidder
But keeps weaving and thinking
And including us in the story.

(A Map to the Next World, 71)

From this story readers and listeners may see the world from the American Indian view which focuses our attention on aspects different from those of the Euro-American mechanical scientific and technological approaches. Thus, the problem cannot be solved if human beings and the communities they belong to do not care about the spirit, the inner energy, the fire in the human body which is the dynamic source of human life.

How being became human through the power of memory

In our contemporary world where everything appears to be easily available and most people in the west have got used to taking what they want at the immediate moment they want it as the myth of consumerism compels them to, other people, particularly Indigenous people because it is part of their myth, would rather have songs, story poems, prayer poems. With regard to these circumstances of life Harjo's poetry is personal and political in the sense that in many of her poems she praises the Wind for truth, blows Voice for justice, and breathes the Word to live on and on from generation to generation. From her own experience Harjo articulates the concept of song as an effective strategy to help resolve paradoxes in life and preserve human beings' life without deceiving alcohol or drugs, as she highlights in the poem "Alive", in which the pronoun "I" becomes the collective subject:

(...)

I like to be sung to:

deep-throated music
of the south, horse songs,
of the bare feet sound
(...)
Alive. This music rocks
me. I drive the interstate,
watch faces come and go on either
side. I am free to be sung to;
I am free to sing. This woman
Can cross any line.

(She Had Some Horses, 53)

Everybody and everything are meaningful threads that interweave in the same universe, where life is a dance, so that Harjo suggests life is related both to the language of dance and the wind, whose voice must be remembered. Accordingly, in the poem “Remember” she insists on certifying that her advice to combat forgetfulness is being listened to as well as acknowledged by American and non-American Indian people because the voice of the wind “knows the origin of the universe” (*She Had Some Horses, 35*), and emphasizes how important memory is to human beings as well. Not only are wind and language interconnected but human beings also need them both. Breathing and living generate language, and this is Harjo’s major concern through the whole poem since without language people would not have become human. The last three lines of this poem focus Harjo’s dream: readers and listeners need to bear in memory that the reason of life of every human being is the universe, it is the earth, time and space that is where language also comes from.

Remember the sky you were born under,
know each of the star’s stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun’s birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown

and the giving away to night.
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.
Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
origin of this universe.
Remember you are all people and all people
Are you.
Remember you are this universe and this
Universe is you.
Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.
Remember language comes from this.
Remember the dance language is, that life is.
Remember.

(She Had Some Horses, 35)

Through the whole poem focus is expressed in the use of the word “Remember”, the imperative, in a repeated rhythm and intonation. In this regard, Harjo depicts her awareness and constant concerns about her people's problems, about American Indian communities and their issues: identity, land, language, culture, heritage, survival. She wants them and us all, as readers and listeners, to “Remember the earth whose skin you are” made of: a great diversity of colour, a whole world that is different, albeit inhabiting the one same land. In this sense, different colours, different lands, different languages, different people, different cultures are interconnected by the same common feature – an outside layer, whose ground of life and diversity is generated by our Mother Earth. No

matter time or space or any other condition, human beings are always human beings, people, and that means memory, a living force which continuously links present to past to future as a spiral:

I feel charged with a responsibility to remember. I suppose *any* poet in *any* tribal situation feels that charge to address the truth which always includes not just the present but the past and the future as well.

(The Spiral of Memory, 41)

The repetition of “Remember” also represents Harjo’s calling out to all people as she feels the responsibility to guide people and encourage them to participate and do everything they can to preserve life, even if you need to fight for it, the same way as “your mother struggled / to give you form and breath” when one was born. That is evidence of life, which every human being fights for from their birth and until they reach harmony. The start and the while-living moments might be hard and painful until people reach the goal, the final point – harmony. However, throughout life, a human consciousness grows and, from American Indians’ point of view, consists of understanding the world in a more spiritual dimension rather than in a scientific or physical one. In this sense Harjo focuses on how human beings’ life is full of meaning if we “Remember the sun’s birth at dawn, that is the / strongest point of time. Remember sundown / and the giving away to night”, an image she uses to suggest the cyclical movement and circularity of the Earth’s life that provides change, evolution and brings hope, not hate nor destruction. The “star’s stories”, “the moon”, the sun’s birth at dawn”, the “sundown”, all symbolize a guide, a light that shines on Earth to all beings at the same time but not in the same way, and it is important to interpret the language of the moment of shining. Such a moment becomes particularly intense at birth, as Harjo emphasizes:

Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother’s, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life also.

(She Had Some Horses, 35)

Nowadays our modern technological world is especially characterized by a demanding, aggressive globalization, and therefore memory, storytelling, identity, and myth found in this poem, and in Harjo's poetry, become politically meaningful in contemporary American Indian circumstances. Her voice emphasizes the crucial need of remembering because it is very important to use memory to help change the world so that intolerance, violence, tension and imposed laws or other dilemmas will be replaced by a process of belief and love as love will be the global language for everyone, the power to break boundaries. Accordingly, Harjo believes in the kind of love as the activity of "sit[ting] down and spend[ing] the time involved in the creation of poetry" because "all poems are love poems", in the way that she clarifies:

A poem may be about death or destruction or anything else terrible, but I somehow always want it to resolve, and in some manner I want the resolution of that poem to *be* love (...) the natural movement of love is an opening, a place that makes connections.

(The Spiral of Memory, 47)

All people look forward to living in paradise, the perfect land, the land of dreams that provides happiness, beauty, harmony and abundance, and American Indians continue to have the opportunity to conceive of their lives in the spirit of change. In this sense, in the poem "I give you back" Harjo encourages the struggle against fear by getting rid of it, by transforming fear in the struggle for liberation on behalf of a right to communities' self-determination, dignity and homeland, such as Harjo announces in a kind of traditional chant:

I release you, my beautiful and terrible
fear. I release you. You were my beloved
and hated twin, but now, I don't know you
as myself. I release you with all the

pain I would know at the death of
my children.

You are not my blood anymore.

I give you back to the soldiers
who burned down my home, beheaded my children,
raped and sodomized my brothers and sisters.
I give you back to those who stole the
food from our plates when we were starving.

I release you, fear, because you hold
these scenes in front of me and I was born
with eyes that can never close.

I release you
I release you
I release you
I release you

I am not afraid to be angry.
I am not afraid to rejoice.
I am not afraid to be black.
I am not afraid to be white.
I am not afraid to be hungry.
I am not afraid to be full.
I am not afraid to be hated.
I am not afraid to be loved.
To be loved, to be loved, fear.

Oh, you have chocked me, but I gave you the leash.
You have gutted me but I gave you the knife.
You have devoured me, but I laid myself across the fire.

