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**Cross-Cultural and Tribal-Centred Politics
in American Indian Studies**

**Assessing a Current Split in American Indian Literary
Scholarship and Re-Interpreting Leslie Marmon
Silko's Ceremony and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks***

by

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Declaration

The thesis does not contain material that I have used before. An article of about 4,000 words, which arises from my work in Part One of the thesis, is published in the online journal *Literature Compass* (Reference: *Literature Compass* 1 (2004) AM 086, 1-18. <<http://www.literaturecompass.com/viewpoint.asp?section=10&ref=450>>). The thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

The thesis examines the current split in American Indian literary studies between cross-cultural and tribal-centred schools of criticism through analyses of Arnold Krupat's, Louis Owens's and Gerald Vizenor's scholarship, on one side, and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's and Craig Womack's critical work, on the other. The conflicting critical positions, despite their growing importance, have not received a consistent analysis in the critical discourse. The implications of this controversy for the future of American Indian studies and for the ways in which American Indian literature may be studied and taught have not been examined in depth. Particularly, there is little recognition of the validity of tribal-centred contributions to the field. The research seeks to address such gaps in the current scholarship: it develops a synoptic discussion of the opposing critical positions, assesses their strengths and drawbacks, and proposes a possible resolution of the controversy. The thesis argues that cross-cultural scholarship (in conjunction with postcolonial and postmodern theory) has contributed importantly to the understanding of discursive hybridity as a vital aspect of American Indian existence, writing and anticolonial resistance. Yet, cross-cultural criticism has sidelined questions regarding tribal sovereignty discourse and tribal-centred identity politics. Tribal-centred scholarship is making an important, and still ignored and misunderstood contribution to American Indian studies because it assists the understanding of these two important categories in American Indian experience and decolonisation. Assessing contributions and omissions of either critical position, the research posits that the current critical split could and should be negotiated to enable a more accurate and comprehensive reading of the political discourses that shape American Indian experience, anticolonial struggles and writing. The research illustrates the controversy and its potential mediation through a re-interpretation of two "representative" American Indian novels: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*. Part One of the research – chapters one, two and three – analyses the debate, while Part Two – chapters four and five – re-reads *Ceremony* and *Tracks*.

Introduction

The consistent development of American Indian literary studies as an academic discipline begins in the late 1960s and early 1970s. That beginning grows out of and is significantly influenced by American Indian activism for decolonisation, self-determination and tribal renewal, by the Civil Rights movement and by the subsequent advance of “pluralism” and “multiculturalism” in academia and in US liberal politics. Since the 1960s the field of American Indian literary studies has evolved with a remarkable intensity: American Indian fiction and non-fiction writing has constantly been on the rise, the critical scholarship has developed in breadth and complexity, American Indian courses, university programs, departments and conferences have claimed a rightful and active presence in academia. The accumulation of American Indian critical mass in academia does not necessarily mean that American Indian scholarship and literature have won all significant battles or have developed in unproblematic directions. Still, the steady advance of the field can be recognised as a great breakthrough: as a distinctive acknowledgement of American Indian peoples’ creative and intellectual power and as an assertion of their (formerly denied) rights to self-expression and intervention in US culture, institutions and politics. In the course of their contemporary development, American Indian literature and scholarship have won important cultural and political victories in combating long-term Indian stereotypes and Eurocentrism in Euro-American culture, in advancing a greater understanding of American Indian socio-cultural heritage and history, and in empowering American Indians to write, publish, teach and have their stories heard.

Yet, the past achievements and future directions, as well as the political meaning and purpose of American Indian writing and criticism, have recently become the subject of an important academic dispute. One major critical disagreement that currently divides American Indian literary studies and calls for a re-examination of the politics, purposes and methodologies of the field, and of its past and future developments is the discord between cross-cultural and tribal-centred critics. (Critics may describe these two positions as “cosmopolitan” and “dialogic” versus “indigenist” and “nationalist.” I use these terms interchangeably, depending on context.) As I started research in American Indian literary studies in the fall of 1999, tensions between American Indian cross-cultural and tribal-centred perspectives had begun to take up a concrete form and significance. My research has focused on those tensions because, as I shall outline briefly below, they have become a new legitimate and important area of study within the field.

On one side, Native Americanists like Arnold Krupat, the late Louis Owens and Gerald Vizenor, among others, have given shape to the cross-cultural school of criticism in American Indian studies in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s with seminal book-length studies, such as Krupat’s *Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (1989), *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature* (1992), *The Turn to the Native: Studies in Criticism and Culture* (1996) and *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (2002), Owens’s *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992), *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place* (1998) and *I Hear the Train: Reflections, Inventions, Refractions* (2001), and Vizenor’s *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (1994) and *Fugitive Poses* (1998). While Krupat’s, Owens’s and Vizenor’s specific critical approaches may differ, as I shall discuss later on, their scholarship defines and represents a cross-

cultural position in the field. What has come to characterise this position, in my view, is a focus on the problematics of American Indian cross-cultural experience, identity, culture and mediation, on the textual expression of cross-cultural hybridity and negotiation, and on the complex and strategic cross-cultural location of American Indian writing and scholarship. The critical approaches that scholars in this camp deploy and develop are deeply informed by orthodox postcolonial theory, which – particularly in Vizenor’s work – is keenly related to postmodern ideas. Central to this critical method is the analysis of the intense cross-cultural fusions, negotiations and politics of representation that exemplify contemporary American Indian life and literature. Cross-cultural critics have been particularly careful to illuminate the political and historical nature of American Indian cross-cultural and postcolonial hybridity: it is the inevitable result of (continuing) colonial history, but, at the same time, represents a reversal of colonial efforts to eliminate American Indian peoples and traditions and/or to confine them to a bygone, static, pre-colonial past. American Indian literature in particular, as cross-cultural scholars elucidate, represents a powerful rejection of colonial binary oppositions, a disruption of colonising discourses of “the Indian,” and a politically meaningful subversion of Western principles of thought, literary expression and critical method. Critical work in this direction has contributed very significantly, I think, to the understanding of how American Indian writing, while adopting established Euro-American forms, works to “Indianise” and subvert those forms, to continue and renovate tribal cultural traditions, and to intervene into and oppose colonial discourses. Scholars who adopt a cross-cultural critical position suggest, furthermore, that cross-cultural disciplinary locations and discursive modes are the most suitable and the most advantageous ones for the development of American Indian studies. Krupat, specifically, underscores

how the evolving intervention of American Indian literature and scholarship in the American literary and scholarly canon, as well as the dialogue with other national resistance and postcolonial literatures, serve not only Native American cultural and political goals but also work to challenge colonial capitalism and oppression globally.

My impression is that cross-cultural scholarship represents an established and widely adopted critical perspective in American Indian literary studies. The discussion of cross-cultural locations and characteristics of contemporary American Indian existence and writing, the study of the ways in which that writing draws on and continues American Indian cultures and traditions of storytelling, the analysis of its capacity to empower American Indian peoples and to transcend cultural barriers have become common approaches in the field.

Meanwhile, and especially since the late 1980s, scholars like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Craig Womack have called for a shift in the focus and character of interpretative and theoretical approaches in American Indian literary studies. The development of this argument comes most conspicuously into view in publications such as Cook-Lynn's articles "The Radical Consciousness in Native American Studies" (1991), "Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, the Third World, and Tribal Sovereignty" (1993), "American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story" (1996), "Who Stole Native American Studies?" (1997), her books of criticism *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays: A Tribal Voice* (1996) and *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A Voice from Tatekeya's Earth* (2001), as well as in groundbreaking studies such as Robert Allen Warrior's *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1995) and Craig Womack's *Red on Red: American Indian Literary Separatism* (1999). In the argument of Cook-Lynn and Womack, among others, the preoccupation with the "subversive" and "hybrid" nature

of American Indian experience and writing works to depoliticise or displace continuing Native political struggles for tribal sovereignty and decolonisation. While established American Indian critical approaches have affirmed American Indian cultures and peoples, and have celebrated their capacity to persist and oppose colonial domination culturally and textually, those approaches – according to Cook-Lynn and Womack – have generally failed to address and sustain the activist and political significance of American Indian nationalism and of tribal-centred identity formation. Therefore, tribal-centred criticism, as I have come to understand it, suggests that cross-cultural critical approaches in American Indian literary studies (together with postcolonial and postmodern methods) have contributed little, or have even been antagonistic, to some of the most important issues in American Indian life: the understanding and support of indigenous anticolonial nationalism and sovereignty, and of tribal-centred categories of identity.

Consequently, scholars who take Cook-Lynn's and Womack's stance formulate and advocate tribal-centred (or indigenist and nationalist) critical methods in American Indian literary studies. Tribal-centred criticism seeks to bring the discussion of tribal sovereignty and anticolonial nationalism to the centre of American Indian studies and literary-critical methods. What I see as a very distinctive feature of this criticism is its focus on the unique political history, religious-cultural traditions and community-based values that distinguish American Indian life and experience. A central aspect of tribal-centred scholarship is the discussion of treaties and legal discourses that illuminate both the sovereign status of American Indian tribes and the systematic violation of that status by US colonial-capitalist policies. Indigenist criticism, furthermore, stresses the formation of identity in connection to tribal community, lands, cultural practices, and socio-political traditions. This criticism has

a strong activist and community-based aspect: it discusses and examines American Indian scholars' and intellectuals' involvement, responsibilities and accountabilities with respect to local tribal communities. Indigenist critical reading of contemporary American Indian literature – as Womack, for example, has illustrated – is based on understanding and illuminating the texts' strengths or weaknesses in expressing American Indian (tribal or pan-Indian) indigenous nationalism, as well as in the texts' consistent, detailed and respectful involvement with tribal knowledges, life and socio-cultural and political traditions.¹

What strikes me, therefore, as a crucial difference between the two schools of criticism in American Indian studies is their different grounds for the interpretation of the political in American Indian writing. On one side, cross-cultural criticism (in conjunction with postcolonial and postmodern theory) privileges categories of analysis such as the “hybrid,” the “transnational” (Krupat), the “mixedblood” (Owens) or the “postindian” (Vizenor), and illuminates their anticolonial potential to decentre and destabilise colonial discourses. On the other side, tribal-centred criticism seeks to redirect American Indian cultural and political discourse to the study and re-assertion of the authority of more centred, local and “stable” categories, such as treaty rights and nationhood, and a sense of stable identity, which is rooted in indigenous bodies of knowledge, relations to the land, and responsible community membership and participation. Indeed, as Cook-Lynn asserts, tribal-centred criticism accentuates the primacy of local goals and contexts, rather than of cross-cultural and cosmopolitan ones (“Who Stole” 10).

Similar divisions apparently exist with regards to the institutional locations of American Indian studies. While cross-cultural critics stress, what Krupat has called, “the conjunction of cultural practices” in American Indian studies (*Turn* 17), tribal-

centred critics seek to “recover,” in Robert Allen Warrior’s idiom, “American Indian intellectual traditions” in the field. Respectively, tribal-centred scholars tend to advocate the development of American Indian studies as a distinctive, “autonomous” discipline, whose focus is on tribal specificities, on political-cultural discourses and activism that primarily engage and benefit American Indian peoples.

Currently, divisions between the cross-cultural and tribal-centred schools of criticism in American Indian literary studies remain intense and unresolved. Their understanding and assessment are now becoming indispensable to the responsible engagement with contemporary American Indian criticism and literature because, as I have briefly discussed above, the two critical schools have major disagreements on the approaches used to discuss the political and cultural work that American Indian writing and criticism are, or should be, doing. Further differences of opinion confuse the understanding of purposes and future developments of the field. The divisions thus demand – especially from those of us working in American Indian literary studies and concerned about the political and cultural dimensions of our work – to reconsider ways in which we teach and discuss American Indian criticism and literature.

While the split between cross-cultural and tribal-centred scholarship is growing in visibility and importance, my research has also indicated that American Indian discourse has not yet offered a consistent reading and an objective analysis of the debate between the two critical positions. This gap in the critical discourse may be due to the flux and the relative newness of the debate, to the ongoing formation of the indigenist position, and to the persistent sidelining of American Indian studies in current academic discussions. In addition, I have realised that scholars who participate in the debate commonly take one side in it and defend their own critical position,

instead of objectively responding to the opposing camp's ideas, critical grounds and political agendas. Tribal-centred scholars, for instance, have often been dismissive and superficial in their assessment of the efforts and achievement of cross-cultural criticism. They tend to represent those efforts as inadequate, and even antithetical, to American Indian political and cultural tenets. Cross-cultural critics, on the other side (particularly Krupat in *The Turn to the Native* and *Red Matters* and Owens in *Mixedblood Messages*), may have shown a greater commitment to "speaking to" the tribal-centred position. Nevertheless, I think that cross-cultural critique tends to (mis)represent nationalist and tribal-centred perspectives as essentialist, "purist" and confining, as well as (politically, culturally, institutionally) unrealistic and retrograde in a contemporary world. Such interpretations of the tribal-centred position, I believe, modify and unfairly discredit its grounds and arguments. My point, briefly, is that both cross-cultural and tribal-centred scholars have failed to engage with and acknowledge contributions, ideas and terms of discourse of the opposing critical school. Apart from the exchanges between major contributors to the debate, there have been few detailed and objective studies of the current "divided" state of American Indian criticism. For instance, two recent publications, which set out to discuss differences between cross-cultural and tribal-centred positions – the subject matter at the centre of my research – are Krupat's chapter "Nationalism, Indigenism, Cosmopolitanism: Three Perspectives on Native American Literatures" in *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (2002) and Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003). Useful and timely as these studies may be, their manifest favouritism of American Indian cross-cultural and postmodern perspectives, as I shall argue extensively later on, limits the objective and comprehensive understanding of tribal-centred claims and approaches. My argument, in short, is that,

currently, American Indian literary-critical discourse falls short of encouraging and developing a thorough grasp and a fair analysis of the two critical positions that currently structure the field.

Accordingly, one central purpose of my research is to address this gap in the scholarship. My goal is to advance the understanding and the objective critique of the cross-cultural and tribal-centred positions in American Indian literary studies. To that end I examine and summarise major underlying assumptions, principles and critical approaches that characterise and differentiate either position; I further analyse strengths and weaknesses in those principles and approaches; finally, I suggest a model that may bring together the strengths of either critical position. These topics and objectives are the focus of Part One of the research.

Part One consists of three chapters, and I open the discussion with an overview of the contemporary beginnings of American Indian literary studies as an academic discipline in the late 1960s and 1970s. One of my major goals in this first chapter is to emphasise the significance of Native political struggles for tribal autonomy, decolonisation and tribal renewal, which reached a notable intensity during that time. Those struggles – while seeking and receiving national and international attention – unequivocally emphasised the distinct political status and rights of American Indian tribes as indigenous peoples and as sovereign nations. Concurrently, the larger socio-political movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States created lasting tendencies towards democratisation, pluralism and “multiculturalism” in American academic and mainstream culture. Accordingly, I point out how the development of contemporary American Indian literature and studies have both benefited from and contributed to the US academic and popular multiculturalism since the late 1960. My discussion, in particular, seeks to highlight differences and

similarities between the socio-political and cultural aspirations of American Indian nationalist struggles, on the one side, and the battles for democratic pluralism and multiculturalism, on the other. Both movements have affected the formation and the consequent development of American Indian literary studies. Understanding the different cultural and socio-political agendas of these two movements, I argue, is a useful and necessary introduction to the understanding of the differences between tribal-centred and cross-cultural criticism in the academic discipline.

The specific approaches and grounds of argument that characterise cross-cultural and tribal-centred scholarship are the subject of my second and third chapters. One of my goals here is to create an informative and fair representation of the key ideas structuring either critical position. I seek to chart both the larger split in the field as well as to tease out nuances between scholars in the same critical camp. My other major goal is to use the synoptic discussion as a basis for my analysis of contributions and failures of each critical model. In chapter two, I discuss Arnold Krupat, Louis Owens and Gerald Vizenor as key contributors to cross-cultural criticism in American Indian studies because of their wide-ranging and established influence in the field. But I also acknowledge the work of other scholars who share similar ideas, like James Ruppert, Catherine Rainwater, Greg Sarris, and Kimberley Blaeser. My synoptic discussion of tribal-centred criticism in chapter three focuses on Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's and Craig Womack's scholarship, but also recognises the input of critics such as Robert Allen Warrior, Chadwick Allen, Sean Teuton, and others. Because, in my view, tribal-centred (nationalist) perspectives in American Indian studies remain largely unknown or misrepresented in current critical discourse, one of my key ambitions is that the discussion in chapter three will contribute to a more comprehensive and constructive understanding of American Indian nationalist ideas.