I take myself back, fear.

You are not my shadow any longer.
I won't hold you in my hands.
You can't live in my eyes, my ears, my voice
my belly, or in my heart my heart

my heart my heart

But come here, fear
I am alive and you are so afraid
of dying.

(She Had Some Horses, 71-72)

To carry on this process of change towards a better world people need a kind of energy that Harjo compares to the spirit of horses who, in her belief, are “very sensitive and finely tuned spirits of the psyche” and “very strong people” (*The Spiral of Memory*, 28). Consequently, there is a kind of interactive relationship between Harjo and horses. Harjo represents the voice of American Indian traditional chants and rituals with clear evidence in the poem “She Had Some Horses” through the use of repetition, rhythm and intonation. The poem evokes the experience of listening to the sound of a horse going on a trot. Throughout this poem, Harjo articulates and interweaves human beings with land, work, values, identity, language, all interact with each other and she can imply her self-determination since there is the punctuation mark of a full stop at the end of each relative clause, which might suggest her skill as oral storyteller, a poet of witness, the spiritual guide that draws the way, informs about the space and strengths of the emotions. She knows that poetry establishes a bridge over the sea of blood, suffering pain and loss, to lead to the way of joy, and indeed that both love and hate are parts of the self. It is a web of life (as in the Myth of the Thought Woman), the image that symbolizes the world is alive and everything is connected. It is a very powerful poem as every line is very important to the American Indian dream and forgetfulness is rejected, for example in the lines where Harjo sings:

She had horses who told the truth, who were stripped
bare of their tongues.
She had some horses.

She had horses who called themselves, *horse*.
She had horses who called themselves, *spirit*, and kept
Their voices secret and to themselves.
She had horses who had no names.
She had horses who had books of names.
(...)
She had some horses she loved.
She had some horses she hated.

These were the same horses.

(She Had Some Horses, 62)

Bringing together the paradoxes in the world in the sense of reconciling polarities, understanding diversity, difference and dilemmas is her role as a poet, whose experiences lead to the effective conclusion that “when you become a human being, you understand paradox”, Joy Harjo says (*The Spiral of Memory*, 134).

Earth, Home, Being, three words in one name: Center of the World

It is an irrefutable truth in that wherever we are on the Earth, we are always in the Centre of the World. Nobody can change that fact. At the same time, the way sunlight shines implies many and diverse variations, differently graded kaleidoscopic views. It may seem a paradox yet it explains the existence of each one individually with their specific characteristics and yet also eminently coexisting as a whole.

Considering Harjo’s position with regard to this, she is very determined to show how certain she is about the truth of her multicultural identity, land, and language. From the prose poetry book *Secrets from the Center of the World*, the narrative poems “This Land is

a Poem” and “Anything that matters” point to the importance of the land, a source of gifts, emotions and life, a language that is hard to be translated or materialized through writing “unless the paper were the sacrament of sky, and ink the broken line of wild horses staggering the horizon several miles away” (30), which suggests the image of a home to shelter and nourish the one who is in it, a place without walls or borders and thus a space of freedom. In these terms Harjo emphasizes the only situation in which the colonizer’s language will not have the power to conquer, because “land-based language” appears to be a simultaneously mild and fierce truth. It is a mild truth in the sense that it cares for every human or non-human being and, on the other hand, it is a fierce truth because the spirit of memory is so strongly grounded in it that English, the colonizer’s language and power will not destroy or separate it. In this area, American Indians believe that language is spiritual and not material; it is very powerful as its connection with the earth is so close that land becomes more important and the expression of something greater than a single act of writing that cannot compare the superiority of “the earth, wind, and sky” (*Secrets from the Center of the World*, 30). Here is the difference between writing a type of text (form) and being the way the earth is (poetics), as Harjo corroborates in the image of “the child you were some years ago. See her laughing as she chases a white butterfly” (*Secrets from the Center of the World*, 32), an image which is also memory of the past brought by the present; “Anything that matters is here” (*Secrets from the Center of the World*, 32), life that is important to preserve because it means the future just as Harjo believes it when she predicts that “Anything that will continue to matter in the next several thousand years will continue to be here” (*Secrets from the Center of the World*, 32).

In every sense of Harjo’s words, it is absolutely necessary to develop an “ethics of care” and respect for our Mother Earth, and both the poet and readers or listeners need to create strategies to cooperate in the preservation of the evolving environment. If people, as listeners and readers, are really interested in taking on these cares or responsibility our mother Earth “will invite you in for coffee, give you warm bread, and you will be obligated to stay and listen” (*Secrets from the Center of the World*, 54), an invitation no one can turn down but instead sit round the table to find the way to balance

all the issues that demand harmony, the right to live, to justice, to concern, to shine, and to be, to be visible and to be heard. Furthermore, it is her responsibility as a poet to warn us and say:

Don't bother the earth spirit who lives here. She is working
on a story. It is the oldest story in the world and it is delicate,
changing. If she sees you watching she will invite you in for
coffee, give you warm bread, and you will be obligated to stay
and listen. But this is no ordinary story. You will have to endure
earthquakes, lightening, the deaths of all those you love, the most
blinding beauty. It's a story so compelling you may never want
to leave; this is how she traps you. See that stone finger over there?
That is the only one who ever escaped.

(Secrets from the Center of the World, 54)

In fact, similarly to most stories this is a story of dream as well as magic from which “you may never want to leave” (54) and Harjo assumes her role as storyteller and assures that we have to trust her knowledge and the truth she is telling us: “I am witness to flexible eternity, the evolving past, and I know we will live forever, as dust or breath in the face of stars, in the shifting pattern of winds” (*Secrets from the Center of the World, 56*); this appears to be the goal, the real message of the earth spirit's story, a message that both readers and listeners can understand when they use the earth's spinning language, the life cycle language according to Harjo's further information who, in the role of poet storyteller, presumes that

If you look with the mind of the swirling earth near Shiprock
you become the land, beautiful. And understand how three
crows at the edge of the highway, laughing, become three crows
at the edge of the world, laughing.

(Secrets from the Center of the World, 4)

As she clarifies in her notes about this place,

Shiprock or *Naat'aani Neez* is a large Navajo community in the northwest part of New Mexico. It is marked by a huge rock that appears to look like a ship. *Naat-aanii* means boss, chief, or leader. *Neez* means tall.

(*How We Became Human*, 212)

Nonetheless, the present time can always find a witness of the past as there is memory, evidence that claims attention and it is impossible to be ignored as Harjo, invites both readers and listeners to participate: "See that stone finger over there? That is the only one who ever escaped" (*Secrets from the Center of the World*, 54). Someone survives to continue the history that will become visible and well known as "It is more than beautiful at the center of the world" (*Secrets from the Center of the World*, 60). In this connection, in a language that gestures beyond words, remembering the past without forgetting the future, Harjo speaks of anger yet in a language of positive transformation as evidenced in the poems contained in *In Mad Love and War*.

Contributions towards puzzling a paradox out

Harjo is the voice of children, human and non-human beings who live in conditions of bare survival, particularly when they miss basic needs: food, land, respect, dignity. Hope for a turning point in this world, nonetheless, comes into being as a strong pole of energy that moves Harjo to intensify her engagement in the struggle for the well-being of all people. At the end of the poem "Grace", Harjo guarantees her ethical care and responsibility when she says that "[she] know[s] there is something larger than the memory of a dispossessed people. We have seen it" (*In Mad Love and War*, 1), which also means that she gives her word for the truth, a process of liberation that, in accordance with João de Mancelos's words is "difícil e feito de avanços e recuos" at the same time that "exige uma aprendizagem e uma postura de ordem espiritual" ("As Faces da Terra na Poesia de Joy Harjo, 360). Such a truth becomes the focus of the plot of the prose poem

“Deer Dancer” in which we, readers and listeners, are called to take part. Not only do we learn with others’ experience but it is also important that we share the responsibility for the problem of the nation. Both Non-Indians and American Indians will be challenged to read the poem, a narrative that combines contemporary lyrical features with American Indian oral traditions of storytelling and myths as well.

In order to make the necessary appeal, Harjo starts this poem in the way of American Indian oral traditions, by telling a story of a significant length in which she interweaves other stories:

Nearly everyone had left that bar in the middle of winter except the hardcore. It was the coldest night of the year, every place shut down, but not us. Of course we noticed when she came in. We were Indian ruins. She was the end of beauty. No one knew her, the stranger whose tribe we recognized, her family related to deer, if that’s who she was, a people accustomed to hearing songs in pine trees, and making them hearts.

(In Mad Love and War, 5)

Harjo lets us know about different events in a whole and quite puzzling story which took place in a very common bar said to be “the club of shotgun, knife wound, of poison by culture” (*In Mad Love and War, 5*). She prepares the reader or listener for something extraordinary by using the metaphor “the coldest night of the year” to which she adds another detail “every place shut down” but they did not and all the people had gone away “except the hardcore”, that is to say that a particular group of customers was there as people who resisted giving up on life. If we think of the American Indian diaspora, this metaphor might suggest a connotation of a group of people who came together in their interest to endure and struggle for their tribal beliefs, culture and survival, and thus they did not go away, they stayed there talking, drinking and sharing the time together. Suddenly Harjo introduces a mystery character: “Of course we noticed when she came in” (*In Mad Love and War, 5*) and, at this point, she challenges us to wonder and keep following the storyteller’s mind to satisfy our curiosity about who “she” refers to. Although the other characters appear to be well known to each other including the

storyteller, their lives might be sad and so ignored that Harjo tells us “We were Indian ruins”. In contrast, the mystery being “She was the end of beauty”, a feminine character that was amazingly “the proverbial dream girl” (*In Mad Love and War*, 5), an attribute we happen to know farther in the story. By considering whether both readers and listeners are American Indians or Non-American Indians, we can imagine the character from different views. An American Indian reader who is culturally engaged in their beliefs and rituals connects “she” either with a non-human being such as, for example, a deer, or with a young female human being. Unless s/he has got enough knowledge of American Indian cultures and their myths, a Non-Indian will think of a woman and will find it very complex to understand the information given by Harjo when she says that, in spite of being unknown and a “stranger”, they identified her tribe whose family is “related to deer”. At the same time, by expressing her thought conditionally, “if that’s who she was”, Harjo is showing that there might be something in her appearance or behavior that raises doubts. However, we are getting acquainted with the main character and keeping attentive to the narrator in the sense that Harjo gives some further information about “the stranger” and her tribe:

a people accustomed to hearing songs in
pine trees, and making them hearts

(In Mad Love and War, 5)

Not only does this detail mean very significant news concerning comfort and happiness that are welcome at that particular moment of the bar customers’ life, but also suggests how dangerously powerful the presence of her “beauty” might be among “Indians in ruins” who, allegorically, are the resistant “hardcore” to very inclement and rather hostile circumstances against which they need a warming and enlightening fire and protection to face “the coldest night of the year”. A dilemma has just been created, which results in different reactions on the part of people who felt puzzled and others who were formidably impressed by her magic power. Both types of customers are attracted by the deer magic:

The woman inside the woman who was to dance naked in the bar of misfits
blew deer magic. Henry Jack, who could not survive a sober day, thought she
was Buffalo Calf Woman come back, passed out, his head by the toilet. All
night he dreamed a dream he could not say. The next day he borrowed
money, went home, and sent back the money I lent. Now that's a miracle.
Some people see vision in a burned tortilla, some in the face of a woman.

(In Mad Love and War, 5)

By using the words "naked" and "misfits" Harjo, allegorically, suggests both the image of dispossession and truth in a space whose image articulates marginalization and abandonment.

According to Creek cultural traditions, deer are magic. Harjo makes some more references to the deer in her work such as, for example, the poem "Song for the Deer and Myself to return On". In this poem she mentions the Creek poet Louis Oliver who has taught her how to interrelate with deer and tells us:

(...) I sang the song Louis taught me:
A song to call the deer in Creek, when hunting,
And I am certainly hunting something as magic as deer
In this city far from the hammock of my mother's belly.

(In Mad Love and War, 30)

Deer Woman is a myth believed by Muskogee and Creek Nation and finds equivalent myths in other cultures. Among American Indian Lakota communities it is believed that if White Buffalo Calf Woman appears she will bring harmony and spiritual balance to the world and can be a sign of positive change for every kind of life. In a similar way, the spirit of the myth of Deer Woman teaches us that we need to be responsible and care for the land and for children who are the future of humankind. Seeing a deer woman might bring evil consequences as well. In this connection, Harjo introduces other characters who represent integrant stories of this whole story, for example, Henry Jack, Richard, his wife and the storyteller's brother-in-law. People who are "broken survivors" (*In Mad Love and*

War, 5) have many different and more or less dangerous or risky life stories occurring in a double world as dominated and as integrant members.