My study of the debate ultimately asserts that one of the central challenges facing American Indian studies is the development of critical (and pedagogical) approaches in the field that accommodate the insights of both cross-cultural and tribal-centred criticism. My suggestion is that the current split in American Indian literary criticism could, and should, be mediated – not in the name of conformity or diplomacy – but in order to unite strengths and balance weaknesses of either critical model. The result, I argue, will be a more responsible, accurate and (politically and pedagogically) enabling engagement with American Indian experience, writing and anticolonial resistance. Accordingly, my conclusions in chapter three urge critics and teachers in the field of American Indian literature to bring together both methods of critical enquiry to their interpretation of American Indian literary writing: to retain and expand the critical analysis of both nationalism and cross-culturality, and, particularly, to rethink and explore the relationship between these two very important categories.

My other central purpose in the research is to illustrate and consider how the rethinking and bridging of the relationship between cross-cultural and tribal-centred categories of analysis may bear upon and be brought to the discussion of specific American Indian literary texts. Since I maintain that the current critical split in American Indian studies demands discussion, study and mediation, I want to suggest ways in which those goals could be integrated into the teaching of American Indian literary texts, novels, in particular, which remain perhaps the most popular subject in American Indian literary studies. To that effect I re-read two well known and widely taught American Indian novels: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988). Undoubtedly, both texts have been the subject of numerous analyses. Even so, my relationship to the material is innovative because I read the

novels with the specific purpose of illustrating how cross-cultural and tribal-centred methods of interpretation may be played off against each other and may produce a more attentive and accurate understanding of the political-cultural meaning of the novels. This task is central to Part Two of the research, which discusses *Ceremony* in chapter four, and *Tracks* in chapter five.

My focus on just two novels is purposefully narrow. Obviously, I have left out of the discussion other influential and academically popular novels by both Silko and Erdrich: for instance, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984, 1993), *The Beet Queen* (1986), *The Bingo Palace* (1994), *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), as well as Silko's mixed genre narrative *Storyteller* (1981) and Erdrich's verse collections. These works are clearly related to the novels I shall discuss, at least in terms of reoccurring themes or by virtue of forming part of a sequel, as is the case with Erdrich's reservation novels. Yet, Silko's *Ceremony* and Erdrich's *Tracks* stand out as "canonical" texts par excellence. *Ceremony*, for instance, as Kenneth Roemer has recently emphasised, is conceivably the most commonly taught American Indian novel at American schools and universities: an informal survey of American literature professors lists it among the most important contemporary American novels ("Silko's Arroyos" 11). Similarly, almost any review of Erdrich's work notes the fact that she enjoys the greatest academic and commercial success among American Indian writers today. Judging by an annotated 1996 survey by Debra A. Burdick, Erdrich's novels *Love Medicine* and *Tracks* are her most popular novels for research and study. I have, in turn, conducted an informal survey of the study of American Indian literature at universities in Great Britain and Bulgaria – the two European academic environments I have studied and taught in – to verify the academic popularity of the novels. My survey has confirmed

that Silko's *Ceremony* and Erdrich's *Tracks* are among the most commonly read and taught texts there, too.² The academic popularity of the novels and their "representative" status in the study of American Indian writing is important to my research for one major reason: since I argue that the study and teaching of American Indian literature should be transformed to bring together cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical methods, and since I want to suggest ways in which this could be done, I am interested in working with academically popular texts, which could easily illustrate and integrate the proposed change within the American Indian literature curriculum and critical discussions.³ I also wanted to limit the scope of my interpretations to a small number of major texts because my interest is to propose "model" discussions, which are detailed enough to develop and illustrate major interpretative directions that I am suggesting, rather than to explore variety of forms that those directions may take in different texts. In other words, in structuring my analysis I have opted for depth rather than breadth.⁴

The specific pairing of Silko's *Ceremony* and Erdrich's *Track* is relevant and beneficial to a focused study of the cultural-political and anticolonial work that the novels may be doing. One fact has first alerted me to advantages of teaming up the novels: I have realised that the issue of political intent, which is at the centre of both cross-cultural and tribal-centred approaches to American Indian literature, is also central to a notorious controversy between Silko and Erdrich. I am referring here to Silko's caustic review of Erdrich's second novel, *The Beet Queen*, published in 1986, just two years before the public appearance of *Tracks*.⁵ In the review, acerbically entitled "Here is an Odd Artifact for the Fairy-Tale Shelf" (1986), Silko criticises Erdrich's writing as politically irresponsible: disregarding the socio-cultural and political realities of American Indian experience, as well as alienating itself from the

histories and current realities of colonialism, racism and injustice that pervade US policies. While I am not interested in discussing Silko's critique per se, or *The Beet Queen* novel that provoked it, I think the controversy offers a meaningful way to think about the political intent of Silko's *Ceremony* and Erdrich's *Tracks*.⁶ The controversy clearly demonstrates Silko's understanding that American Indian writers – novelists, in particular – have the historical obligation to write with a strong political purpose: an understanding that both cross-cultural and tribal-centred scholars share and foreground in their critical approaches to American Indian literature. Accordingly, *Ceremony* – the only novel Silko has published by the time – possesses a recognisable political intent and has repeatedly been acclaimed for this quality by cross-cultural and tribal-centred critics alike. (See, for instance, Owens's *Other Destinies* (167-191), Krupat's *The Turn to the Native* (14), Cook-Lynn's "Intellectualism and the New Indian Story" (126).) On the other side, I share the view, expressed by critics like Nancy Peterson, that Erdrich's *Tracks*, the novel following Silko's unfavourable review, "almost seems to answer Silko's criticisms of *The Beet Queen* by overtly engaging political and historical issues" ("History" 176). Thus *Tracks*, as critics unanimously agree, is Erdrich's most intensely political novel to date. The strong political agendas that distinguish *Ceremony* and *Tracks* make the novels very apt for a critical discussion like mine, which seeks to apply and bridge two different methods for the interpretation of the political in contemporary American Indian writing.

One purpose of my re-reading of *Ceremony* and *Tracks* is to underscore how the novels exemplify and elaborate on a variety of themes, discourses and literary techniques, whose political meaning cannot be discussed adequately without the help of cross-cultural critical theories and approaches. The framing of *Ceremony* with the invocation of the Laguna oral storyteller, Ts'its'nsi'nako, who seeks to reclaim the

Laguna traditions and stories from the “destroyers,” and the composition of *Tracks* as a battle between the stories of the Anishinabe traditionalist Nanapush and his accommodationist rival, Pauline, clearly place the novels in relation to cross-cultural (postcolonial and postmodern) politics and literary strategies for voice reclaiming, for appropriation and subversion of colonial discourses (and of the English language itself), for reassertion of American Indian peoples’ power to tell their own stories, and for affirmation of American Indian philosophies. Both *Ceremony* and *Tracks*, furthermore, focus on cross-cultural issues and negotiations in American Indian experience and identity constructions through “mixedblood” discourse and through characters like Betonie and Tayo in *Ceremony*, and Nanapush in *Tracks*: these characters reject “terminal creeds” and successfully negotiate a cross-cultural Indian identity. The novels thus work to reverse the stereotype of the tragically split “Indian,” and exemplify a politically meaningful denial of the fixed and unbridgeable dualities that characterise colonising, “othering” discourses.

I argue, at the same time, that *Ceremony* and *Tracks* support distinctive tribal sovereignty and nationhood agendas. My interpretations highlight and explain the novels’ redeployment of tribal origin stories and other tribal narratives and symbols of sovereignty, and of US-Indian treaty discourses and tribal land rights. The perceptions on US corporate uranium mining industry on Laguna lands in the 1950s-1970s that *Ceremony* presents and the perspectives on the Allotment Act of 1887 and of the Citizenship Act of 1924 that *Tracks* develops, testify to colonial violations of Indian sovereignty and ancestral relationships to tribal lands. Simultaneously, the novels demand a settlement of those violations and re-assert the ongoing validity of tribal sovereign and indigenous status. The exploration of such themes is particularly important because they are rarely brought to the novels’ critical interpretations (and/or

to the ways in which the novels are commonly taught, as I believe I am correct to assume). My re-reading of the novels illustrates the usefulness of tribal-centred critical approaches as approaches that facilitate the understanding of Silko's and Erdrich's re-articulation of tribal sovereignty and nationhood discourses, as well as the historical-political contexts and implications of that re-articulation.

A third and interconnected aspect of my interpretations involves a consideration of the conflicting functions of "mixedblood" discourse in both novels. I support and illustrate the understanding – developed in cross-cultural, postcolonial and postmodern theories of identity – that hybridity discourse of Indian identity challenges colonial and racial essentialism. Culturally (and biologically) syncretic characters like Tayo and Betonie, in *Ceremony*, and Nanapush, in *Tracks*, undoubtedly work to challenge and dismantle essentialist, dichotomised and self-destructive colonised perceptions of "self" and "other," embodied in characters like Rocky, Auntie and Emo, in *Ceremony*, and Pauline, in *Tracks*. But I also argue that mixedblood discourse disrupts or fails to explain and support the local, tribal-centred categories of identity that the traditional medicine man Ku'oosh in *Ceremony* and Fleur in *Tracks* represent. The novels thus illustrate limitations of hybridity discourse and highlight the validity of tribal-centred categories of analysis.

My discussion of controversial political meanings that the novels support, leads me to consider interpretative controversies that *Ceremony* and *Tracks* have generated. I recognise the fact that both novels have received mostly favourable, even laudatory, interpretations of the political work they are doing. A few unusual critiques, however, contest this accepted reading of the novels' politics. For instance, Paula Gunn Allen's contentious article "Special Problems in Teaching *Ceremony*" (1990) claims that Silko's use of oral traditions may be inappropriate and

unsanctioned. Another article, “Literature in a ‘National Sacrifice Area’: Leslie Silko’s *Ceremony*” (1993) by Shamoan Zamir, reads the novel as a “sacrifice” of local Laguna narrative models and political agendas, and a validation of the “global” narratives and politics of colonial capitalism and literary modernism. Jana Sequoya, furthermore – in two successive articles “How (!) Is an Indian?” (1993) and “Telling the différence: Representations of Identity in the Discourse of Indianness” (1995) – highlights cultural and political problems that plague the affirmation of mixedblood identity in *Ceremony*. Gloria Bird’s critique, in “Searching for Evidence of Colonialism at Work: A Reading of Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*” (1992), similarly suggests that Indian identity configurations and representations in Erdrich’s *Tracks* support colonising, rather than anticolonial politics. Such critiques of *Ceremony* and *Tracks*, uncommon as they may be, problematise, and even challenge, positive readings of the novels’ cultural-political agendas and achievements. I do not think that critical interpretations of the novels have paid sufficient attention to those critical views or have been able to provide a comprehensive explanation of the contentious political discourses that are at play in the novels. My re-reading of *Ceremony* and *Tracks* revisits such contentions and seeks to demonstrate how a combined use of cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical approaches could explain disagreements in the political interpretations of the novel and evaluate their connotations.

In summary, my re-reading of *Ceremony* and *Tracks* in the second part of the thesis illustrates and asserts one central argument: interpretations that set out to analyse the political-cultural work that the novels may be doing, need to bring to such analyses both cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical perspectives, if they are to be politically responsible and accurate. The multifaceted political discourses that unfold in the novels demand a process of balancing and testing tribal-centred and cross-

cultural interpretative frameworks against each other. Thus, *Ceremony* and *Tracks*, in my analyses, become exemplary texts that illustrate the usefulness – together with the strengths and limitations – of both tribal-centred and cross-cultural approaches and affirm the necessity for their bridging.

I do not claim that every American Indian novel invites, as fully as Silko's *Ceremony* and Erdrich's *Tracks* do, the mediation of cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical approaches. The suggested way of re-reading the novels, however, affirms that – given the cross-cultural, postcolonial-like conditions of American Indian historical experiences and current life, on the one side, and the ongoing conditions of US colonisation and the continuing American Indian struggles for decolonisation and protection of tribal lands and resources and for reassertion and strengthening of tribal sovereignty, on the other – it is logical, as well as politically necessary, to read American Indian writing from both cross-cultural and tribal-centred perspectives. My ambition is that the examination of the debate in American Indian literary studies that I have proposed will help to problematise and clarify relationships between postcolonial literary theories of hybridity and subversion and American Indian discourses of nationalism and sovereignty. My hope, in particular, is that the research will contribute to a better knowledge and appreciation of the new, valid, much needed and previously missing perspectives that tribal-centred criticism brings to the study of American Indian writing and its political valence. Finally, I like to believe that the particular perspective from which I study the primary texts offers a meaningful addition to the abundant and evolving scholarship on Silko's and Erdrich's work and, specifically, to the interpretation and teaching of Silko's *Ceremony* and Erdrich's *Tracks*.

NOTES

¹I often use terms such as “indigenous,” “Indian,” “American Indian” and “Native American” interchangeably. The words, however, have different political strengths and implications. The term “indigenous” communicates the status of American Indian peoples as the first inhabitants of the lands: it emphasises both the vested connectedness of American Indians to their ancestral lands and also the recognition of that connectedness in US-Indian treaties and legal discourse. “Indigenous” helps to distinguish American Indian peoples from early Euro-American settlers and from other, long-standing immigrant and ethnic groups in the US. The term, therefore, is commonly used in tribal-centred and nationalist discourses. “Native American” is an established and preferred term in academia and also in US legal-political documents: it is considered the “politically-correct” way to address American Indian peoples in US public and academic discourses. (“Native American” may also communicate the understanding of American Indians as “multicultural” citizens of the United States, by analogy with the established terminology for African American, Mexican American and Asian American people.) The words “American Indian” or “Indian” may offer a mid-point terminology. Many American Indians prefer the latter reference, if they have to identify themselves generically rather than by tribal identification. (Scholars like Joseph Bruchac (“Returning” xvii-xviii) and Alan R. Velie (*Four* 5), for instance, have recognised this preference.) Another relevant term that I do not use in the research is “First Nations”: it is used in Canada and clearly asserts American Indian peoples’ national and sovereign status. “First Nations” will be a historically and politically relevant term to use in the context of American Indians in the US, too, but it seems to me that the term has not yet gained ground in

US American Indian academic and political discourse. The very terminology in the field, in short, reflects some of the contesting critical and political ideas that structure American Indian literary-critical debate.

²A brief discussion of the informal survey appears in the Appendix.

³Silko and Erdrich have clearly received a great deal of critical attention.

Already at its publication *Ceremony*, for instance, became the sole subject of the 1979 special issue of the *American Indian Quarterly* (edited by Kathaleen Sands). That academic success remains unflagging, as testified by a recent case study collection on *Ceremony* edited by Allan Chavkin and published in 2001. Erdrich has perhaps been the subject of more studies than any other author or her oeuvre in the field of American Indian literature. A few illustrations of Erdrich's steadfast scholarly and popular success include a volume in the Critical Companion to Popular Contemporary Writers Series (by Lorena Stookey in 1999), a case study of *Love Medicine* in the Case Books in Contemporary Fiction Series (by Hertha Dawn Wong in 1999), *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich* (by Peter Beidler and Gay Barton in 1999), and Chavkin's *Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich's Novels* (1999). These brief examples indicate that Silko and Erdrich shape what is referred to, at least in the mainstream cultural and academic environment, as the contemporary Native American literary tradition.

⁴I must admit that my original intent was to study a much larger number of texts. In the process of the research, however, I realised that the development and the illustration of my argument about the combined use of cross-cultural and tribal-centred approaches in the interpretations of American Indian texts requires much more time and space than I thought originally. I decided to explore and demonstrate

my argument in detail through just two texts, rather than to study the different forms that it may take in a variety of different texts. Now that the research has helped me detail and clarify (even for my own sake) what interpretative directions are most appropriate and beneficial, I think that an alternative approach would be equally useful.

⁵As I shall discuss in chapter five, Erdrich first drafted *Tracks* in the late 1970s, but the draft took about a decade to come up to its final version.

⁶Susan Perez Castillo develops a detailed discussion of the Silko-Erdrich controversy in the chapter “Postmodernism, Native American Literature and the Real: The Silko-Erdrich Controversy” in *Notes From the Periphery: Marginality in North American Literature and Culture* (1991). Dennis M. Walsh and Ann Braley’s article “The Indianness of Louise Erdrich’s *The Beet Queen*: Latency As Presence” (1994) suggests that Silko’s criticism of *The Beet Queen* may be misguided.

PART ONE

AMERICAN INDIAN LITERARY STUDIES: POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND CRITICAL CONTEXTS

Chapter 1

The 1960s and after: American Indian Political Activism, US Multiculturalism and the Formation of American Indian Literary Studies

Intricate energies of our roots on Turtle Island

have supported us...

Roberta Hill Whiteman

Dating back thousands of years, American Indian literary traditions are the first and oldest on the land now known as the United States. By the time European settlers started establishing their colonies on the newly “discovered” continent of North America and by the time the country of the United States started moulding its sense of national “American” identity and of national “American” literature, the indigenous peoples there had been conveying their vibrant traditions and had been expressing their sense of belonging to a land and to a group of peoples in hundreds of different languages and narratives. Traditional oral tribal literatures are vivacious today, too, and despite centuries of colonial suppression and disruption, they continue

to express American Indians' sense of distinct political and cultural identities, as well as their connectedness to tribal lands, histories, and worldviews.