Imagination develops according to people's views of the world and to the knowledge we have of it. Besides having drunk much, Henry Jack imagines he is seeing Buffalo Calf Woman whose magic power may be harmful and he feels respect for this tribal belief. Thus he chose to take the decision of going back home because he did not want to take the risk. Buffalo Calf Woman is a myth that makes up part of the tradition and cultures of many tribes in Northern America including Dakota and Lakota. Then Harjo also reveals a detail concerning morally correct behavior in such circumstances when she tells us: "We who were taught not to stare drank our beer" (*In Mad Love and War*, 5). At the same time, life went on as evidenced by the players, the music in the jukebox and a certain kind of violence between husband and wife, in fact due to the effect the young mystery beauty of the deer woman was causing on the man. What seems an event of innocence grows and becomes a fact of adult experience for "some people see vision in a burned tortilla, some in the face of a woman" (*In Mad Love and War*, 5). By establishing aggressive behavior which will turn into violence and maybe death in the allegorical relationship of these characters, Richard and his wife, Harjo raises awareness and evidences her political responsibility for the fallacy of the mystery stranger's wonders. In relation to this fact, Dean Rader explains that

through the unusual and provocative conflation of public and private significations, performative powers, and subtexts of relation and confrontation, the contemporary American Indian poem has become a truly unique and effective form of simultaneous engagement and resistance.

("Word as Weapon", 148)

That is how, in the role of storyteller, Harjo feels committed to seek a way to find the solution for the problem. Meanwhile, she must still confront language, by using a metaphor that might represent a certain disorientation created by her in order to involve us in her need to find a response, which gives the impression of being impossible as she

mentions: “but I couldn’t take it in this dingy envelope”, moreover, “in this strange city, frozen to the back of the sky” and she motivates us to reflect with her and share her belief in the spirit of light which is a language that never disappoints her, just as she admits: “So I look at the stars (...) the only promises that ever make sense” (*In Mad Love and War*, 5). In terms of American Indian cultures the spirit of light always speaks the truth. On the other hand, Harjo chooses a mediator, her brother-in-law who is quite skillful in law and interrelationships with Euro-Americans as he “hung out with white people” (*In Mad Love and War*, 5); besides, he is good at speaking circumstantial language appropriately in spite of having left law school as he “practiced law on the street with his hands” (*In Mad Love and War*, 5). By way of supporting American Indian evidence for the use of language in accordance with their need to assert dominant characteristics of their cultures, identities and concerns about liberation, sovereignty or the future life of their communities, Dean Rader quotes the linguist John Bierhorst who claims the “belief that words in themselves have the power to make things happen ... is one of the distinguishing features of native American thought” (“Word as Weapon”, 147). In the light of this, in the role of storyteller, she queries her brother-in-law for a solution to her linguistic problem so that she can ensure harmony and continuity of life for the small group of poor American Indians who have lived outside privilege and were nearly succumbing to the charming beauty of the stranger deer woman. This reveals itself to be the right strategy because Harjo succeeds in changing the woman’s hypnotizing bright image of her body at the same time as she focuses her inner energy, the positive power of a sensitive feminine spirit, evidenced in the expression “The woman inside the woman”, as soon as her brother-in-law talked to her in a frontal approach. He confronted her “face of the moon” and “bragged to us, he told her magic words and that’s when she broke, became human” (*In Mad Love and War*, 5). The problem, nonetheless, has not been solved yet, and thus Harjo insists on provoking a reaction in her relationship with us, who are reading or listening to her story, in the sense of increasing the dialogic exchange, which is a distinct American Indian strategy of their oral tradition. With regard to this, Harjo does not wish to separate people, but rather offer good advice as a helpful guide to save their lives, that is to say, to sustain them for their safe journey of life. Harjo wants to

make sure whether someone is going to give a hand to help or to bushwhack her instead. That is suggested by the meaning of the verb form “crack” used in the sentence of introduction to her brother-in-law’s question, and whose tough-guy bar voice is abandoned for a different, kinder voice:

But we all heard his bar voice crack:

What’s a girl like you doing in a place like this?

(In Mad Love and War, 5-6)

Harjo knows that if we ask the right question at the right time we have a better possibility of opening a path for the change of the world and to know the truth as well. Therefore, as readers and listeners, we have been called to participate and keep on paying attention once again, presuming that we feel eager to take part in the story. We are aware that the story cannot end because it is expected to generate good spiritual power that people need in order to be able to transform and change the desperate circumstances of life in which they are involved and make them better. Not only does Harjo want to know what they are doing there, but we and all the people in the bar also need to find a strategy to release all of us. This is why she inquires and expects a fair response to her question in order to accomplish a necessary balance:

That’s what I’d like to know, what are we all doing in a place like this?

(In Mad Love and War, 6)

By representing aspects of popular urban culture and a position different from that of the American Indians, Harjo reminds us that “she could hear only what she wanted to” (*In Mad Love and War, 6*), at the same time as she assertively interpolates us with the question-tag “don’t we all?” so assured she is of everyone’s dream. Accordingly, João de Mancelos contends that

a imaginação e o espaço psicológico das personagens anulam o espaço físico do bar decadente, fazendo com que a cena a que assistem ganhe

conotações completamente novas. A *stripper* converte-se numa bailarina tribal e a dança licenciosa numa cerimónia imbuída de magia: “She was the myth slipped through dreamtime. The promise of feast / we all know was coming”.

(“As Faces da Terra”, 362)

Although the ritual was not in accordance with the American Indian Creek or Lakota tradition, as Harjo says “Our ceremonies didn’t predict this” (*In Mad Love and War*, 6), she leads us to imagine a promising harmonious future for both American Indian and Non-American Indian coming generations. In point of fact, that suggests her vision as a poet and storyteller: “I had to tell you this, for the baby inside the girl sealed up with a lick of hope and swimming into praise of nations” (*In Mad Love and War*, 6), an allegorical hint that evidences a wish to strengthen American Indian cultural identities and expectations of a promising future; nevertheless, it does not seem to be easily near, in the sense that imagination and reality do not seem to match conveniently for “The way back is deer breath on icy windows”, which means a difficult dream almost impossible to see and to realize.

Moreover, once again “She” surprised them all by proceeding enigmatically as she climbed onto a table, not an ordinary table but a “table of names. And danced in the room of children without shoes”, an allegory we can associate with the American Indian myths of the Deer Woman and the Buffalo Calf Woman. With regard to this, both myths represent warnings and advice concerning the misuse of sexual power in order to avoid suffering or destruction, for the good reason that Indigenous tribal survival and their cultural identities need to be guaranteed by choosing a mate wisely to continue into the next generation. As “she” was not wearing shoes, all the people around the table could see her feet. This is another mythical image which also means a warning in the sense that, according to the myth, if the young woman shows deer or buffalo calf’s hooves instead of human feet the male human being will be destroyed by that curse which symbolizes despair, loneliness, depression, loss, madness or even death. Furthermore, Harjo imagines a song which can accompany the dance and thus she adds these lines to the story poem:

You picked a fine time to leave me, Lucille.