At the same time, since the formation of the United States as a state of colonial domination over the indigenous peoples and lands, American Indians – many of whom acquired the English language that was commonly forced upon them – have conveyed some tribal philosophical, cultural and political views in new forms, in English and in writing, in order to intervene in the colonial culture. American Indians have mastered the English language and have written and published in it since the 1770s. Prominent contributors to the early American Indian writing in English are works such as William Apess's biography *A Son of the Forest* (1829), John Rollin Ridge's early novel *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (1854), Alexander Posey's satires in the *Indian Journal* (1902-1908), and various written account of tribal histories and life like George Copway's *Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (1850), Sarah Winnemucca's *Life Among the Piutes* (1883) and Luther Standing Bear's *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933). Better-known examples from the first half of the 20th century include Emily Pauline Johnson's short stories and poems, Charles Eastman's *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian* (1917), Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories* (1921) and mature novels such as John Joseph Mathews's *Sundown* (1934) and D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936). In addition to that broad array of individual American Indian works in English, since the mid-19th century there had started a number of tribal newspapers in English, among which the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the *Cherokee Advocate*, the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, the *Chickasaw Intelligencer* and the Creeks' *Indian Journal* ("Newspapers"). To summarise, early American Indian

writing in English forms a significant and dynamic tradition: ranging from autobiographies, novels, short stories and poems, to satires and tribal histories, to journal articles, tribal newspapers and other non-fiction work. The forms and themes of the writing inevitably testify to the colonial (and cross-cultural) experience of American Indian peoples. At times, the work of early American Indian writers in English reflected the influence of colonial discourses and strategies, supporting US colonial imagining of “the Indian” and the government’s policies for American Indians’ acculturation and assimilation. Nonetheless, much of the early American Indian writing used the English language and expressive (as well publishing) forms to publicise and criticise the plight of their peoples under the US rule, to confront stereotypes of the “Indian” and to promote a more positive image of American Indians’ experience to the broader American public.

Despite the continuing rich tradition of tribal oral literatures and the new development of a diverse and often politically-charged tradition of American Indian writing in English, American Indian discourse in the US public sphere has, until recently, been controlled exclusively by the dominant culture. The latter has commonly used Indians and Indian themes to comment upon the destiny of the “master” race and has primarily functioned to justify – politically, economically, culturally and psychologically – the European and, consequently, the US colonisation of the “Indian.” In European and, afterwards, in US cultural and political discourses the indigenous peoples of North America have routinely filled the role of scapegoats to Euro-American civilisation. The very idea of the United States, of American “manifest destiny,” civilisation and progress has been based on the construction of “the Indian” as either a “savage” – backward, barbarian, warlike and treacherous – or

as a romantic “child of nature” – contemplative, thoughtful and dignified but unable to grasp the forces of a progressive, material and rational world. Regardless of whether those representations have projected a violent, wistful or romantic imagining of Indians, they have been, as Louis Owens puts it, invariably infused with the sense that “the Indian did not count and was just a colorful residue of the past” (*Mixedblood* 100). That colonising imagining of “the Indian” has gone hand in hand with the US Indian policies. The federal government has used the rhetoric of the “doomed” and “vanishing” Indian to justify the taking of indigenous lands, the policies of “civilisation” and acculturation of American Indians and the suppression of their cultural and political identities as indigenous peoples. That rhetoric has formed the basis for the key Indian policies of the United States: of removal of Indians from their lands (1789 through 1871), of allotment and assimilation (1871-1928), of reorganisation and termination of Indian reservations (1928-1961) and of ongoing colonial appropriation and use of tribal lands.

The conditions of discursive and political colonisation reflect in what, until about three decades ago, constituted the canon of American literature. In the writings of American canonical writers like James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Mark Twain and Ken Kesey, to name just a few, the figure of “the Indian” looms and reoccurs as a haunting, one-dimensional and “vanishing” figure of the past. That doomed and nostalgic “presence” has commonly been the main recognition of “the Indian” in the US public discourse.¹ The existence of a contemporary and evolving tradition of American Indian writing in English was acknowledged only sporadically in American cultural spheres. There was hardly any scholarly interest in studying the cultural, political or moral intents and implications of that writing.

The 1960s and 1970s, however, mark a radical transformation in the perception and standing of American Indian writing in US academic and popular culture. This is the period during which American Indian writing virtually exploded and started growing at an amazing pace. Simultaneously, that writing attracted an unmatched interest and recognition by the literary and academic culture of the United States. The late 1960s consequently witnessed the launch of American Indian literary studies as an academic field. Given the fact that the tradition of American Indian writing in English and for diverse audiences started much earlier, as I briefly outlined, one particular question begs a consideration: What factors played a major role in the explosion of American Indian writing, in its wide-spread popularity and growing reputation in the mainstream culture, and in the beginning of the academic discipline some thirty years ago?

A common critical and pedagogical approach is to place the development of contemporary American Indian literature and its institutional criticism in the context of post-1960s multiculturalism in the US academy and culture. This understanding is legitimate, yet incomplete. A more comprehensive, historically accurate and politically necessary approach, I shall suggest, is to consider the development of the field in relation to the larger history of Native political and discursive struggles for tribal self-determination. While those struggles go back to the beginning of colonisation, they reach an eminent momentum in the 1960s and 1970s and they still shape US-Indian relationships today. Accordingly, in this chapter I want to focus on the legacy of the Red Power movement and discuss specifics of the American Indian activism and goals. I shall highlight similarities and differences between those political-cultural goals, on one side, and the political-cultural goals of US

multiculturalism. The discussion, I shall suggest, provides a necessary context for assessing the significance of the American Indian literary “renaissance,” the establishment of American Indian studies and the current conflicting positions on the achievements, purposes and future directions of the field.

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Organised national Indian activism (also referred to as Red Power) gained ground in the 1960s and was part of the upsurge in social and political activism throughout the United States at that time. While the Red Power movement both benefited from and contributed to the Civil Rights struggles, its roots are not in that activist movement. In *Custer Died for Your Sins*, published amid the fervour of the times in 1969, Vine Deloria, Jr. points out how early civil rights ideas did not respond to American Indians’ unique political situation: they brought into focus and worked mostly for needs of “the black,” not of “the red”(168-196). Deloria’s distinction here seeks to emphasise that the central socio-political and cultural issues in contemporary American Indian life, history and struggles arise not merely from conditions of social oppression but also, and primarily, from conditions of colonisation. What distinguishes American Indian socio-political situation and activism, as Ward Churchill points out in an argument analogous to Deloria’s, is the assertion that the primary cause for contemporary American Indian problems is “not so much a matter of socio-economic discrimination against Indians as it [is] their internal colonization by the United States” (“Bloody Wake” 255). The Red Power struggles thus reflect the unique status of American Indians as both indigenous and colonised peoples: these struggles go beyond racial, socio-economic and civil rights issues and seek to re-

assert tribal rights self-determination and nationhood, as well as to tribal lands and resources.

Contemporary American Indian activism started with the first fishing rights struggles of several tribes in the Pacific Northwest in the 1950s-early 1960s. The fishing rights, as those tribes asserted, were part of old and still valid treaty agreements between the tribes and the US governments. The dispute attracted great national publicity, yet remained very localised because the “fish-ins” focused on specific tribal treaty rights and on a particular local legal situation; they rarely expressed wide-ranging “Indian” issues.² The more broadly organised and pan-Indian form of the American Indian political movement evolved in the urban centres, where, as Deloria and Lytle point out, “Indians of different tribes were coming together for mutual help and support” (*Nations Within* 236). The authors summarise this development as follows:

Cut off from their own communities by great distances, there [in the urban areas] people preferred to be with other Indians rather than other racial groups including whites. Hence, to articulate conditions existing all over the country as an “Indian” matter was not only natural for concerned Indians in the cities but wholly justified in terms of their understanding of the situation. It was better in the cities to forego tribal differences in order to gain some kind of identity than simply to disappear or to associate only with people from their own tribe or reservation. (236)

Various Red Power urban activist and student groups, therefore, played the most significant role in consolidating the Indian political movement. The American Indian

Chicago Conference in 1961, as Francis Paul Prucha suggests, is “the first major sign of organised Indian activism” (410), and later in the same year lead to the formation of one of the first Indian activist and urban-based groups, the National Indian Youth Council. Other prominent urban Indian groups that came into being were the Bay Area group, formed in the early 1960s, and the American Indian Movement, founded in Minneapolis in 1968.

The formation of these groups and the rise of the urban-originating American Indian movement, in general, are rooted in the historical conditions of colonisation. One contemporary manifestation of those conditions is the Indian termination and relocation program that the US federal government implemented in the 1950s and 1960s. Termination, as the name of the policy suggests, aimed to terminate Indian reservations. The policy was advertised as a move towards American Indians’ greater self-government and independence but, in effect, sought to cancel out federal (legal, financial and moral) obligations to American Indians and to end the special status and rights of American Indian tribes as indigenous nations.³ Simultaneously, relocation aimed at assimilating and urbanising American Indians by moving many of them to urban centres, away from their reservations, by deceptive promises for vocational training, employment and financial advantages. (Those promises were very luring, given the fact that – as a consequence of colonisation – many reservations were economically depressed and offered very little employment and education opportunities.)

Yet, the federal policies for Indian termination and relocation “backfired,” as Troy B. Johnson puts it (*Occupation* 13). The government’s strategy for terminating Indian cultural and political standing through urbanisation did not go as planned

because it provided conditions for Indians to organise and form allegiances across inter-tribal (pan-Indian) practices and networks. The policies of termination and relocation, as Churchill similarly explains, created “the urban diaspora from which AIM itself [and Red Power activism as a whole] had emerged” (“Bloody Wake” 255). Many urban American Indians kept their ties to their reservations and could thus establish allegiances with both reservation and urban Indian communities. The new social conditions, furthermore, provided Indians with opportunities to build allegiances between tribal communities nationwide. Simultaneously, the policies of relocating and assimilating American Indians in the American society gave many urban Indian groups the power of accessing US media and seizing the attention of the mainstream public.

The pan-Indian activism that started in the cities initially had a primarily civil rights agenda: to guard against police brutality in Indian neighbourhoods and in prisons and to provide social, educational and cultural services for urban native communities.⁴ Nevertheless, the philosophy and activities of American Indian activists, as I suggested before, soon centred on specifically Indian issues: reflecting and protesting against conditions of US colonisation. Hence, a significant feature that came to distinguish contemporary American Indian activism in the 1960s was its pan-Indian (or “ethnic,” “unified”) nature and its capacity to express the general issues that concerned all Indians in the US. The pan-Indian aspect of the movement, as Deloria and Lytle observe, reflected the general liberal atmosphere and struggles of the period, but it also helped to distinguish the specifics of American Indian demands and struggles amidst the emerging struggles of various other groups in the US at the time (*Nations Within* 236-37). That was particularly important for representing and

publicising American Indian struggles and for building broader allegiances among various tribal and non-Indian supporters. (Deloria and Lytle point out further, for instance, that any socio-political activism formed along narrow tribal affiliations would have failed to achieve national publicity and to make Indian issues visible to a broad public (237).)

Notably, the general Indian issues that the urban-based Indian movement articulated and sought to redress also expressed and resonated with specific, local issues, which concerned individual tribes on the reservations. The latter fact is not surprising since all tribes share a history of colonialism and relationships with the US government, as well as a comparable tradition of sovereignty and nationhood. Deloria and Lytle illustrate in *Nations Within* how a major and consistent focus of the Indian political activism in the 1960s and 1970s was the assertion of Indian treaty rights, the protest against their violation by the US government, and the strong movement to restore the nations status of Indian tribes and their treaty relationships with the US government. Many Indian tribes could identify with and support these ideas because they rekindled tribal traditions of nationhood, which US colonial policies had tried to erase. The pan-Indian urban movement thus gained the support of tribal people, including tribal elders and traditionalists, from various reservations (232-34).

The Indian movement, to sum up, incorporated both pan-Indian and specific tribal aspects. Its activities and goals functioned on at least three major levels: local and tribally specific, national pan-Indian, and broader national (and international) levels. In my discussion I shall underline the dynamics between these three levels of commitment. I want to affirm that, indeed, the American Indian movement utilised and mobilised pan-Indian and cross-cultural conditions and aimed to build broad

allegiances, yet, it also increasingly sought to assert and uphold Indian tribes' sovereign powers and their political rights as distinct nations.

A prominent early illustration of the nationalist (sovereignty and treaty rights) agenda of American Indian political activism and, simultaneously, of its cross-cultural (ethnic, pan-Indian) appeal is the occupation of Alcatraz Island in California through 1969-1971. The Alcatraz occupation began in November 1969 when a group of San Francisco Indian students and activists landed on the island and (symbolically, at first) declared it Indian land.⁵ As the occupation soon evolved into a tangible project, the Alcatraz activists – calling themselves Indians of All Tribes to reflect the multi-tribal base of the group – demanded the use of the island for an Indian centre and, subsequently, for various educational, cultural and spiritual institutions managed by Indians and advancing tribal cultural heritages and political rights. The narrative *Alcatraz Is Not An Island*, composed by Indians of All Tribes and published in 1972, illustrates how the occupants' claims to Alcatraz deliberately and unequivocally evoked treaties between American Indian tribes and the US government, protested their consistent violation and demanded tribal rights to self-determination. A clear symbol of the activists' recognition and denunciation of US historical experience as an ongoing colonisation of Indian lands is the occupants' posting of the phrase "Indian land" everywhere on the island and on its federal buildings.⁶ This assertion of a distinct Indian land title is an early example of the Indian movement's demands for a fair decision on Indian treaty and land rights and for tribal self-determination.

Though the invocation of treaty rights with regards to Alcatraz may be unfounded or ill-informed,⁷ the occupation of the island is significant in that it brought into focus the pertinent "Indian issues" of tribal self-determination, sovereign

powers and political rights. The US government, however, ignored those central aspects of the Alcatraz-based Indian protesters: it attempted to settle the crisis by proposing that future projects on the island be run by US government-appointed officials and focus on cultural and recreational activities rather than on social and political ones. The suggestion was to transform the island into an Indian park “commemorating noted Indians through history” and employing some Indians “professionally trained by the Park Service” (Indians of All Tribes 65). The instructive irony of this proposal is that it fails to acknowledge, and in fact undermines and reverses, the most fundamental demands of the Alcatraz occupation. While the occupants asserted the political idea of self-determination, guaranteed by US-Indian treaties as binding, and still valid, legal documents, the proposed resolution rested upon government control and conceptualised Indians as cultural – rather than as political – bodies of peoples, who need government assistance and monitoring to maintain their affairs. It comes as no surprise that the protesters on Alcatraz rejected such a “solution” because it violated all political and social arguments that the occupation represented and aimed to assert.

For various reasons – among which leadership and organisation problems within the Alcatraz group and the heavily armed force the US government sent to the island in the summer of 1971 – the power and clarity of Indian demands weakened and failed to effect any amendment of US Indian policies.⁸ Still, as many historians and American Indian activists have pointed out, a major achievement of the occupation was its success at making Indian socio-political and cultural grievances, as well as Indian rights and goals known to a broad public. The very fact that the Alcatraz occupants called themselves Indians of All Tribes bespeaks their aim to

represent and address both pan-Indian and larger US national communities. The title that Indians of All Tribes give to their narrative about the occupation, *Alcatraz is Not an Island*, similarly communicates the desire to reach out to a wide national audience and to build cross-cultural understanding and solidarity. The following introduction, for example, opens the book:

Dear America, the people: We present these documents and thoughts concerning the Indian occupation of Alcatraz in the hope that a better understanding may be reached between peoples of various backgrounds and traditions. [...] The Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island was the attempt of our people to awaken a nation asleep. The circle of our dancing is meant to be joined by many others. Our songs are of the life cycle and our drums reach out to encompass the earth.

(11)

The popularisation of American Indians' situation and demands are undeniably among the most significant accomplishments of the Alcatraz occupation. Johnson confirms: "The underlying goals of the Indians on Alcatraz were to awaken the American public to the reality of the plight of the First Americans and to assert the need for Indian self-determination. In this they were indeed successful" (*Occupation* 148). On the other hand, one may also conclude that the focus on obtaining media coverage and on popularising Indian causes took impetus away from other central Indian political goals. As Deloria comments, "unfortunately, most of the people involved in the occupation had no experience in formulating policy and saw their activities as primarily aimed at awakening the American public to the plight of Indians. Thus a great opportunity to change federal programs for Indians was lost

(“Alcatraz” 31). In other words, Alcatraz may illustrate the challenge and the importance for American Indian activism at the time (as well as today) to bring cross-cultural, pan-Indian and specific tribal goals efficiently together.