With four hungry children and a crop in the field.

(In Mad Love and War, 6)

By having chosen this part of the well-known western country song which mentions the name “Lucille” Harjo may be suggesting a sparkling light which cannot fade away and she focuses on “four hungry children” who are important to contribute to the continuity of American Indian peoples. Given the fact that children and love are important, Harjo corroborates the need to welcome them as she shows in the metaphor: “for the baby inside the girl sealed up a lick of hope and swimming into praise of nations”. It is also important that human beings maintain good care of the land where there is “a crop in the field” ready to be gathered and used to feed starving people. There seems to be a problem again from which tensions arise when Harjo uses the expression from the song “You picked a fine time to leave me”, which suggests the “Deer Dancer” symbolizes all sorts of negative effects associated with broken and dysfunctional families.

On the other hand, we can imagine that “she” stood on a higher level compared to the audience around her table and, when “she took off her clothes” it could be as if she meant to set herself in those people's condition. By stripping off all her possessions in that space she is symbolized as being dispossessed and poor as them, American Indians. Then, the magic woman decided to start a physical and spiritual journey into memory as if she wanted to bring together her “self” and the others by releasing the sense of loss and transforming it in the rediscovery of identity, that is to say, a personal and a collective meeting, engendering the way back home, feeling free of every sort of oppression and thinking beautifully through body talk and dancing: “She shook loose memory, waltzed with the empty lover we’d all become” (*In Mad Love and War, 6*). Despite the fact that “She was no slouch”, Harjo exalts the American Indian values, spirit of wisdom and knowledge in her assertion: “and neither were we, watching” (*In Mad Love and War, 6*), which intensifies the need to use our human senses, eyes and ears, without forgetting spiritual care, while we pay attention to the situation, learn with the experience of life and continue being attentive to false visions, treacherous promises, elusive temptations

or attractions, because we cannot trust the miracle of a “vision in a burned tortilla, some in the face of a woman” (*In Mad Love and War*, 6). As regards this, people need to strengthen their spirit with love so that they feel healthy and able to choose and take decisions harmoniously, something which the woman has apparently not been able to do, but which nevertheless may serve in the continuing quest to think life differently.

The story in this poem suggests a movement of people who are activists but invisible. Given her role as a contemporary poet and storyteller, Harjo is expected to reveal her public and personal responsibility, and thus she is allowed to use her imagination in order to develop awareness at the same time that she sustains the spirit of collective power to go on struggling for American Indians’ survival, cultural identities and liberation as well as for the values of respect, justice and truth from which harmonious intercultural relationships with other peoples and nations will progress. In this connection, the last lines of the poem support Harjo’s strategy to continue the story and never give up in spite of having started the paragraph by saying that

The music ended. And so does the story. I wasn’t there. But I imagined her like this, not a stained red dress with tape on her heels but the deer who entered our dream in white dawn, breathed mist into pine trees, her fawn a blessing of meat, the ancestors who never left.

(In Mad Love and War, 6)

In addition, the story of American Indian peoples continues, albeit often invisibly, which might be understood both as a good and a bad prospect. On the one hand, American Indians are existing human beings of our contemporary world and, unfortunately, on the other hand, most of them remain invisible, segregated or indifferently set aside. This is the strong point focused on by Harjo’s imagination as a good caretaker of the Earth, the mythic home of all human beings, she also makes part of the family story in which other stories based on other stories of communities, towns, countries, worlds and world are gathered, remembering to take good care of the “self”, whose being or spirit also needs protection, food and thus hopeful, renewed life. This is a

vision sustained by the words she knows to speak by means of “the deer who entered our dream in white dawn” and that Harjo transformed into a pole of positive power by the force of the love and wisdom of “the ancestors who never left”. With regard to us, readers or listeners, we have learned that by a dialogic dynamics, by watching other experiences of life, by exchanging knowledge of other world views, we can be encouraged to begin something that may contribute to a better change of the world.

To a certain extent, this story is connected with other stories, which Harjo interweaves in other poems, for example, “Returning from the Enemy”, which she starts by giving us a hint of encouragement, when she says “It’s time to begin. I know it and have dreaded the knot of memory as it unwinds in my gut” and she proceeds to reinforce the incentive to “continue to believe we will make through the bloodstream to the ceremony for returning from the enemy” (*A Map to the Next World*, 69). Moreover, Harjo offers her readers different paths in different languages so that we do not get lost and may go forward.

Intercultural worlds teamed up in counterpoint

The multicultural landscape is a modern American and world issue due to people’s mobility for work or to change living conditions. “Bird” is an intercultural poem for reasons related to music. Bird is the allegorical name of the main character Harjo refers to in the poem, and whose true name is Charlie Parker. Coincidentally, it was his nickname and the reason why he became known as Bird or Yardbird, which is a word used for a chicken, was explained by the fact that he loved eating chicken. Moreover, bird is a word connoted to the motion of flying both physically and spiritually. Thoughts, feelings or other aspects such as, for example, multiple sounds which are part of our inner and outside world, and can be used for communication as a non-linguistic system. Given the multiple intelligences that characterize human beings and contribute to the evolution of cultural diversity, Harjo associates the sounds of music to a language that is felt like spontaneity, liberation and interaction.

Charlie Parker was a great jazz musician and music is the main theme of this poem through which Harjo tells a story. She presents cultural information in the image of a bird

and other metaphors connected with music, which is common to all American Indian communities and all people in the world, and thus it makes up part of Harjo's language, a language she feels most comfortable with. In this process, Harjo has recourse to American Indian beliefs and tries to develop a strategy in order to speak to everybody, independently of their country or language. Thus, she starts the poem by personifying the moon:

The moon plays horn, leaning on the shoulder of the dark universe
to the infinite glitter of chance. Tonight I watched Bird kill himself

(In Mad Love and War, 21)

maybe to suggest the antithesis between its circular shape, its light, its movement and the mystery of the "dark universe", and a comparison of Bird, a cultural icon, to someone extraordinary "larger than real life" and "with nerve endings longer than our bodies", the image of someone who transcends normal space or common feelings because the way he plays goes beyond "his convoluted scales could reach", his tendency to fly, to improvise very complex harmonic sounds and rhythms which lead Harjo to challenge all of us who are reading or listening to her, so that we can feel directly connected and participate in the same mood. The presence of the moon, which is a meaningful symbol in American Indian cultures, suggests that transcendence is necessary to make situations clear and its silver light helps to harmonize human interrelationships, and thus Harjo is trying to explain the visible facts through what is invisible in the attempt to overcome the experiences of life's routines. At the same time that helps us to understand this language otherwise there will not be transformation, change, healing or survival:

Each rhapsody embodies counterpoint, and pain stuns the woman
in high heels, the man behind the horn, signs the heart.