Regardless of its shortcomings, the Alcatraz occupation, like no other event before, united Indians across the US for political action for re-assertion and defence of tribal rights to self-determination and for active challenge of Indian federal policies: Alcatraz thus consolidated the American Indian activist movement. The occupation became a powerful political legacy and a lasting symbol of American Indians struggles for nationhood, recognition of tribal political rights and for the just settlement of treaty violations. These long-lasting ideas in American Indian history acquired a new strength and significance after Alcatraz. Alcatraz thus inspired successive waves of Indian activism throughout the 1970s and provided additional ideas and impetus for the formation and the development of the most influential Indian organisation at the time, the American Indian Movement founded in 1968.⁹

AIM continued Indian struggles through the 1970s with direct actions for the assertion of Indian treaty rights, the revival of tribal identity and the renewed affirmation of tribal spiritual and cultural traditions. Following the example set by the Alcatraz occupation, the organisation also sought to secure media interest and to engage the attention of the general American public. AIM’s political activities, however, were more successful in interacting with tribal people, in engaging with specific tribal treaties and issues and in demanding Indian self-determination and changes in federal Indian policies: these issues came clearly to the forefront of the Indians’ political struggle. AIM-organised activities expressed, more successfully than the Alcatraz occupation, an increasingly tribal agenda, which focused on tribal

issues and peoples and on the assertion of tribal rights to sovereignty. But AIM also developed the pan-Indian and multi-ethnic (cross-cultural) aspects of the Indian activist movement and continued to work on raising national awareness and support for American Indian issues.

The Trail of Broken Treaties in 1972, ending with the takeover of the BIA headquarters in Washington DC, is one of the events that prominently exemplifies the strong tribal focus of AIM activities. The march to Washington, as Churchill points out, “marked the American Indian Movement’s transition from an urban civil-rights-focused entity to an organisation invested in securing the treaty rights of reservation-based people” (“Force” 39). The event represents a significant point in American Indian activism because it was successful in bringing together the political agendas of both urban and reservation Indians across the US. The Trail of Broken Treaties involved three caravan routes starting in Seattle, San Francisco (Alcatraz) and Los Angeles, going through major Indian reservations and gathering people to converge in Washington, in front of the US Department of Interior, a week before presidential elections. The name of the event – recalling the Cherokees’ Trail of Tears in 1838 – and the place and timing of the event’s final convergence sought to emphasise the US government’s systematic abuse and manipulation of Native treaty and human rights.¹⁰

The most important outcome of the Trail of Broken Treaties is the Twenty Points position paper, which, in Deloria and Lytle’s assessment, “form[s] one of the most remarkable documents ever presented to the federal government by any Indian group” (*Nations Within* 238). The Twenty Points are of a particular significance because they represent the most coherent and unequivocal record of Indians’ demand for assertion and re-initiation of tribes’ sovereign political relationship with the US

government. The document – produced in workshops by various groups of urban and traditional Indians – called for the restoration of Indian tribes’ self-determination, demanding the elimination of state jurisdiction over tribal affairs and the re-establishment of the status of Native governments as treaty making bodies.¹¹ The position paper also insisted on the assessment of and compensation for treaty violation through land return. Outside of the central treaty scope it considered socio-cultural and economic issues, discussed provisions for the restoration of tribal land bases, and suggested steps towards tribal religious and legislative freedom. In this sense, as Deloria and Lytle stress, the Twenty Points carry “the mark of the traditional Indian” (*Nations Within* 238) as most of the ideas behind the points “can be traced directly to traditional values and beliefs” (239). The document in effect demanded the elimination of US imposed governing models for the tribes and the re-establishment of more traditional (and sovereign) tribal and community-based political and social models.

The Indians rallying in Washington hoped that the widespread publicity of the event, which they had deliberately sought and truly achieved, would ensure that the White House gave the Twenty Points a timely and thoughtful response. Indeed, federal officials agreed to consider the document in order to avoid political scandal before the elections. That agreement ended the Trail and the BIA office occupation.¹² Yet a few months later the government gave an outright negative response to the Twenty Points and particularly to the idea that Indian tribes could have sovereign political powers. Instead of considering a change in their policy to allow tribes a greater degree of traditional tribal and community-based governing models, the federal officials proposed the reformation of their own institutions and models of

regulations on the reservations. Deloria and Lytle summarise how the proposed resolution “sought to make Indians better Americans; the Twenty Points [in contrast] sought to allow Indians to become functioning tribal members once again” (*Nations Within* 239). Even though Indians’ demand to be sovereign political entities again may have been too ambitious and idealistic, the government’s dismissal and distortion of that demand still exemplifies an overt expression of colonial control.

The political activities of the Indian movement in the few months following the Trail of Broken Treaties and its frustrating results in Washington converged not in urban centres but in reservation areas. The Wounded Knee Demonstration in February-May 1973, at the heart of Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, became the best-known event in the history of American Indian activism in the 1970s.¹³ That protest, even more emphatically than the earlier ones I quoted, had at its core tribal sovereignty, treaty rights and the defence of tribal political and spiritual traditions.¹⁴ The immediate cause for the Wounded Knee Demonstration was the opposition that AIM activists and tribal traditionalists put up in response to the authoritarian rule of the Tribal Council administration, and particularly of its chair Richard “Dick” Wilson. The US government, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, actively supported Wilson and the tribal police force that was used to uphold his regime and assault opposing tribal members. The Wounded Knee occupation, therefore, involved not simply an opposition between American Indian activists and the US government but also a confrontation between two different groups of Indians on the reservation: tribal traditional people and AIM members, on one side, and, on the other, the supporters of the tribal government system established with the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) in 1934. I shall take a moment and explain this conflict because some awareness of the

history behind it is integral to the understanding of the drive for nationhood and sovereignty that is at the core of American Indian activism, as well as at the core of tribal-centred critical approaches in contemporary American Indian studies.

The roots of the confrontation on the Pine Ridge reservation go back to the Indian Reorganization Act and are symptomatic of pertinent problems in the historical relationship between Indian tribes and the US government. This observation is not meant to deny the fundamentally radical and positive philosophy that the IRA (and particularly its major architect, John Collier) introduced and sought to implement in the 1930s and 1940s. For its times the Act represents an impressive positive step in the relationship between Indian tribes and the US federal government: it put an end to the total destruction of tribal powers, structures and land bases inflicted by the General Allotment Act in 1887, and initiated measures for preservation of tribal lands; it started a movement for the reformation of the corrupt institutions of Indian federal policy and the removal of their decision-making powers on Indian reservations; significantly, the IRA supported a movement towards tribal self-government and cultural revival, and initiated the restoration of some political sovereignty for Indian tribes.¹⁵ Yet the models for self-government that IRA promoted still depended on the approval and control of the US federal institutions and thus, in the view of tribal traditionalists – many of whom rejected the Act – those models undermined, rather than supported, the true exercise of tribal sovereignty and nationhood (which includes the functioning of more traditional forms of government). The very process of interpreting and implementing the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act fostered divisions among traditional and acculturated Indians on the reservation, and also allowed for corruption and abuse of power.

Problems in the self-government models initiated by the IRA, as well as divisions among Indians with regards to those models became particularly pertinent in the 1960s and 1970s. By that time, as Deloria and Lytle observe, many “tribal governments [had become] surrogates for the federal government” and “were almost totally dependent upon the federal agencies for their funds and program ideas” (*Nations Within* 197-98). In other words, tribal governments – as created and supported by the US federal government – commonly functioned in a colonial manner as they, in Eric Cheyfitz’s words, generally allowed for “native elites [to] stand in for the colonial power at the local level” (413). As a result, relationships between tribal governments and tribal people often were, and may still be, strenuous: many tribal people, particularly traditionalists, tend to perceive tribal governments as an extension of US colonial power (where tribal governments may or may not actually support US policies). Such tensions within the tribes became exceedingly aggravated with the growth of Indian activism in the 1960s and 1970s. The fact that the US encouraged and supported tribal governments in opposing activist movements (as was the situation on the Pine Ridge reservation) “[underscored] the feeling,” as Deloria and Lytle explain, that tribal governments were merely arms of the federal government and that true self-determination would have to occur outside the regular channels of institutional life” (*Nations Within* 226). Indeed, some tribal officials like Richard Wilson and his tribal administration on the Pine Ridge reservation in the 1970s, have used US Indian policies and the positions of power they have afforded within the US Indian institutions for personal benefits and empowerment, and have abrogated tribal interests and majority interests of the reservation community.¹⁶ Significantly, Wilson has given the US government legal title to portions of tribal lands (LaDuke and

Churchill 116). The situation made traditional tribal aspirations and struggles for reassertion of treaty rights and sovereignty even more urgent and justified. It is true that the Indian Reorganization Act from the 1930s has aimed, and has partially succeeded, to restore some tribal sovereign powers. The upsurge of American Indian activism, however, around categories of treaty rights and retributions, as well as around demands for greater sovereignty for the tribes, indicate that former provisions are no longer sufficient and that Indians have grown politically and/or have gained a political leverage to demand and reinforce further changes.

The confrontation on the Pine Ridge reservation in 1973 exemplifies this situation. The situation there, to underscore again, was aggravated by the arrogant abuse of tribal government power demonstrated by Richard Wilson in the early 1970s and by the unscrupulous support the US federal government gave to his tribal council administration. The ensuing occupation of Wounded Knee – even more powerfully than the Twenty Points Paper – expressed Indian socio-political aspirations for the recognition of tribal nationhood and tribal treaty rights. The drive for nationhood, sovereignty and restoration of tribal treaty rights that characterises the Wounded Knee occupation culminated in the occupants' establishment – on March 11, 1973 – of the Independent Oglala Nation. The act aimed to assert and restore tribal sovereign powers, guaranteed by the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1868 (Akwasasne Notes 54-8, 112-17, 134-52). Simultaneously, the occupation turned into a symbolic commemoration of the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre and of the Ghost Dance religion.¹⁷ The occupants revived and engaged in many traditional ceremonies and other spiritual and community rituals, performed by tribal medicine men and involving the whole community. In that way the occupation communicated the idea that, for American

Indians, the notion of tribal nationhood and sovereignty derived not merely from colonial conditions (and from the treaty making process with the US in the 18th century) but was deeply rooted in old tribal spirituality and traditions, whose philosophical, religious and visionary significance had been routinely misunderstood and actively suppressed by the US government. The Wounded Knee occupation in 1973, therefore, endeavoured to validate the pursuit of tribal sovereignty from a variety of standpoints: political, historical, spiritual and cultural.

The Wounded Knee occupation ended in a recognisable manner. Seeking to end the siege, the US government agreed to give a serious consideration of the Indians' position. The ensuing government response was to reject all demands for tribal sovereign (treaty) status as inadequate and to suggest instead improvements in existing Indian federal policies and institutions. The Independent Oglala Nation subsequently proved powerless and its existence faded.¹⁸

The assertion of tribal sovereign political rights and the push for their recognition, however, persisted. The International Treaty Council formed in 1974 on the Standing Rock Reservation called upon tribes to act as nations on the international scene as well. This goal was realised in the fall of 1977 when a delegation of Indian representatives and tribal elders appeared before the United Nations in Geneva. The delegation presented specific tribal and general Indian grievances at the specially organised International NGO Conference on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations in the Americas, which reached a very broad public and generated a wide positive appeal and moral support for American Indian causes. The Council's practice of asserting tribal sovereignty at international forums continued throughout the 1980s as well.

The persistent assertion of tribal sovereign powers on local, national and international levels did not (and perhaps could not realistically) result in either a national or an international recognition of tribal Indian sovereignty. Still, American Indian political activism did bring some important political gains and did enhance elements of tribal sovereignty. In 1971, for instance, the US government returned to Taos Pueblo Indians their sacred Blue Lake, which the US Forest Service had taken illegally some seven decades earlier. In 1973 the Menominee reservation, which was the first to be terminated by the US government in 1954, had its tribal legal status recognised and restored. A number of court cases, such as *United States v. Michigan* in 1979, confirmed the legal validity of special tribal fishing rights guaranteed by treaty agreements from the 18th century (Prucha 420-21). Prompted by the American Indian activism, the government furthermore passed several significant acts: among them the Indian Civil Rights Act in 1968, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1974 and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978 (Ruoff 5). Such changes in the US federal law acknowledge Indian legitimate, even if partial, sovereign rights within the framework of US laws and institutions.¹⁹

Overall, the American Indian political activism of the 1960s and 1970s has created a valuable and an enduring legacy. It represents a contemporary, direct, far-reaching and widely broadcasted expression of Indian people's centuries-long opposition to colonialism. It revived the use of treaty discourse as a valid political, legal and rhetorical means for American Indian tribes to salvage and strengthen tribal political and socio-cultural rights: to seek justice and responsibility from the US government for its past and current relationships with American Indians, to guard and claim rights to Indian lands and resources, to demand a fair settlement or

compensation for violated rights and agreements, to work for beneficial political, social, economic and cultural developments on Indian reservations and in urban centres. American Indian activism has asserted, more effectively than ever before, that such rights come with tribal nation status and sovereign powers – partial and knotty as they may be – that result from American Indians’ distinct historical and political experience, both as indigenous peoples and as participants in the Indian-US relationships. American Indian political experience in the 1960s and 1970s, furthermore, made issues of tribal status and tribes’ relationships with the United States more pertinent and visible than ever. The Red Power movement also set into motion a revival and restatement of tribal traditions and spirituality, together with a renewed assertion and appreciation of pan-Indian and tribal identity. Last but not least, American Indian socio-political struggles successfully generated a greater visibility and a real, contemporary “presence” of American Indian peoples and issues on the national and international scene. It achieved a widespread publicity for both general socio-cultural Indian grievances and specific tribal political and legal concerns.

Indian activism and the resulting growth of cultural awareness and sense of tribal nationalism among American Indians also lead to an unparalleled upsurge of American Indian newspaper and activist publishing. Native and nationally circulated newspapers like *Akwesasne Notes*, established in 1969 and *Wassaja*, in 1973, became a powerful means for communicating and popularising American Indian activist ideas. The foundation of the American Indian Press Association in 1971 provided further assistance for the expression and broadcasting of Indian political and cultural goals both on local and national levels (“Newspapers”). In the 1960s and 1970s the

political writing of Vine Deloria, Jr., furthermore, both expressed and added to the political, cultural and emotional significance of American Indian activism. In books such as *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), *We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf* (1970) and *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties* (1974) Deloria asserted and traced the connection between contemporary American Indian activism and indigenous resistance since the beginning of colonisation. His publications focused on challenging the political status quo on Indian matters, on advocating American Indian political and civil rights and on explaining their historical, legal and moral validity. Deloria's writing also articulated the significance of tribal political struggles and socio-cultural traditions for the contemporary generation of Indians: it was an invaluable and timely medium for expressing and moulding a contemporary political and cultural identity for American Indian peoples. Overall Deloria's work, as Chadwick Allen summarises, has always been "concerned with living American Indian individuals and communities [...], and with the question of how they are to construct viable futures as indigenous peoples" (124). Deloria's work, together with American Indian newspaper activist publications in the 1960s and 1970s are quintessential examples of contemporary American Indian writing that adopted a distinct political voice, reflecting, supporting and shaping Indian political struggles for nationalism and sovereignty. American Indian activist writing, like the American Indian political activities at the time, achieved unprecedented development, as well as an unmatched popularity among both American Indians and the larger US national public. All this generated, as one might expect, a wide spread interest in broader (and not necessarily overtly political) American Indian issues and publications. Books like Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* in 1971, for example, and the reprint

in 1972 of John Neihardt's "as told" biography of Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks* (originally published in 1932), suddenly and rapidly found an avid readership and an impressive popularity.²⁰ Ultimately, American Indian political upsurge and the national interest in American Indian matters at the time proved very beneficial for the unparalleled development of American Indian literary writing and for the establishment of American Indian literary studies in the late 1960s.

Indeed, the institutionalised study of American Indian literatures began around that time. The first American Indian Studies programs were established in the late 1960s at a number of universities throughout the United States. The demand for such programs, as Russell Thornton points out, often came from American Indian students and academics on campus (87). The scholarly and publishing interest in American Indian writing was signalled at the time by some of the first anthologies of contemporary American Indian writing, such as Kenneth Rosen's *The Man to Send Rain Clouds: Contemporary Stories by American Indians* (1974) and *Voices of the Rainbow: Contemporary Poetry by American Indians* (1975), Duane Niatum's poetry anthology *Carriers of the Dream Wheel* (1975), Alan Velie's *American Indian Literature: Anthology* (1979) and Geary Hobson's *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature* (1979). A further indication of the broadening academic interest were book-length literary studies such as Abraham Chapman's *Literature of the American Indian: Views and Interpretations* in 1975 and Charles R. Larson's *American Indian Fiction* in 1978. In the beginning of 1974 two specialised literary journals, the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* and the *American Indian Quarterly*, had their first issues published. (Both journals are among the leading scholarly publications in the field today.) The

Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures (ASAIL), crucial for the development of the field, was established in 1971, and the D'Arcy McNickle Center – which was to play a major role in the study of American Indian history and culture – was founded in 1974 (Iverson 174). Meanwhile, in the spring of 1970, the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars met to discuss directions and goals for the development of Native American Studies as an academic discipline that, as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn points out, seeks to express tribal points of view and assist sovereignty struggles (“Who Stole” 9-11). A few years later, in 1977, as A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff documents, the Modern Language Association held a special seminar on the study and teaching specifically of contemporary American Indian literature and particularly in view of its growing participation in American literature curricula. The seminar initiated the important publication of *Studies in American Indian Literature* in 1983 (a book edited by Paula Gunn Allen), which offered discussions, suggestions and course designs for the teaching of American Indian literature (Ruoff vii). Such milestone events attest to the early, steady and diverse developments of American Indian literary studies as an academic discipline.

In addition to the favourable conditions created by the American Indian activism, American Indian literary developments were given a boost by N. Scott Momaday's work. In 1969, the year in which the Indian takeover of Alcatraz Island became, as Joseph Bruchac puts it, “the first Native American ‘media event’” (“Contemporary” 314), Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn* became the first work by an American Indian writer to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. That literary event, predictably, “endorsed” – for the first time on the national American cultural scene – the status of American Indian literature in English as one of a high literary

value. This is not to say that American Indian writing prior to the 1960s was fully unknown or unappreciated in mainstream American culture: American Indian works in English did enjoy some literary popularity in the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as at the beginning and the middle of the 20th century.²¹ Still, it is only after Momaday's breakthrough in the late 1960s, that American Indian literary creation gained an eminent national standing and a wide recognition by (non-Indian) readers, publishers and academics.²²

Momaday's work, the national fame it achieved and the consequent "recognition" of contemporary American Indian literature in the US are not "autonomous" literary events but – like the American Indian activist movement – reflect conditions of colonisation. One of the ironies and attributes of colonisation, as Kenneth Roemer among others points out, is the fact that the American literary establishment acknowledged the richness and "value" of American Indian literary creation only when that creation reflected and perfected the expressive forms recognised and appreciated by that establishment ("N. Scott Momaday"). This is an observation that Louis Owens reaffirms in his discussion of the Pulitzer juror's critical evaluation and praise for Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* in 1969 (*Mixedblood* 57-62). Undeniably, in *House Made of Dawn* and in other writing that soon followed it – like the autobiographical *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) and the poetry collection *The Gourd Dancer* (1976) – Momaday demonstrated a manner of writing that weaved together Euro-American literary themes and techniques with Indian perceptions of self, place, community and language. *House Made of Dawn*, in particular, exemplified – like never before in the history of American Indian writing in English – an effective blending of tribal themes, myths, forms and Indian settings together with familiar

Euro-American literary influences and forms: modernist expressive style, stream-of-consciousness techniques and biblical references. Momaday, in brief, perfected a type of writing that, as Owens puts it, “well-schooled readers could both recognise and sink their teeth into” (*Other* 91). Earlier American Indian writers had likewise combined Native and Western models because they similarly needed and aimed to meet, in David Murray’s words, “the taste of a white audience” to achieve recognition and some impact in the dominant culture (57). Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, however, illustrates a more sophisticated combination of cross-cultural (and colonial) influences and demands on American Indian literature in English. It set a model for the particular kind of American Indian literary writing that was likeable and publishable in the US academic and popular culture. Momaday, therefore, became a major literary influence on contemporary American Indian writers and particularly on James Welch, Simon Ortiz and Leslie Marmon Silko, who were beginning their writing careers and were gaining readers’ and critics’ recognition in the early 1970s.²³ In this sense, the contemporary American Indian literary writing that became the basis of American Indian literary studies needs to be understood and assessed within the history of colonisation.

The apparent explosion of Native writing post-1960s also reflects the fact that US Indian policies – whenever they have undertaken to assist American Indian development – have focused on helping Native people to acquire (English) education as well as to preserve cultural aspects of Native traditions. US Indian policies, in other words, have always adopted an acculturation and assimilation rationale and have emphasised cultural rather than political attributes of American Indian heritages. For example, a major outcome of the progressive for its times American Reorganization

Act in 1934 – an outcome which resonated well into the 1950s and 1960s – is the fact that the US government had allocated federal funds specifically for Indian education and cultural development (Deloria and Lytle, *Nations Within* 168-83). As a result, prior to the socio-political changes demanded and initiated by the American Indian political movement in the 1960s, many more Native people were able to get education and training to become writers in English rather than (tribal) lawyers and politicians, for instance.²⁴ In other words, there are some unmistakable connections between the upsurge of American Indian literary writing in English and the long-term US Indian policies of colonisation and assimilation. For certain, as I pointed out, Euro-American literary education and conventions strongly inform some of the literary structures, forms and ideas in Momaday's work and in the subsequent work of other contemporary and "celebrated" American Indian writers.

While such situation reflects conditions of colonisation, this does not mean that the literary work of American Indian writers in the 1960s and 1970s, and since then, lacks Native and counter-colonial literary and political dimensions. On the contrary, a lot of elements the thematic, linguistic and imaginative structures of contemporary American Indian writing reflect Native lived or remembered experiences, knowledges and literary inspirations. The writers themselves commonly attest to the influence of tribal and pan-Indian experiences and traditions of storytelling both on their decisions to become writers and on their evolving literary subjects and techniques. More importantly, the writers communicate how their writing is also motivated by a political agenda: they feel that they need to explain and defend Native people's experience, history, worldviews, humanity and aspirations to the U.S. society at large in order to publicise and gain better understanding and support for

American Indian socio-political goals. Leslie Marmon Silko, for instance, relates her inspiration to embark upon a writing education and career in the late 1960s to the realisation that “the power of stories” offered the most compelling way “to seek justice” for American Indians (*Yellow Woman* 20).²⁵ Louise Erdrich articulates a feeling of moral urge, of political obligation and necessity to “tell the stories of contemporary survivors” (“Where” 48), which both expose and defy the colonialist expectation that American Indian peoples won’t survive. Contemporary American Indian literary writing thus represents, as Simon Ortiz puts it, one of the influential and meaningful ways through which “Indian people have creatively responded to forced colonization” (66).

One can say, in short, that US educational policies for American Indians, like the policies of urbanisation and termination in the 1950s that I discussed earlier, “backfired”: by the late 1960s they had created opportunities for young American Indian writers and students in English to develop literary means and acquire public power in the US culture that had the potential to benefit American Indian peoples culturally, politically and emotionally. American Indian literary writing, not unlike American Indian political activism and writing, has sought to remember, testify to, publicise and, ultimately, work against injuries and manipulations of colonisation.

Given the fact that the upsurge of contemporary American Indian writing since the 1960s reflects the history of American Indians’ colonisation as well as American Indian writers’ (“creative”) response to it, I want to object to the term Native American literary “renaissance,” which the established critical discourse commonly uses to describe the post-1960s developments in American Indian writing. (Kenneth Lincoln suggested the term in 1983 and since then it has become the

preferred way to define the contemporary advance of American Indian literature, particularly the period from the late 1960s until the early 1980s.) Joseph Bruchac, among others, complains how the naming “may be both inadequate and inaccurate” because contemporary Native literature “is both something old emerging in new forms and something that has never been asleep” (*Returning* xvii). I support this objection because the reference to “renaissance” suggests that at a particular cultural moment American Indian writers miraculously recovered some forgotten cultural traditions, untouched by the effects of colonisation. The term thus obscures and depoliticises connections between the history of colonisation, the development of American Indian writing in English (since the 18th century), and the ongoing use of that writing for various politically motivated purposes. The understanding of the post-1960s literary developments in American Indian writing as a “renaissance” is problematic because it conceptualises the significance of that writing exclusively in terms of its more recent recognition by the American literary establishment and thus undermines the literature’s connection to historical conditions, American Indians’ accommodation to US colonisation, and at the same time, their resistance to it in creative and politically-informed ways.²⁶

Nevertheless, I recognise that Momaday’s breakthrough and the post-1960s outpouring of American Indian literary writing and scholarship need to be understood in relation to the rise of multicultural politics within American academia and culture as well. Indeed, by the late 1960s the efforts and successes of the wide-ranging socio-political activism at the time – the Civil Rights and the women’s movements, the Black Power and the Red Power movements, the Chicana and the college student movements – had managed to affect significantly the US academic and mainstream

culture. The intense socio-political movements at the time initiated lasting tendencies towards democratisation and liberalism, pluralism and “multiculturalism” in American political and cultural life and in academia. Modern literary and cultural studies have since then expressed an overall tendency toward deconstructing the privilege and exclusivity of white, Eurocentric, racist and male perspectives that previously dominated US society, culture and politics. Thus, since the 1960s-early 1970s, there have been expressed liberal efforts in American society to open up political and cultural discourse for “minority” groups of peoples that it has formerly suppressed or marginalised. Most prominently, those groups have included women, indigenous peoples, and long-standing non-Western communities. Since the 1960s, those groups have achieved a growing cultural (and occasionally political) power and a greater acknowledgement of their civil rights. In the context of American literary studies the politics of democratic pluralism and multiculturalism have manifested themselves in the re-formation of “the” American literary canon through the ever-growing participation in it of “forgotten,” suppressed or newly emerging texts and authors previously excluded from the US cultural and political discourse. The evolving post-1960s canon of American literature has commonly been described in academia as “multicultural”: it incorporates American texts from a variety of socio-cultural and “ethnic” traditions in the US. Women’s literature, African American, Native American, Chicano and Asian American literatures are the major bodies of literary texts that have achieved a mounting recognition and a growing cultural space. While those diverse literatures utilise the dominant culture’s literary conventions and cultural spaces, they often unsettle and challenge those very conventions and spaces, as well as the political status quo they represent.²⁷

Contemporary American Indian literature, in particular, has gained a significant recognition and status in US academic and popular culture. The promotion of American Indian literary writing in the context of recent multicultural politics has pursued and achieved some significant socio-political and cultural goals, which are beneficial for American Indian peoples. American Indian literature and its high standing in the US literary establishment have helped to challenge longstanding stereotypes of American Indians, have advanced well-informed appreciation for American Indian heritage and experience, have opened venues for a socio-political critique of US Indian policies, and have encouraged cross-cultural understanding and support for some American Indian issues. Those achievements, in fact, reflect some of the socio-political and cultural intentions that American Indian writers have envisioned and pursued in their writing. Those achievements also demonstrate objectives and effects of the multicultural movement and politics. The very basis for these politics is the understanding that previously marginalised “voices” are a powerful means for expressing cultural values and advocating socio-political goals of marginalised/oppressed people, for promoting cross-cultural knowledge and liberalism and, ultimately, for challenging structures of oppression and dominance. These ideas, coupled with arguments from postcolonial studies, support the belief that the cross-cultural spaces that (formerly) marginalised and oppressed people occupy, together with the hybridised discourse that they employ and develop in their creative writing, “[enable] a form of subversion [...] that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention” (Bhabha 145). What I identify as a “cross-cultural” position in American Indian literary studies grounds its understanding of the academic discipline in an analogous argument. For cross-cultural critics like

Krupat, Owens and Vizenor, the “hybrid” locations, subject matters and expressive devices that characterise American Indian literature and scholarship represent an intervention in and a challenge of the colonial discourse of “the Indian.” The articulation and study of “cross-cultural,” subversive and counter-colonial features of American Indian experience and writing have been central to cross-cultural American Indian scholarship, as well as to multicultural and postcolonial studies.

Tribal-centred scholars, however, have been particularly wary of such cross-cultural, multicultural and postcolonial tendencies in American Indian studies. They fear that American Indians are conceptualised as yet another “ethnic” minority, as yet another “cross-cultural” and “postcolonial” group of people, and that, in the process, American Indians peoples’ specific situation, material history, struggles and goals have been neglected, or inadequately addressed, in the current scholarship. For tribal-centred scholars American Indian studies, in general, and American Indian literature and scholarship, in particular, represent a part and an extension of American Indian political struggles for sovereign rights and powers. In those scholars’ view, the major goals of American Indian studies, as tribal-centred critic Elizabeth Cook-Lynn asserts, are defined by the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars in 1970, which has specified that “defending First Nation status” and “benefiting Indian *Nations*” [emphasis mine] will be central to the emergent academic discipline (“Who Stole”¹⁰). Tribal-centred scholars may regard cross-cultural and interdisciplinary aspects, methodologies and outcomes of American Indian literary studies as necessary and beneficial. Nonetheless, those aspects and outcomes are not seen as defining, that is, as crucial to the discipline and its goals and directions. American Indian literary studies, from a tribal-centred perspective, have the primary and activist purpose of

discussing, expressing and defending indigenous nationhood. The later are the most important and the most powerful means in American Indians' struggle against US colonialism. The discussion of indigenous nationalism and of American Indian writers' successes and failures in articulating its complexities and goals, therefore, are seen as primary inquiries of the academic discipline. For tribal-centred scholars, the subject matter, the methodologies and the goals of multiculturalism – coupled with a persistent focus on cross-cultural and postcolonial “hybridity” and subversive intervention – distract from and dissolve those most important inquiries that American Indian studies should pursue if it was to become a truly decolonising discipline. Accordingly, tribal-centred scholars see current “multicultural,” “cross-cultural” and “postcolonial” approaches and achievements of American Indian literary studies as yet another act of colonisation, which has subsumed the most vital counter-colonial and activist aspects of the academic discipline.

Overall, it seems to me that the two different positions in American Indian studies reflect crucial differences in the socio-political rhetoric and goals that are behind the multicultural/cross-cultural movement and the American Indian political movement. (Similarly, as I have pointed out earlier, there is a crucial difference between the Civil Rights movement and the American Indian activist movement in the 1960s and 1970s.) On one side, American Indian political activism (in the 1960s and today) regards nationalist ideology and practice and the reclaiming of tribal sovereign powers and lands as central (and most desirable) to the process of American Indian peoples' decolonisation. Multicultural/cross-cultural politics, on the other side, seek to open spaces for American Indian (and other oppressed) peoples' participation in, subversion and reformation of US political and cultural institutions: these are

regarded as the most desirable as well as most realistic ways for American “minority” groups to achieve social justice and socio-political power in the US and the world.

Cross-cultural and nationalist goals are not irreconcilable and I believe they can and should work in tandem. The study of American Indian matters, however – particularly the study of contemporary American Indian literature, which has become a very active participant in multicultural and cross-cultural politics – should not proceed without some serious acknowledgement and understanding of differences between multicultural/cross-cultural and tribal-centred/nationalist politics and goals. The current split in American Indian literary studies, in my view, represents a crisis in the scholarship’s ability, or sustained efforts, to understand and resolve those differences. In the subsequent two chapters I shall develop this argument in detail through a synoptic discussion of the two conflicting critical positions – of their major contributors and the respective conflicting grounds for their arguments – and through an analysis of the key contributions and failures of either critical model.

NOTES

¹American Indian representation in mainstream American culture is the subject of thoughtful discussions in works such as Roy Pearce's *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (1953), Robert F. Berkhofer's *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (1978) and Bataille Gretchen's *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations* (2001). A film by the Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva, *Imagining Indians* (1992), presents an illuminating Native perspective on the appropriation and misrepresentation of American Indian cultures and peoples in Hollywood films.

²Troy R. Johnson points out that the Indian activism that started in the 1950s "was largely tribal in nature [...] very little, if any, pan-Indian or supratribal activity occurred" ("Roots" 139).

³As Johnson writes, "Indian peoples recognized [termination and relocation] as an attempt to acquire what little Indian land remained and assimilate Indians peoples into mainstream culture. Their arguments against the resolution focused on financial concerns, loss of rights and privileges established by treaties or by federal law, concern about tribal preparedness for termination, procedural issues, and Indian relationships to traditional lands. Termination ended the special federal-tribal relationship almost completely and transferred responsibility and power for the majority of terminated tribes and people from the federal government to individual states" (*Occupation* 7). An essay by Nancy O. Lurie, "Ada Deer: Champion of Tribal Sovereignty" is another useful resource on US termination policies and on the Indian

political activism and mobilisation that those policies stirred in the 1950s. (The resource is useful because the Menominee tribe of Wisconsin was the first “scheduled” for termination in 1953 and its energetic and politically-active member, Ada Deer, became one of the best-known and effective spokespersons and activists that contributed to reversing the termination policies and advocating indigenous rights and self-determination.)

⁴Johnson summarises the dire socio-economic conditions of urban Indian life at the time: “Fifty percent of the one thousand inmates in Minnesota prisons in 1968,” he writes, “were Indian people, while Indian people made up only one percent of the total population” (“Roots” 128). Peter Matthiessen gives a comparable account (*In the Spirit* 34). In *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement From Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (1996), Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior further explain how the tactics of AIM in response to police violence towards urban American Indians adopted ideas from the Black Panther Party. One of the first projects of AIM, as the authors point out, was to form a patrol crew equipped with cars “with two-way radios, cameras and tape recorders so they could monitor arrests by the police department [...] AIM also became expert at providing attorneys for those arrested. It was a tactic similar to Black Panther campaigns to monitor police in Oakland, California and other cities” (128). Akwesasne Notes (60-2) and Matthiessen (35-6) offer a further narrative of the earliest urban formation and activities of AIM.