To survive is sometimes a leap into madness. The fingers of
saints are still hot from miracles, but can they save themselves?

(In Mad Love and War, 21)

When human beings work for others' wellbeing, and for that of the "self" as well, alongside all those who confront conflicting inner or outside situations, they react symptomatically in a spontaneous attempt to find a response in their memory. If knowledge and experience have not been developed enough, people need to search for clues within the problem itself. Moreover, facts are part of experience brought to consciousness in the sense that "what may seem to be sites of rupture can also be re-read as sites of suture", as David Callahan admits (*Contemporary Issues in Australian Literature*, 13); at the same time the effort to construct ethical paths is important to approach problems. If people are interested in solutions they will insist, as they believe the answer is there among the facts. Such a resolution may still be in hypothesis, information in bits and pieces; nonetheless, facts as we know them condition the response and may lead us to ignore the truth. Issues have a life of their own and human beings need to embrace the situation mentally, that is to say, to improvise and use imagination in order to work toward everyone's wellbeing and harmony.

The multicultural world, war, hunger, criminality, destruction these are riddles for a dialectics of spirituality that can be expressed or effected symbolically by jazz: call gives way to response versus a crazy quilt in order to gather diversity in harmony, and not necessarily copy others' models.

In this connection, Harjo advises us to become aware of the dichotomy in the relationship between the physical and spiritual aspects of life, or between man and woman as well. Moreover, she draws a reference to the language of artists, poets or musicians, who can use non-verbal language to reason with other human beings or, albeit not necessarily, communicate feelings:

(...) All poets

understand the final uselessness of words. We are chords to

other chords to other chords, if we're lucky to melody. (...)

(In Mad Love and War, 21)

Moreover, music and its rhythm together with poetry can become the intercultural whole for harmony, when things become more clear and visible, greater than music even as a new cycle occurs according to the image given by the moon that

is brighter than anything I can see when I come out of the theater,

than music, than memory of music, or any mere poem. At least

I can dance to "Ornithology" or sweet-talk beside "Charlie's Blues,

(In Mad Love and War, 21)

However, there is a world that, unfortunately, the poet cannot depict in a poem because it is so extraordinary that it only finds expression through the grace of a compassionate spirit like Bird, according to Harjo's counter-argument:

but inside this poem I can't play a horn, hijack a plane to

somewhere where music is the place those nerve endings dangle.

(In Mad Love and War, 21)

Mystery is in this space and nothing seems to show evidence of any surprise or unexpected experience, a mythic fact that only landscape, the two mountains, Catalinas and Rincons, can understand in its land-based language, as Harjo appears to be looking for someone who can understand her:

Where is the dimension a god lives who will take Bird home?

I want to see it, I said to the Catalinas, to the Rincons,

to anyone listening in the dark. I said, Let me hear you

by any means: by horn, by fever, by night, even by some poem

attempting flight home.

(In Mad Love and War, 21)

While reading this poem many of us may feel confused or having difficulty understanding the plot; however, in the attempt to solve any possible confusion, Harjo uses many common phrases, words and images that recall familiar experiences, sounds or sensations, for example, in line two: "Tonight I watched", line 3: "I've always had a theory", line 9: "if we're lucky", line 10: "anything I can see when I came out of the theater", line "I said to the Catalinas", line 21: "I said, Let me hear you". We know the Catalinas is a range of mountains; nonetheless, as mentioned in Part I of this dissertation, the personification of mountains, rivers and other parts of our Mother Earth is an aspect of American Indian cultures, that is to say, the spirit of life is embedded in these beings so they are cared for like humans. Therefore, Harjo is very present throughout the poem which suggests a personal experience of life in a musical atmosphere, listening to Charlie Parker. He was a unique invincible shining star among saxophone players of his time. Conversely, he died early and still young because of hard drugs and alcohol: the "dark universe" in the first line of the poem. Thus, Harjo conveys the continuance of his living spirit by asking us:

(...) Those nights he
played did he climb the stairway of forgetfulness, with his horn,
a woman who is always beautiful to strangers? (...)

(In Mad Love and War, 21)

all memories and sensations she needs to share as a poet, a meaningful cultural interaction and increase of awareness in this story.

The theme of music played and sung together with the saxophone is also present in other poems by Joy Harjo, as if they were voices in dialogue for intercultural understanding and response to problems common to human beings in general. In this connection, for example, the poem "Bleed through":

I yearn to sing; a certain note can spiral stars,
or knock the balance of the world askew.
Inside your horn lives a secret woman

Who says she knows the power of the womb,
can transform massacres into gold, her own heartache
Into a ruby stone.

(In Mad Love and War, 36)

or the poem “Healing Animal” throughout which Harjo succeeds well in showing evidence of the process of transformation operated by the language of love and the belief in the way a benevolent spirit can bring health, continuity of life or other solutions, so as she suggests:

And I ask you
what bitter words are ruining your soft-skinned village,
because I want to make a poem that will cup
the inside of your throat
like the fire in the palm of a healing animal. Like
the way Coltrane knew love in the fluid shape
of a saxophone
that could change into the wings of a blue angel.
He tasted the bittersweet roots of this crazy world,
and spit them out into the center of our musical
jazzed globe.

(In Mad Love and War, 38)

Furthermore, Harjo uses a full allegory in the prose poem “Nine Lives” to depict paradoxes of human existence and the cause of anger or despair, which reaches its high point when she tells us that

Cicadas climb out of the carcasses their voices make, into their wings of
fragile promises to glide over the wet grass. We are all spun within a
crescendo of abalone light, unseen beneath the wild storm

(In Mad Love and War, 50)

After so much struggling for life, Harjo challenges us to work out the right way to achieve solutions for those dilemmas when she warns us not to tell her “unless it will turn me into something as perfect as a perfect monarch butterfly” (*In Mad Love and War*, 50).