⁵Johnson emphasises that the Alcatraz occupation in 1969 was not organised by AIM but mostly by Indian college students (a great number from UCLA) and by Indian activists from United Native Americans (UNA), an organisation with a pan-

Indian platform, founded in 1968 in San Francisco (“Roots” 128, 140, 144-7). An earlier occupation of the islands occurred in March 1964 and involved several Sioux Indians representing the Bay Area urban Indians. They similarly claimed Indian title to the island under provisions of federal treaties (See Adam Fortunate Eagle’s *Alcatraz! Alcatraz!* 14-18 and Johnson’s “Roots” 144-5 and *Occupation* 16-27). The immediate cause for the 1969 occupation was the destruction of the Indian Center by fire, which united students and activists to find a new meeting place. Firstly, students and activists briefly and symbolically occupied the island on 9 November, upon which they became aware of the possibility for a prolonged occupation that started on 20 November (Johnson, “Roots” 145).

⁶Photographs in *Alcatraz is Not an Island* and Robert A. Rundstrom’s article “American Indian Peacemaking on Alcatraz, 1969-71” offer good visual documentation and illustration of the land claims of the Alcatraz occupation.

⁷Deloria and Lytle point out in *Nations Within* that the Alcatraz occupants’ reliance on the Sioux treaty from 1868 for their justification of the occupation of the island, as surplus federal land, was unfounded. As the authors put it, “the claim was mythological ... [as] no article existed in the 1868 treaty that gave the Sioux (or any other tribe) rights to federal surplus property” (236). In a later article “Alcatraz, Activism, and Accommodation” (1994), Deloria furthers his critical assessment of the Alcatraz events. He points out that the demands of the occupation were rather unrealistic and legally unsound (27-8).

⁸Johnson gives account of various problems on Alcatraz that began a few months after the occupation: struggles for leadership as new groups arrived on the

island, development of inter-personal animosities, disorganisation and lack of efficient leadership as Richard Oakes – who provided the original impetus and leadership for the occupation – left the island after the tragic death of his daughter and inadequate handling of finances (*Occupation* 151-71).

⁹Smith and Warrior illustrate how Alcatraz gave AIM the impetus it needed to become a national political movement. AIM, as Johnson points out, carried out the idea and the activism across the US, while Indians of All Tribes remained focused on the Alcatraz occupation (*Occupation* 220). A diverse and helpful source of information about backgrounds and developments of AIM is the 1994 Special Edition of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, which theme is “Alcatraz Revisited: The 25th Anniversary of the Occupation 1969-1971.” The most interesting articles from that issue are reprinted, with minor changes, in a 1997 book edited by Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel and Duane Champagne, *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk*. Johnson’s *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island* and Peter Matthiessen’s *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* are other comprehensive resources.

¹⁰The Trail of Tears from 1838-1839 refers to Cherokees forced removal from their homelands in Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee to Indian Territory in Oklahoma, as part of president Andrew Jackson’s policy for relocation of eastern Indians. (The treaty of New Echota from 1835, on the basis of which the government justified the removal of the Cherokees, was opposed by the majority of Cherokees and was not signed by their elected representatives.) During the thousand-mile journey more than 3000 Cherokees died from cold, hunger, disease and exhaustion.

¹¹The first of the Twenty Points, as Francis Paul Prucha discusses, “called for the president and Congress to repeal the provision in the 1871 law that ended treaty making with Indian tribes – ‘in order that Indian Nations may represent their own interests in the manner and method envisioned and provided in the Federal Constitution’” (412).

¹²According to Prucha, the way in which the Trail of Broken Treaties ended was perhaps unfortunate and unhelpful for “any serious consideration of the Twenty points” (414): the destruction of the BIA quarters and the removal of the BIA records by Indian protesters, presented Indian demands as riotous and unfounded, rather than as historically and legally sound.

¹³Even before the Trail of Broken Treaties the Pine Ridge area had attracted AIM actions, following a call for help from Indian groups on the reservation in February 1972. The intervention of AIM then (confronting authorities with several hundred people) helped to bring to trial the two white brothers who had beaten to death an Oglala Indian there, Raymond Yellow Thunder (That was a murder which the police authorities had tried to cover up). The guilty brothers, as Churchill writes, “became the first whites in Nebraska history sent to prison for killing an Indian” (“Bloody Wake” 258). That was an important legislative and moral victory for AIM. The support and respect for AIM on the reservation, as Churchill points out, “soared” (258). AIM activists sought to repeat that success in February 1973, when they tried once again to bring to trial the covered white murderer of another Oglala, Wesley Bad Heart Bull. That time, however, AIM was met by heavily armed US police force and their effort failed. As Churchill narrates, AIM members and participants in the protest

were arrested and the murderer was never charged (“Bloody Wake” 259-60, also Matthiessen 62-3).

¹⁴It may be meaningful to mention in this context that the Pine Ridge area and the Lakotas, in particular, have a rich history of defiance to US rule and treaty rights violations. The most famous is the Lakota defeat of the seventh cavalry under General Custer in 1876: that victory managed to stop, albeit only temporarily, the gold rush in the sacred Black Hills, which the US government had claimed in violation of the 1868 Laramie Treaty. The US government had signed the latter treaty after defeats of the US cavalry in its confrontations with Lakota and Cheyenne warriors in the Northern Plains, along the Bozeman Trail, in the mid-nineteenth century (Akwesasne Notes 7, Matthiessen 4-8). Within a just a few years settlers and gold seekers had entered the Lakota territory secured by the Laramie Treaty. In 1874 an expedition led by General Custer confirmed the availability of gold in the Black Hills. When the Lakotas – led by Crazy Horse, Red Cloud and Sitting Bull – refused to sell the Black Hills to the US in 1875, the government sent the army to “resolve” the dispute (Matthiessen 9-14). One may draw the parallel and say that contemporary AIM “warriors” at Wounded Knee were similarly fighting against treaty violations, tribal land theft and federal control over tribal affairs.

¹⁵The Indian Reorganization Act was initiated by the Meriam Report in 1928, which provided the Congress with an assessment of the impact of the Allotment Act on the conditions of Indians in the US. The report offered a serious criticism of the devastating effects of the Allotment Act and recommended changes in the US Indian policies. The work of John Collier became integral to the implementation of such

changes. His progressive proposals in the Collier bill – which became the backbone of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934 – were instrumental for promoting the philosophy of tribal self-government and the revival of tribal cultural and political traditions in the US congress. Collier’s inspiration for the proposed reforms perhaps originated in his appreciation for the strong, local governing traditions of the Pueblos. In Deloria and Lytle’s favourable judgement, Collier’s idea was to boost and adapt tribal governing traditions to functioning more profitably in their relation to US federal institutions. Collier was shortsighted, however, in that he had little understanding of conflicts and factions within Indian communities between traditional and acculturated Indians, which had become common on many reservations (as a consequence of colonisation and acculturation). Hence “his proposal was phrased in such a way as to deliver to the mixed-blood and more acculturated Indians the controls of the tribal government (*Nations Within* 70, see also 165). In addition, the powers of self-government that the tribal councils received were still under the superior control of the federal government and many tribal traditionalists opposed this arrangement (170). Yet, in due course, Collier was successful in gaining Indian support for the Act so that “ultimately 181 tribes, with a population of 129,750 Indians, voted to accept the Indian Reorganization Act,” while “seventy-seven tribes, with a population of 86,365, rejected [it]” (172).

¹⁶Wilson’s abuses of power, for instance, included mishandling of tribal funds, bribery, nepotism, rule through repression and harassment of tribal traditionalists (Akwesasne Notes 14-29).

¹⁷The Wounded Knee Massacre occurred on 29 December 1890, when US soldiers surrounded and killed nearly 300 Lakotas (among them many women and children). The massacre expressed US fear of the spread of the Ghost Dance religion, which advocated a belief in the disappearance of all whites and the return of traditional tribal life.

¹⁸In addition, the US government has launched a violent attack on American Indian political activism and by the late 1970s has managed to suppress its power. (For an account, see Churchill and Wall's *Agents of Repression*.)

¹⁹While my focus is on the achievements of American Indian activism in the 1960s and 1970s, one may also notice that those achievement soon spread an anti-Indian sentiment among some non-Indians, who saw the re-assertion of special Indian rights as a threat to their own rights and well being (Prucha 422-27). Even today, the broader American public has mixed attitudes to Indian treaty rights: some are staunch supporters while others are strong objectors.

²⁰See Neihardt on the "surprising popularity" of *Black Elk Speaks*, as described in the preface to the re-printed edition in 1972 (xxx).

²¹Examples include Samson Occom's sermon, Emily Pauline Johnson's short stories, Will Roger's humorous commentaries, and Charles Eastman's various writing in the 18th and 19th centuries (see Ruoff 62-75). Anthologies of American Indian oral literature from the beginning and the middle of the 20th century (such as George Cronyn's *The Path on the Rainbow* in 1918 or Margot Astrov's *The Winged Serpent* in 1946) are also indicative of an early literary interest in American Indian cultural heritage.

²²Contemporary American Indian playwriting also got its “official” mainstream recognition at around that time with the presentation of Hanay Geiogamah’s *Body Indian* in New York City in 1972 (D’Aponte 4). This fact, given the many practical and financial challenges involved in staging an American Indian play, is another indication of the immense leap in the development of American Indian literary culture at the time.

²³In one of her interviews Silko refuses to place too much significance on Momaday’s influence. Kim Barnes asks the following question: “Paula Gunn Allen has said that reading Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* was a turning point in her life. Has Momaday had the same effect on you as a writer?” Silko’s response sounds somewhat defensive: [...] Turning point? Where was Paula headed before? I don’t quite understand. No. I like *The Way to Rainy Mountain* very much, but I would have been doing what I was doing regardless of what Scott has done or not, written or not written” (*Conversations* 82). I can understand that writers who share backgrounds and themes are sensitive to questions of how they might influence each other. Still, I think that Silko’s response unfairly diminishes Momaday’s favourable influence, at least through the 1970s, for making it easier for a coming generation of American Indian writers to follow a writing career through getting published and appreciated in the dominant culture.

²⁴It was only in the late 1960s that tribal colleges (or tribally controlled institutions of higher education) began to develop. The first tribal college, Navajo college later renamed to Dine College, was established in 1968 by the Navajo nation. Other five or six colleges were founded in the 1970s, and new colleges continued to

emerge throughout the 1980s and the 1990s. Tribal colleges aim not only to reinforce and explore traditional tribal cultures but also to prepare tribal youth for various administrative, legislative and political positions on the reservation (“Tribal Colleges”).

²⁵Silko, in fact, started her graduate education at the University of New Mexico as a student in American Indian Law because she believed that such knowledge and training would be most beneficial to American Indian political needs. At the time, however, Silko became disappointed both in the ways in which American Indian law was taught at the mainstream university and in the ways in which it was applied in practice in the US court system. She recalls in her collection of essays *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*: “I realized that injustice is built into the Anglo-American legal system” (19). Consequently, Silko saw writing as a more likely and effective way to fight legal, political, cultural and moral battles.

²⁶I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer for *Literature Compass* at Blackwell, whose critique helped me develop my disagreement with the term American Indian literary “renaissance.”

²⁷Multiple publications since the late 1970s engage with the issue of the changing canon of American. Useful and informative sources of information for me on these issues have been *Redefining American Literary History* (edited by A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward, Jr.) and *Reconstructing American Literature: Courses, Syllabi, Issues* (edited by Paul Lauter).

Chapter 2

Counter-Colonial Subversions and Border-Crossings: The Cross-Cultural Position of Arnold Krupat, Louis Owens and Gerald Vizenor

I have already proposed that divisions in American Indian literary scholarship between cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical camps are rooted in differing and non-negotiated interpretations of the socio-cultural and political purposes, methodologies and directions of the academic discipline. On one hand, cross-cultural criticism – deploying ideas from multicultural and postcolonial studies and, occasionally, from postmodern theory – gives preference to cross-cultural, hybridised and interdisciplinary perspectives in the field. Tribal-centred criticism, in contrast, privileges nationalism, sovereignty and local tribal communities, concerns and knowledges as primary categories around which discussions, methodologies and goals of the field should develop. The critical work of Arnold Krupat, Louis Owens and Gerald Vizenor has had a major influence on the development of the former critical position, while Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's and Craig Womack's scholarship charts current trends in the latter. In the two chapters that follow, chapters two and three, I shall focus on presenting and analysing the ideas of these scholars as key contributors to each critical position.

I am not suggesting, however, that cross-cultural and tribal-centred positions in American Indian studies are uniformly grouped, simplistically divided, or evenly developed. Rather, as I shall underscore, I see the field in a state of flux, whereupon cross-cultural criticism exemplifies a somewhat established critical position, by and

large adopted in academia, while the tribal-centred one is presently growing and taking shape, commonly situating itself in opposition to the established cross-cultural models in the discipline. I also recognise that there may be different ways of grouping together and studying critical perspectives in American Indian studies, as well as scholars' theoretical contributions to them. Individual critics' approaches, in addition, have complexities and layers that exceed the two-fold categories within which I am discussing them. Nonetheless, the specific division I am discussing and seeking to understand represents a significant, overall split in the field, and its nature is currently either neglected or misunderstood. My assertion, therefore, is that it is necessary and crucial to comprehend differences in these two critical positions, to assess their conflicting grounds of argument and to consider how they affect – or should affect – ways in which American Indian literature is studied and taught.

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Arnold Krupat is the Native Americanist who puts forward one of the earliest, wide-ranging and influential studies of American Indian literature and scholarship as fields which evolve in a markedly cross-cultural (multicultural) and a postcolonial context. Krupat's initial focus is on discussing and advocating the participation of contemporary Native American writing in the canon of American literature as a progressive and beneficial step, which contributes to the mutual understanding and appreciation of cultural, political and human differences. He started an early discussion about this issue in 1981 with an article on Native American literature in the *Critical Inquiry*'s "Special Issue on Canons."¹ Later on, in his book-length study *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (1989), Krupat furthers and details his argument for opening up the canon of American literature to include Native American literature(s). Here Krupat discusses

how American cultural and political discourses have continually silenced American Indian peoples and have inscribed them as either the savage or the romantic “other” in order to justify US policies of territorial and cultural colonisation. He insists that contemporary Native American literature should be studied within the canon of American literature (and, in fact, within the cosmopolitan, world literature canon) because such cultural and institutional practice plays an important part in challenging American Indian “othering” and silencing, and works to deconstruct US colonial history from a Native perspective.

In Krupat’s interpretation, contemporary Native American literary writing – for all the influences of Euro-American education and literary conventions – articulates American Indian cultural and socio-political views and constitutes a form of resistance to the culture and politics of colonial domination. Native writing, Krupat maintains, commonly violates Western literary and philosophical principles, as well as Euro-American expectations about Native American cultures and experiences. The writers claim a right to speak, to affirm the “survival” and reconstruction of Indian cultures and identities, to remember, bear witness and interrogate established colonising patterns of dominance, submission and exclusion. As Krupat puts it, contemporary Native American literature is a recuperation of voice, a “writing back” against Euro-American discourses of “Indianness,” and a “refusal of imperial domination, and so of the West’s claim legitimately to speak for all the rest” (*Voice* 17). Krupat maintains how – as a result of US colonialism and the cross-cultural relations and tensions it has created – Native American literature cannot be conceptualised as autonomous and independent from US socio-cultural modes and institutions. Contemporary Native American literature, he asserts, is most productively and justifiably discussed as literature “marked by traditional/local

modes of expression interacting with the modes of the dominant culture” (*Voice* 214). In Krupat’s argument that interaction is a form of resistance to US colonising cultural and political discourses, which have been founded on false concepts of purity, authenticity and dichotomy. The hybrid, dialogic nature of contemporary Native American writing is hence “pressing upon, even seeking to delegitimize” dominant “monological” forms and discourses (*Voice* 214). In this line of reasoning, the study of American Indian literature from the perspectives of postcolonial, cross-cultural interaction, and with a focus on the literature’s cross-cultural and subversive (“delegitimizing”) aspects, represents the most beneficial form that American Indian scholarship could take.

Krupat’s successive contributions to Native American critical theory – in *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature* (1992), in his editorial work for *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism* (1993), in *The Turn to the Native: Studies in Criticism and Culture* (1996) and in his latest publication yet, *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (2002) – confirm and enhance these early arguments. Firstly, Krupat develops and supports the understanding that contemporary Native American literature is rooted in traditional tribal philosophies and cultural practices, and assists their continuation. Consequently, he posits that the scholarship of Native American literature cannot, or should not, proceed without a committed study of the tribal cultures that have bearing on the contemporary texts. One of the major thrusts in Krupat’s *Ethnocriticism* is the rejection of the tendency in established critical discourses at the time to resort only to familiar Western/Euro-American categories of literary investigation when dealing with Native American texts (113-23). Krupat calls, respectively, for categories of interpretation that derive from, and try to represent as fully and adequately as possible, Native/specific tribal

worldviews and their rendition in contemporary Native American literature. Krupat, in addition, asserts the leading role that Native critics should play in developing this kind of literary criticism (*Turn* 9-10).

Concurrently, Krupat re-affirms his conviction that Native American scholarship should aim to represent and balance the grounding of Native American experience and writing in both Native (local) contexts and in the larger American (as well as global and cosmopolitan) ones. He emphasises once more that “from 1942 on, neither Euramerican intellectuals not Native American intellectuals could operate autonomously or uniquely, in a manner fully independent of one another, for all the differences in power relations” (*Turn* 18). As a result of colonial history and intermingling of cultural practices, Native American literature and scholarship are defined by (Bakhtinian) dialogism: “cross[ing] the borders between Western and non-Western modes of knowing and articulating” (*New Voices* xxiv) and testifying to “the conjunction of cultural practices, Euramerican and Native American” (*Turn* 17). For Krupat, one of the most powerful decolonising features of Native American literature is that conjunction, or “betweenness,” which represents American Indians “as not entirely Other nor yet the same” (*Ethnocriticism* 125). Accordingly, the cross-cultural critical perspective for Native American studies that Krupat advocates – which he calls “ethnocriticism” or “cosmopolitan comparativism” – is committed, on one side, to the understanding of the different epistemological and socio-political experiences, philosophies and goals that distinguish American Indian perspectives. At the same time, that perspective also denies incomprehensible differences and seeks to deconstruct purist, essentialist and dichotomising categories that characterise colonial discourses. For Krupat, in other words, what is central to Native American literature and scholarship is the expression and study of, what

Mary-Louise Pratt has called, the “contact zone” or, in Krupat’s words, “that shifting space in which two cultures encounter one another” (*Ethnocriticism* 5). Such ethnocritical/cosmopolitan model, Krupat maintains, “manifests itself in the form of multiculturalism,” which for him is “that particular organisation of cultural studies which engages otherness and difference in such a way as to provoke an interrogation of and a challenge to what we ordinarily take as familiar and our own” (*ibid*, 3-4).

Krupat goes on to emphasise, over again, how the writers’ and scholars’ work on the cross-cultural, cosmopolitan and shifting “contact-zone” is not merely a cultural but a political act as well. He affirms that the interaction between Native and Euro-American cultures, as enacted in contemporary Native American literature and criticism, assists not only the mutual understanding of cultures, experiences and perspectives, but also anticolonial and anti-imperial political struggles. Like other postcolonial literatures, Native American writing aims and manages to appropriate and subvert colonial discourses, and the English language itself, in ways that express and assert Native and counter-colonial socio-political agendas and literary-philosophical models. Contemporary Native American writers, as Krupat puts it, “configure their texts in apparent consonance with Western or Euramerican literary forms” but those forms “are powerfully affected” by “‘the tongues’ [...] indigenous to America” (*Turn* 36). Accordingly, the multicultural/cosmopolitan critic, like the postcolonial critic, seeks to analyse ways in which American Indian writing functions as “anti-imperial translation,” both imitating and subverting the dominant discourse in a way that ultimately communicates Indian socio-cultural, political and philosophical views (*Turn* 35-38).² The purpose of the Native American critic, in other words, is to discuss how “Indian” structures “operate in tensions with or in a manner resistant to an English in the interest of colonialism” (*Turn* 38). Krupat

acknowledges the fact that the situation of Native American peoples in the United States is still colonial rather than postcolonial (*Turn* 30-39). Nonetheless, he justifies the value of postcolonial theory in Native American literary studies because it appropriately conceptualises the counter-colonial power of hybridity, as well as the international dimensions of Native American resistance to colonial and imperial dominance. Overall, Krupat champions comparativist and interdisciplinary models and locations for the academic discipline (*Voice* 215, *Turn* 24-29, *Red Matters* 19-21). His own work elaborates on ideas and theories from a wide range of scholarship, especially postcolonial and multicultural studies.

In summary, Krupat's critical model foregrounds and commends cross-cultural and counter-colonial discursive strategies in contemporary American Indian writing. The interpretative approaches he advocates focus on illuminating how American Indian writers have appropriated Euro-American literary forms, techniques and language in ways that subvert – or, to repeat Krupat's idiom, “delegitimate” – the dominant culture and advocate American Indian cultural and political causes. Simultaneously Krupat maintains that the conditions and categories of cross-culturality and “comparative cosmopolitanism” are the necessary and most advantageous ones for the development of Native American literature and scholarship.

The late Louis Owens is another leading critic whose scholarship is dedicated to discussing the cross-cultural positionality and hybridity of contemporary American Indian literature.³ In his first prominent study, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992), Owens develops a broad overview and a detailed analysis of, specifically, the American Indian novelistic tradition, starting with John Rollin Ridge in the 1850s and Mourning

Dove in the early 20th century, and focusing on novels by established contemporary American Indian novelists. Owens thus contributes to explaining and illustrating of many of his (and Krupat's) theoretical concerns with comprehensive and focused literary interpretations. Krupat's major studies, in comparison, maintain a more theoretical focus and offer only select and brief literary analyses.⁴ Unlike Krupat, furthermore, Owens does not make issues of multiculturalism, canonicity and institutional locations of American Indian literature his explicit theoretical concerns. (This difference is not surprising: as one of the editors of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, which is committed to multicultural politics and is becoming increasingly multicultural, Krupat is likely to be more involved with those issues.) Owens discusses briefly, mainly in the introductory chapter to *Other Destinies*, the relationship between American Indian literature and the American canon. In contrast to Krupat, who often discusses the progressive, reformative significance of American Indian literature in relation to American and cosmopolitan cultural, political and discursive fields, Owens shows a greater concern for the relationship of the literature to native cultures and communities. (This difference may have to do with Owens feeling a different relationship to American Indian literary production as a Native, "insider," critic.) Using that different perspective, Owens observes that some of the ways in which Native American novelists "fit into the mainstream of American literature" may be problematic (*Other* 24). In particular, Owens notes that the cultural and socio-political conditions of being an author in the commodifying and objectifying colonial culture and publishing industry often involve the risk of "desacralization" of tribal traditions and may put contemporary American Indian writers in tenuous relations with the native cultures and communities they draw from and often genuinely seek to benefit (11).⁵

Despite such differences, Owens's views share particular affinities with Krupat's when they support the claim that contemporary American Indian literature contributes to the process of reclaiming Indian identities, cultures and discourses from colonial invention and appropriation. Owens affirms that contemporary American Indian writing serves anticolonial purposes: it asserts how Native peoples are achieving and living "destinies" other than those prescribed by the US founding myth of the Manifest Destiny, which presumed that Indians would "vanish," regrettably-but-inevitably, so that the more progressive and worthy "master" race could continue unhindered (*Other* 18). Such socio-cultural imaginings and "inventions" of the Indian were "embodied in the accepted canon" of American literature (18) and in the former literary appropriation of Indian themes by non-Indian writers (23-24). By contrast, contemporary American Indian writing – its themes and discursive strategies and its growing influence locally, nationally and internationally – represents a forceful testimony to Indians' endurance and continuance, and a challenge to colonial discourses and representations that have sought to silence and disempower "the Indian." Like Krupat, Owens asserts that the most characteristic and effective strategy for empowerment and decolonisation that American Indian writing deploys is its simultaneous adoption and subversion of Euro-American discourses and expressive forms. The political significance of American Indian writing is encoded in its difference from the very colonial language, forms and discourses that the writing interacts with and intervenes in.

Owens's and Krupat's critical positions are thus comparable in that both scholars conceptualise the socio-political meaning of contemporary American Indian literature primarily in the context of the literature's mimicry and Indianisation of "the coloniser's discourse." In developing this perspective, both Krupat and Owens

draw and elaborate largely on Bakhtin's and on (traditional) postcolonial ideas of "hybridity," "dialogism," "appropriation" and "subversion." Directly invoking these ideas, Owens affirms that American Indian novels, for all their Euro-American appearance, are "Trojan-horse novel[s] ... contain[ing] a thoroughly 'Indian' story and discourse" (*Mixedblood* 69). That discourse is "heteroglossic" and has a characteristic socio-political valence because it is "almost always in direct conflict with the dominant *ideologemes* of Euramerica" (*Other* 8). The same central argument re-emerges and evolves in *Mixed-Blood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place* in 1998 and *I Hear the Train: Reflections, Inventions, Refractions* in 2001, Owens's two major studies that followed *Other Destinies*. (In the latest volume, the most relevant to this argument is chapter 18, "As If an Indian Were Really an Indian: Native American Voices and Postcolonial Theory."⁶) The influence of the language and concepts of postcolonial theory – as articulated in "classic" postcolonial texts like Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), a work that Owens references consistently – comes even more emphatically in these later works. Owens sees American Indian writers, and himself, as "appropriating the master discourse [...] abrogating its authority, making the invaders' language our language, english with a lower case *e*, and turning it against the center" (*Mixedblood* 4). These brief citations illustrate the main overlap in Owens's and Krupat's critical approaches to contemporary American Indian literature: for both scholars the literature represents, above all, a cross-cultural, dialogic and postcolonial practice that subverts the very colonial forms and discourses that it seemingly adopts.

In this relation Owens asserts that, because American Indian writers superimpose tribally specific narrative strategies and references onto the familiar

Euro-American genres and themes, they reverse positions of socio-cultural privilege, “[placing] the Eurocentric reader on the outside, ‘as other,’ while the Indian reader [...] is granted, for the first time, a privileged position” (*Other* 14). Two critics who elaborate this specific argument are James Ruppert in *Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction* (1995) and Catherine Rainwater in *Dreams of Fiery Stars* (1999) and in her analyses of Erdrich’s novels, “Reading between Worlds” (1990) and “Ethnic Signs” (1999). Taking Owens’s cue, Ruppert and Rainwater contend that contemporary American Indian narratives deliberately unsettle the schooled expectations of (Euro-American) readers for a unified and familiar point of view and oblige them to accept American Indian and multiple ways of understanding and narrating/reading the world. Accordingly, as Owens and Krupat assert, American Indian writing demands from Euro-American readers and scholars to develop some knowledge and understanding of tribal mythology, traditions and world views in order to experience and appreciate adequately the creative vision and power of that writing. Similarly to Krupat in *Ethnocriticism*, Owens furthers his argument to contend that scholars, teachers and readers of American Indian literature cannot rely only on familiar Western categories of perception and analysis in their engagement with American Indian texts; they have to develop some understanding and appreciation of American Indian/tribal “conceptual horizons,” histories and mythologies as well (see *Other* 15-16, 29-31 and *Mixedblood* 4). Both Krupat and Owens insist that the study of the relationships between Native American literature (its style, images, themes, conceptual and linguistic frameworks) and the Native cultures it carries on and portrays should be a central undertaking in Native American scholarship.

Various interpretative approaches in American Indian scholarship over the last three decades – some deployed by Owens and Krupat themselves – have, indeed, elucidated on the layering of specific pan-Indian and tribal aspects in the plots and themes, structuring and stylistic devices, images and characters in American Indian literary writing. Well-known is William Bevis's 1987 analysis of American Indian novels as "homing-in" novels that map out a movement towards coming home to a tribal community and place. That plot structure, as Bevis argues, differentiates itself from and critiques the expansionist and individualist values of the dominant culture, articulated in classic American narratives about leaving home and "lightning out for the territory." By affirming, in Owens's words, "a circular journey towards [a tribal] home and identity" (*Other* 191), American Indian novels also make a truly counter-colonial statement: they challenge Euro-American representations of tribal traditions and peoples as doomed, vanishing and worthless. (Bevis's essay is a common reference in Owens's interpretations of American Indian novels in *Other Destinies*, and is also included in a volume of criticism edited by Krupat and Brian Swann, *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature* (1987).)

Studies have further explored the relationship between Native American writing and tribal oral traditions. An important and well-developed subject of scholarly discussion has been the significance of mythological figures (especially the "trickster"), of mythological structuring of the world and of ritual elements in Native American writing. This subject has furthermore been connected to the study of the influence in contemporary Native American literature of tribal oral forms and the socio-cultural values associated with them: the repetition of key events and words, the participatory, audience-involving quality of the writing, the episodic and

associational structure of the novelistic plots, the “communal” narrative voice and so on. Many studies exemplify and elaborate these approaches, among them Owens’s discussions in *Other Destinies*, some of Krupat’s analyses (“Post-Structuralism” 1987, “The Dialogic” 1989), Paula Gunn Allen’s influential essays in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), James Ruppert’s *Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction* (1995), Kimberley Blaeser’s study of Vizenor’s work, *Writing in the Oral Tradition*, (1996), Greg Sarris’s *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts* (1993) and Gerald Vizenor’s critical writing. Central to these critical studies is the argument that the incorporation of elements from tribal oral traditions into American Indian written texts, not only destabilises the textual authority of Western genres and discourses, but also asserts the power and meaningfulness of tribal epistemologies.

These brief examples illustrate ways in which American Indian writing can be, and has been interpreted as an intrusion upon and an unsettling of Western expressive and cognitive models, and concurrently, as an assertion of the authority and worth of tribal literary and epistemic perspectives. The focus of this type of interpretative criticism is on studying the cultural, aesthetic and conceptual “difference” of contemporary American Indian writing as it mimics, appropriates and challenges Euro-American forms and understandings. That difference is politically meaningful because, as Owens and Krupat emphasise, it upholds the vigour and validity of tribal perspectives and defies the erasure of tribal cultures, peoples and knowledges indulged by the colonial discourse. Once again, there is an affinity and a pronounced connection between the creative and interpretative methods that foreground the “signifying difference” of American Indian writing and the literary and critical perspectives adopted by postcolonial, and particularly by

African-American writers and critics. (See, for instance, discussions by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in *Black Literature and Literary Theory* and *The Signifying Monkey*, where he talks about “black aesthetics” and “the black vernacular tradition” in African American writing.) In both cases, writers and critics are committed to situating the writing (American Indian, postcolonial or African American) as a “counter-writing,” which distances and liberates itself from Euro-American (colonial, imposed, coercive) forms and discourses, and simultaneously recovers, asserts and sanctions “other” (marginalised, colonised, silenced) perspectives.

Conversely, and very importantly, Krupat, Owens and other scholars, who adopt cross-cultural and postcolonial approaches in Native American criticism, emphasise how Native American writing and scholarship aim, or should aim, to articulate and promote the understanding of “difference” in dialogic and anti-essentialist ways. Scholars assert that the most equivocal and characteristic way through which contemporary American Indian literature and criticism could express and continue traditional American Indian storytelling and worldviews – and could challenge Euro-American ones – is through the adoption and extension of the holistic, syncretic and dynamic nature of tribal traditions. One of the dangers of counter-colonial ideological discourses and expressive strategies, points out Owens – referencing African American/postcolonial critics like Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and John Guillroy – is that those discourses and strategies may re-create the binary structures and fixed opposites of the colonial discourse. Owens cautions how

In our desire to imagine an oppositional culturally unified “other” – whether from an indigenous perspective or that of the ‘paracolonial’ center – we run the risk of constructing what Vizenor has called “terminal creeds”: those monologic utterances that seek to violate the

dialogic of trickster space, to fix opposites and impose static definitions upon the world. (*Mixedblood* 55)

In other words, Owens maintains – similarly to Krupat and other scholars of “difference,” postcoloniality and “ethnicity” – that the counter-colonial goal of the American Indian literary project is to illuminate and assert conceptual and epistemological differences between Native American and Euro-American perspectives, without – at the same time – re-inscribing American Indian peoples and cultures as the “natural,” incomprehensible, unchanged and pure “other.” Such a goal involves a reclaiming of the tribal “trickster discourse [which] insists upon and celebrated the boundless zone of transculturation” (*Mixedblood* 55). American Indian writing, suggests Owens, uses two distinctive cross-cultural strategies to that end: it seeks to build dialogic relationships with diverse, native and non-Native, audiences and it also deploys cross-cultural knowledges and discourses.