In an interview with Harbour Winn, Elaine Smokewood and John McBryde (2009) contained in the book *Soul Talk, Song Language*, Harjo talked about “contradictions” which can hardly exist peacefully and easily as one appears to struggle to annihilate the other. Harjo argues about opposite sides, for example, the concept of “anger” in its positive and negative values, and she focuses on the need to raise ourselves above the problem, as if we were watching it from the moon, for then we will find out that “it all makes sense”. In this connection, she also adds how important art is in such contexts, or difficult worlds, as it constitutes “a means to transform or transmute anger into something useful” (Harjo and Winder, 72). Thus she believes that “most of the poetry that has been produced is probably born in song” and in her words: “I consider poetry as song language, as soul talk ...” (Harjo and Winder, 73), older and much more ancient than the culture of writing. Whenever human beings get together with their mates, friends, family or strangers even, sitting down at a table and sharing stories, life experiences, dilemmas, tensions, and feelings, a poetic space is being developed, the table becomes “the heart of the human world” (Harjo and Winder, 73), the time and place to receive and give back. Everybody and everything appears to be connected, and full of spirit: visibility, poetic justice, equality, liberty, identity. The poem “When the World as we Knew it Ended”, which Harjo considers to be “a poem that practically wrote itself...” (Harjo and Winder, 73), means a voice of truth and wisdom before our modern problematic conflicted world, a powerful vision of a two or many sided life: the American dream and greedy power versus the Earth’s surviving power and multicultural diversified knowledge. The first lines of this poem seem to refer to the northern American continent where many details and features of everyday life, business, trade, finance, science, technology and culture show evidence of the human being’s ephemeral condition through metaphors of real worlds in a single whole world.

We were dreaming on an occupied island at the farthest edge

of a trembling nation when it went down.

Two towers rose up from the east island of commerce and touched
the sky. Men walked on the moon. Oil was sucked dry
by two brothers. Then it went down. Swallowed
by a fire dragon, by oil and fear.
Eaten whole.

It was coming.

(How We Became Human, 198)

There are signs, elements of the Earth, all around human beings on Earth as if they are trying to warn us about something that is going to happen, although humans' capacity to understand the phenomenon is very tiny and they could never imagine that the eleventh of September (9/11) was going to happen. However, "We", the American Indians and all the other people who are closely linked to the Earth, have been taking notice, and Harjo emphasizes the presence of these people, people considered minorities and without visibility in the mainstream world, by the repetition of synonymous expressions: "We had been watching", "We saw it all".

We had been watching since the eve of the missionaries in their
long and solemn clothes, to see what would happen.

We saw it
from the kitchen window over the sink
as we made coffee, cooked rice and
potatoes, enough for an army.

We saw it all, as we changed diapers and fed
the babies. We saw it,
through the branches
of the knowledgeable tree

through the snags of stars, through
the sun and storms from our knees
as we bathed and washed
the floors.

(How We Became Human, 198)

At the same time, Harjo speaks and informs us in a way that brings us closer to people's daily routines on that specific day. Everyone was normally busy either doing the house chores or looking after their family or others in interconnection with other living members of the earth: trees, stars, sun, or the birds, flowers and mountains, sea and animals, a whole universe sharing the same event altogether. For example, the birds flying over give an image of a storm, which means a warning, and the interrelationship between humans and the birds, like loyal friends that can communicate in the earth's language, the same code for all, for example, announcing the right moment things were going to happen. In this world where we live, dreams are different, the illusion of power for some and Truth, the real power, for others; political power, greed and violence on one side, and love, beauty, landscape, song and harmony on the other side, very contrasting realities, although we are all a little dot or spot between the ground and the infinite sky. Visions are a constant presence in American Indian cultures and they not only inform but also symbolize warning or premonition. They become a rich source of listening and remembering old stories or giving and sharing new experiences all together, concerns expressed by Harjo in the following lines:

The conference of the birds warned us, as they flew over
destroyers in the harbor, parked there since the first takeover.
It was by their song and talk we knew when to rise
when to look out the window
to the commotion going on –
the magnetic field thrown off by grief.

We heard it.

The racket in every corner of the world. As
the hunger for war rose up in those who would steal to be president
to be king or emperor, to own the trees, stones, and everything
else that moved about the earth, inside the earth
and above it.

We knew it was coming, tasted the winds who gathered intelligence
from each leaf and flower, from every mountain, sea
and desert, from every prayer and song all over this tiny universe
floating in the skies of infinite
being.

And then it was over, this world we had grown to love
for its sweet grasses, for the many-colored horses
and fishes, for the shimmering possibilities
while dreaming.

But then there were the seeds to plant and the babies
who needed milk and comforting, and someone
picked up a guitar or ukulele from the rubble
and began to sing about the light flutter
the kick beneath the skin of the earth
we felt there, beneath us

a warm animal
a song being born between the legs of her,
a poem.

(How We Became Human, 198)

All of us readers, listeners and viewers are invited to listen to the sounds of the singing, the impulse of creativity, the breathing, the heart pumping, the Earth speaking, the poetics of life. This is “how we became human” as Harjo posits the existence of life in the poem “It’s Raining In Honolulu” (*How We Became Human, 194*).

PART III

CONCLUSION

For many people, Native Americans are trapped in this 19th century ferocity. The military loves to invoke that ferocity – like with the Blackhawk and the Apache [helicopters] – and so do sports teams. One case in point is that the code name for Osama bin Laden was Geronimo. Native Americans serve in the U.S. military in a rate that far exceeds what one would expect from our [small] population. It's a point of pride to serve. The flag comes out first at every powwow. So to have Geronimo be associated with the enemy is very painful.

(Louise Erdrich, "10 Questions". *TIME*, December 17, 2012, p.52)

Diversity, intercultural relationships and multicultural knowledge challenge human needs as people deal with various interconnections in today's world. People and their lives appear to be evolving towards a materialistic globalization, which tends to impose a certain degree of Euro-American cultural homogenization. In this sense, the English language is part of that process, to the extent of turning into a threat to many other languages. Although the consumerist and mass-mediatised culture is affecting aspects of all the other cultures which may not survive the dominating world view, there also seems to be a human desire to understand the gift of sharing various challenging cultures and welcoming the cultural differentiation of our world, an attitude which can contribute to improving the way we interact. In this context it makes sense to increase awareness of the fact that everybody and everything on Earth is part of a whole huge web where interconnections are continuously emerging.

Literature, a strong expression of many world cultures, represents the languages and voices of individuals and communities, and can offer help to understand the many diverse and sometimes complex perspectives of such interwoven worlds whose roots are grounded in our planet Earth, the home world of all human beings all together with plants, animals, land and minerals, water and air. It is important that human beings who

have the privilege of sharing the Earth remember how much they depend on it to keep themselves alive. Sharing the same space as the Earth, human beings have developed life, memory, language, emotion, culture and identity. Throughout their evolution, having grown into communities and nations, human beings have also developed their own perspectives on the world. The American Indian view, if we can include so many different cultures in a pan-Indian perspective is characterized by a particular ethical care towards the Earth and our part on it.

In the light of this, choosing a representative of American Indian cultures has turned into a difficult although gratifying decision which led to encountering the work of Joy Harjo. She is a well-known poet who has been sharing her knowledge, her views on our contemporary world and her experience of life throughout the Northern, Central and Southern Americas and in diverse countries from Europe to Asia including the Middle East, Israel, places that she has visited as a poet, a speaker of truth, justice, spirituality, sovereignty, whose identity roots grow principally from her ancestral Muskogee American Indian heritage. She has contributed widely to the attempt to change our present world and indicate paths to deal with dilemmas, social and political tensions, human injustice or the neglect of human rights, in the sense that “[p]oetry has given [her] a voice” (*The Spiral of Memory*, 43), a language of her own that has enabled her to cross over many difficult and varied borders towards the goal of achieving a world without frontiers. There is particular relevance in recalling an excerpt of her poem “The Creation Story” which highlights the cyclic motion of life and death, because in the American Indian perspective on the world they “don’t see things as beginning and ending” (*The Spiral of Memory*, 38).

I’m not afraid of love
or its consequence of light.

It’s not easy to say this
or anything, when my entrails
dangle between paradise
and fear.
(...)

If these words can do anything
I say bless this house
With stars.

Transfix us with love.

(The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, 3)

It is a different way of expressing the connection and duality Heaven and Earth, good and evil that corresponds to the conventional Western or Euro-American view. At the same time, two different perspectives on the world are revealed: the American Indian thought that considers the search for convergence and integration, collectivising the individual, in contrast with the Euro-American view which tends towards measuring and fragmentation, separating, individualizing the collective in terms of the drive to accumulate power. In contrast with mainstream western cultures, when we read or listen to Harjo, we find she is sharing a spirit very sharply grounded in knowledge about our Mother Earth and the consciousness of belonging to the land, the Earth, the Universe. Therefore, she feels her responsibility to find a resolution in the hope of bringing harmony to people of her community and other people of the world. For not only is she the voice of the land but also of her community and other Indigenous peoples of the Americas, particularly including all those who are invisible and need to be heard or have a caring voice to speak for them in order to become acknowledged. In her demand for justice Harjo cares for words as sacred and uses English in an interwoven way with her ancestral Indigenous culture, which leads to transforming the language of Euro-American power and anger into song language and inner/soul language, the putative voice of Mother Earth's spirit that nourishes, heals and cares for all her members and leads them to equity and harmony. In the same way as nobody and nothing exist isolated in the world so it happens with the word, which does not exist alone. As with the threads of a web, each word or verbal expression acquires meaning only when connected to other words and worlds/stories. Thus, words can become very powerful. Furthermore, being human means to become conscious of connections and develop ethical care, that is to say responsibility for the fragile strength of the world, the land or the city.

Moreover, Harjo's transformed language has proved to have an intense focus in the sense that her poetry articulates Harjo's love and respect for her Indigenous heritage. She has been able to change and fill the global language, the lingua franca, with new sounds, colours, tastes, rhythms which embody the power of her work. Harjo likes to keep stories alive and enjoys "the ability to tell a story and to tell it well. Traditionally, wealth was often determined by your gifts in this area (...) the skills which enabled the retelling of memory were seen as our true riches" (*The Spiral of Memory*", 42). Through her poems, Harjo has attempted to communicate a dream involving diverse Indigenous worlds within the Americas such as, for example, Honduras, Nicaragua or Hawai'i, along with the Euro-American New World, particularly the USA. Her words speak of renewal and reinvigoration, working for change and healing. Her poetry explains how American Indians and all the other people on Earth might become human.

Harjo has endured and succeeded in making sense of her present world while not neglecting the brutalities of contemporary urban living conditions and life on reservations. Similarly, the recent news from many nations is evidence of a world which contains conflicts and tensions related to so many aspects of life: the economy, gender politics, citizens' security, ethnicity, immigration, identity, land and natural resources, food, water, sustainability, sport in an increasingly technologized and industrialized world. All peoples have their responsibility for both the degradation of the Earth and the dilution of creative words: human beings, land resources, plants, animals and even the language, stories, memory or ceremony. On the other hand, there are many people sensitive to the need for change, people who meet together "round the table", activists or just human beings who have also developed awareness and ethical care towards the Earth and its communities. If we preserve the Earth we are preserving humanity, not to mention the life and the beauty of our world. These need to be taught to our children, who are the continuance of human beings' memory, and who we also trust to repair or to fix, to heal or to care for our Mother Earth's health, for she will always be our "kitchen table".

The time has come when we should consider why the trees, the deer, the rivers of our Home are disappearing and think of the effects of their loss. The renowned

conservationist, the Senegalese Baba Dioum, in a speech he made to the International Union for Conservation of Nature in New Delhi, in 1968, has left this message:

In the end we will conserve only what we love,
we will love only what we understand,
and we will understand only what we are taught.

(Dioum)

In this connection, Harjo's poetic language can teach us how to respect cultural diversity because it reinforces survival, stresses the harmonious cyclical process of life and helps maintain connected the important bond between the old, which contains tradition and memory, and the new, which engages creation and transformation, a bond in which patience and compassion play a crucial role in welcoming the idea of change in order to achieve balance, the key to ethically healthy life. "I don't see things as beginning or ending" (*The Spiral of Memory*, 38), says Harjo after having observed so many varied worlds within the whole world. In addition to these highly significant words, Harjo shares the prayer poem "Letter (with songline) to the Breathmaker", the wind spirit, to encourage hope and the continuance of belief in Life, a powerful spirit:

Oh Maker of Breath if you are the shine woven
through all things, from the plumeria blossoms
clustered on the tree of knowledge to the destroyers
in the bay across the water then where does justice begin
and cruelty end in this talking and thinking world?

*A butterfly with wings like lungs carries pollen in the direction of the sun.
We will search for you urgently everywhere.*

(*How We Became Human*, 178)

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Dissertação de Mestrado
ROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE
The poetic work of Joy Harjo

À MESA DA COZINHA
O trabalho poético de Joy Harjo

Maria Helena de Sousa Guedes

Errata

Página 11 – Resumo:

Primeiro parágrafo, segunda e terceira linhas dois e três **Indígenas Norte-Americanas** deve ler-se **indígenas norte-americanas**.

Segundo parágrafo, segunda e terceira linhas **Índias Americanas, ou Ameríndias** deve ler-se **índias americanas, ou ameríndias**.

Segundo parágrafo, terceira linha **poetisa** deve ler-se **poeta**.

Na sexta linha **Índias Americanas** deve ler-se **índias americanas**.