As Owens argues, Native American texts may be culturally specific (located in Native historical and cultural experiences and in tribal storytelling traditions), but they also successfully “bridge the gaps” between Native and non-Native understandings, and motivate shared (cross-cultural) perspectives and knowledges. Contemporary American Indian writers, who self-consciously identify as Indian authors, who are commonly highly educated in Euro-American literary traditions and who have a lived and schooled experience in both Euro-American and tribal/pan-Indian cultures, are particularly adept in carrying such a cross-cultural and politically meaningful task. Both Krupat and Owens affirm that American Indian literature and criticism, for all the grounding in and appreciation of tribal realities and cultures that they demonstrate and promote, also function as cross-cultural “dialogues” and as mediators of human and cultural “difference.” Rupert’s

Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction, David Murray's *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (1991), Rainwater's *Dreams of Fiery Stars*, and Sarris's *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* are other characteristic examples of Native American scholarship that studies Native American writing as an instance of cross-cultural communication, cross-writing and cross-reading, which bridges Native American and Euro-American experiences, knowledges and discursive fields. The literary approaches that these critics adopt – like the approaches Krupat and Owens practice and promote – are similarly “cross-cultural”: drawing on Native knowledges and on a variety of Western theories. Sarris, to give an example, makes extensive references to his Pomo experiences and knowledges, structuring his own critical writing as a kind of Pomo narrative. (Craig Womack does something similar, when he models some of his critical commentary in *Red on Red* in the style of Creek storytelling.) Yet Sarris also recurrently resorts to Euro-American theoretical discourses, among them the reader-response criticism of Stanley Fish and James Clifford's theories on cross-culturality. Sarris's two final essays even describe and promote the use of dialogic and mediating methods in the classroom. The approaches thus exemplify Krupat's call for a “conjunction of [Western and Native American] cultural practices” in *American Indian Studies* (*Turn* 17). Krupat strongly believes that this kind of cross-cultural work that both border writers and “border intellectual[s]” (*Ethnocriticism* 124) are doing “contribute[s] to a breakdown of ‘hierarchical relationships’” and brings closer the “cosmopolitan vision,” which “stand[s] against age-old narrow sectarianisms and endless bloody battles between ‘us’ and ‘them’ not only in the academy but in the world” (*Turn* 25).⁷

Krupat's quotation above indicates once more that cross-cultural scholarship studies and calls attention to the dialogic and hybrid nature of contemporary Native American literature, and supports cross-cultural critical and methodological approaches, because both writers and scholars understand such practices not only as culturally but also as politically meaningful. The adoption of a cross-cultural method, the competent deployment of colonial/dominant and colonised/marginalised knowledges, the power to bridge understandings and the ability to unsettle boundaries between "sameness" and difference," "self" and "other" are features of American Indian writing (as well as scholarship and lived experience) that truly produce and "signify" the difference of American Indian writing in comparison with the "coloniser's" discourses and representations. Owens articulates this argument when he asserts that "ethnostalgia" – the imagining of "the Indian" as a static, pre-modern and one-dimensional figure of "otherness" – has been "most common to Euramerican treatment of Native American Indians" (*Other* 12). Contemporary American Indian writing, in contrast, exemplifies how Indians in real, historically grounded life "live within a frontier world of possibility and change" (*Mixedblood* 35). The frontier metaphor that Owens evokes here – "the zone of the trickster" (*Mixedblood* 26) as he also calls it – draws again on Pratt's notion of the "contact zone" and overall, on the postcolonial concepts of "hybridity" as the historical cross-cultural legacy of colonialism, which colonised peoples and writers have adopted and turned into a position of power and subversion. For Owens – as well as for Krupat and other scholars of postcoloniality and "the border," on whom Owens draws – the anticolonial power of Native American "hybridity" is comparativist and relational, that is, emerging in relation to – in contrast and opposition to – preceding colonising and racialising discourses. The latter, as

various studies have discussed, are typically founded on “fixed” and “terminal” categories of purity and on denial of miscegenation, asserting hierarchical and unbridgeable divisions between “self” and “other,” coloniser and colonised, civiliser and savage, master and slave.⁸ As one postcolonial critic puts it, the “fear of contamination” is “repeated in the writings of invaders and settlers” and constitutes one of the “key themes [which] inform [the] colonialist discourse” of dominance and submission (Madsen 7). And, of course, Frantz Fanon’s landmark studies of postcoloniality and identity have elucidated the issue by discussing how the fixed and unbridgeable dualities produced by the colonial discourse have sought to, and have successfully induced, psychological traumas and inferiority complexes in the minds of the colonised. (American Indian experience, particularly in the boarding schools, and some early American Indian writing illustrate such effects of psychological colonisation within the context of American Indian colonial experience.)

In contrast, contemporary American Indian writers, like postcolonial writers in general, unsettle the clear-cut and unbridgeable binaries between Euro-American and American Indian experiences and perspectives that typify the colonial discourse. The writers foreground the hybridity of their own experience and writing to assert that they, that American Indians in general, have lived through the undeniably cross-cultural conditions of colonisation and have appropriated those conditions to their own ends: to ensure and champion the continuance, transformation and socio-political power of American Indian cultures, peoples, narratives and perspectives. The boundary bridging and the unsettling of fixed categories of knowing and understanding, cultural belonging and identity, language and genre forms have become central to the writers’ strategies of resistance to and liberation from colonial

discourses. Both Krupat and Owens, as I pointed out earlier, recognise the capacity of American Indian writing to bridge Euro-American and American Indian discursive fields – particularly to engage the English linguistic and literary heritage in an act of counter-colonial, anti-imperial “translation” of “Indian” discourses – as the most conspicuous and politically-intense dialogic aspect of that writing.

A related facet of the counter-colonial deployment of hybridity in both American Indian writing and scholarship is the exploration of, what has come to be known in the field as, American Indian “mixedblood” identities and themes. Owens, notably, emphasises how the mixedblood and cross-cultural heritage of major American Indian writers, himself included, plays out in the cross-cultural themes and linguistic structures of the contemporary American Indian novel and, particularly, in the recurrent use of mixedblood protagonists. The latter, as Owens asserts throughout his analyses in *Other Destinies* – successfully negotiate a syncretic personal identity and reverse the favoured colonial imagining of the Indian as an unchanging and doomed figure, tragically (or sometimes romantically) split between assimilation and extinction. Mixedblood protagonists in contemporary American Indian literature – like Mourning Dove’s Cogewea, Silko’s Betonie in *Ceremony*, Vizenor’s and Erdrich’s various characters – as Owens concludes, “[invert] the tragic image of the halfbreed” and speak up for “hybridization and heterogeneity as sources of power and rich potential” (*Mixedblood* 35). (I should add parenthetically that such themes could be traced to Gloria Anzaldúa’s work *La Frontera/Borderlands*, which presents the embracing of the border and of the mestiza identity as the basis for transforming marginality to an advantageous position.⁹) Owens carries on his mixedblood discussion, in an occasionally self-absorbed manner, in *Mixedblood Messages* and in *I Hear the Train*, where he often

examines the empowerment, potential, challenges and responsibilities of his own position as a writer, intellectual and a person of a complex mixedblood heritage and “diasporic” identity (*I Hear* 208).¹⁰ As both Owens and Krupat have suggested, however, the use of hybridity and mixedblood discourse in American Indian writing and criticism may be most provocatively and most powerfully exemplified by Gerald Vizenor’s work.

Indeed – in publications such as *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives of Mixed Descent* (1981), *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (1994) and *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (1998), and in works of fiction like *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978), (republished as *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* in 1990), *Landfill Meditations: Stories Crossblood Stories* (1991) and *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) – Vizenor uses themes and metaphors of mixedblood identity to illustrate and explore, like Owens does, the hybrid and counter-colonial conditions of American Indian experience, identity and writing.¹¹ The figure of the trickster in Vizenor’s oeuvre often overlaps with that of the “crossblood” and similarly works to unsettle the fixed and static categories of colonial discourse. Like Owens and Krupat, Vizenor discusses the counter-colonial potential and the subversive power of American Indian literature and criticism, his own work included, in relation to prior colonising discourses. On numerous occasions Vizenor asserts – in a language often cited in Owens’s scholarship – that colonial imagination has “invented” the Indian as a figure of stasis, of “terminal creeds” and “manifest manners of domination.” The two phrases, reoccurring in Vizenor’s writing and re-focused in *Manifest Manners*, are Vizenor’s references to the colonial manifest myth and desire that Indians remain static figures of the past, and eventually vanish and terminate as a people. These terminal – fixed and deadly –

categories of “Indianness,” produced and persisting in the cultural imagination are still hurting the lives and interests of contemporary Indians, argues Vizenor. His work persistently returns to exposing the strategies and the lasting effects of the colonial discourse that “invents,” stultifies and “museumizes” the Indian.

The central purpose of Vizenor’s writing, and of American Indian writing in general, as Vizenor defines and carries it out in his work, is the deconstruction and dismantling of such damaging representations and discourses. This purpose is politically significant, argues Vizenor, because if American Indians internalise or fail to combat colonial representations of “Indianness” they will be committing a “cultural suicide” (*Bearheart* 100), accepting colonial control and containment upon their imagination, lives, possibilities and freedom. In Vizenor’s argument and language, if American Indians fail to combat “terminal creeds,” the latter may turn into “terminal diseases” (*Landfill Meditations* 113), and a few fictional characters of Vizenor’s – for instance, Belladonna in *Bearheart* – illustrate the enslaving and detrimental power of that possibility. As Vizenor re-asserts, the potential for liberation and decolonisation lies in the creative unsettling of the invented, fixed and clear-cut categories of “Indianness,” which are produced and perpetuated in the colonial imagination. One powerful strategy is the repossession and continuation of the practices of boundary crossing, articulated so well in tribal traditions and, especially, in the elusive, disruptive and regulating role of the trickster. Where the “terminal creeds” of colonial discourse have sought to reduce Native peoples and realities to “shadows of absence,” American Indian writers as – “mixedblood tricksters” – deploy their mixed heritages, experiences and knowledges to assert the vitality and dynamism of Native American actual existence and the continuing,

vigorous “presence” of “real” American Indians (these phrases and ideas come particularly strongly in *Fugitive Poses*).

The historical and current realities of American Indians, affirms Vizenor throughout his fictional and critical writing – like tribal trickster traditions – exemplify motion and capacities to laugh, heal, adapt and continue. The principles of, what Vizenor calls, “transmotion” and “survivance” permeate American Indian experience, traditions and now, contemporary American Indian writing. These principles, as Vizenor explains, signify American Indians’ capacity to preserve and evolve tribal traditions, identities and knowledges, and, all at once, to adapt and continue as peoples in the face of colonial policies that have sought to destroy them.¹² The linguistic and creative strategies that contemporary American Indian writers develop, that Vizenor himself vigorously pursues and exemplifies, restate and reconfigure these principles. The writing of contemporary American Indian writers and critics – maintains Vizenor in an argument paralleling Krupat’s and Owens’s postcolonial perspectives – has turned the “coercive [English] language of boarding language schools,” into a language of “liberation,” telling “some of the best stories of endurance” and of “tribal survivance” (“Ruins of Representation” 163). Vizenor’s own writing strategy is emphatically language-centred: focused on challenging and breaking down the rules of the English language, literary conventions and established discourses. Thus Owens and Kimberley Blaeser – two top scholars of Vizenor’s work – suggest, for example, that Vizenor’s neologisms and genre mixings are strategies that deconstruct and challenge linguistic and literary colonisation. In the process, Vizenor urges readers, “in trickster fashion,” as Owens puts it, to re-think clichés, labels and stale definitions that characterise Euro-American discourse and representations of Indianness (*Mixedblood* 69). Vizenor’s

writing, adds Blaeser, can be read as a “political act” because it seeks to liberate and heal American Indian representations from colonial “inventions,” and to unsettle and “Indianize” the English language, literary traditions and colonial discourses (*Gerald Vizenor* 195).

Because Vizenor is so intensely concerned with colonial discourses of the Indian as “inventions” and Baudrillardian “simulacra” (see *Manifest Manners*, in particular); because his work draws extensively on poststructuralist and postmodernist theorists and theories; because his characters, critical writing and theories relish in ambiguity, in the unsettling of certainties and fixed categories; because his writing has an intense linguistic focus, celebrating language heterogeneity and fluidity as sources of empowerment and liberation, Vizenor is regarded as the chief proponent of postmodernism in American Indian literary studies. Vizenor himself asserts the validity of this correlation. His work and his introduction as the editor for the critical collection *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (1989) is one of the earliest and sustained scholarly efforts to explore connections between postmodernism and American Indian literature and scholarship. Regardless of these features of his oeuvre, Vizenor emphasises that his postmodernist perspectives as a critic and writer derive from a tribal basis and represent a reclaiming of postmodernism for American Indian literary studies (rather than the other way around). Postmodernism, in Vizenor’s perspective, expresses the diversity and non-conformity of tribal/American Indian literary forms and structures, whereby postcolonial theory has been “invented” by tribal people and represents a tribal phenomenon. Vizenor’s point is that he is appropriating postmodern discourse to continue an essentially tribal trickster tradition.

Owens confirms this argument (*Other* 226-54, *Mixedblood* 55, 81). He points out that trickster tradition is based on boundary-crossing, disruption of language, consciousness, and order – features that are characteristic of postmodern discourse – but the former, in contrast to the latter, is also aiming to heal through laughter and to re-establishing equilibrium and order for the benefit of the people (tribal communities). Vizenor appropriates postmodern discourse for similar “tricksterly” purposes: not to celebrate chaos, to succumb to cynicism and/or to transcend reality, but to face reality in a responsible, affirming, politically-motivated manner, by showing the necessity to re-order the world (as well as discourses, perceptions, possibilities) and to expose, heal and transform damages inflicted by colonialism. This is a distinction that Owens elucidates particularly well in his discussion of Vizenor’s creative writing (see *Other* 20, 235-36, *Mixedblood* 81, 94-95).¹³ In Owens’s judgement, Vizenor’s “postmodern” strategies work to dismantle the colonial “invention” of the Indian, to revitalise tribal traditions (through the trickster narratives), to “hybridise,” appropriate, and subvert both Western literary authority and colonial discourses of dominance.

Owens, therefore, readily suggests that Vizenor’s critical perspectives – with their postmodern slant – and his own critical agenda – characterised by a postcolonial orientation – accord well with each other. (Vizenor himself, as far as I am aware, does not align himself explicitly with postcolonial theories and/or terminology. First and foremost, his language and theoretical sources remain decidedly within postmodern theory.) Krupat, on the other side, is more hesitant to suggest that his and Vizenor’s critical positions have a common ground. Above all, Krupat is concerned that the political intent of Vizenor’s postmodern method is always bound to be ambivalent and relativist, so that the reader/critic can never be

sure what political allegiances Vizenor supports or may want to repair (*Turn* 61-65). (Krupat, unfortunately, does not elaborate on his critique. As I shall discuss in my next chapter, tribal-centred scholars have similar complaints about postmodern perspectives in American Indian studies.) Nevertheless, Krupat also acknowledges – specifically in his discussion of *The Heirs of Columbus* – that Vizenor’s imaginative work ultimately aims to create a healing and a stable vision of the world, which puts Vizenor at odds with the ambivalent and relativist postmodern model (*Turn* 65-68). Hence Krupat concludes tentatively, in an argument evoking Owens’s, how “it may be that Vizenor’s postmodernism can serve as an antagonist to Western postmodernism rather than an ally” (*Turn* 68).

To tease out further nuances in Owens’s and Krupat’s critical position, however, I want to underline that Krupat, unlike Owens, does not necessarily see Vizenor’s ideological distancing from postmodernism, and his ultimate concern with healing, as an affirmation of tribal (trickster) knowledge. (Krupat even suggests that Owens’s discussion to this effect may be strained.) In Krupat’s interpretation, Vizenor is rather expressing “a ‘humanist’ recourse to an ‘ethical universal’” in a manner evoking Sartre and Appiah (*Turn* 67). The critical difference that I see is that Owens always seeks to foreground the surfacing and re-creation of tribal thought and traditions in American Indian writing and criticism, within the overarching cross-cultural and postcolonial position he adopts. Krupat, in contrast, is more interested in emphasising “ethnocritical,” “transnational,” or “cosmopolitan” perspectives in American Indian literature and scholarship, while his overarching theoretical method is also postcolonial. In *The Turn to the Native*, particularly, Krupat seems most interested in arguing that American Indian writers adopt cosmopolitan/ethnocritical postcolonial perspectives, in that they combat

colonialism (and capitalism) but at the same time they also reject narrow and limiting adherences to “the nation,” in affirmation of transnational, global allegiances. This argument comes across very clearly in Krupat’s discussion (in *Turn*) of Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* and of Vizenor’s *Heirs of Columbus*. Krupat’s conceptualisation of “the nation” as a dangerous concept within the cross-cultural, postcolonial agenda for American Indian studies makes him, I think, “a number one” target of criticism from tribal-centred perspectives. I shall return to this discussion in the chapter that follows.

While I am aware of differences in the specific theoretical agendas adopted by Krupat, Owens and Vizenor, my discussion has suggested that there are characteristic and significant overlaps that bring those agendas together. Owens conveniently affirms such overlaps, unequivocally connecting his critical project to that of Krupat’s and Vizenor’s: “If the heteroglossia that is the discursive home of the mixedblood writer [Owens identifies himself as such a writer] is to be engaged in any significant way in [Native American writing and criticism], it will be due to the work of critics such as Krupat within the metropolitan center and Vizenor from the frontier zone of the Native trickster” (*Mixedblood* 38). Owens recurrently refers to Vizenor’s and Krupat’s work to support and explain the cross-cultural – “heteroglossic” and “mixedblood,” in his idiom – perspectives he proposes for American Indian literature and scholarship (see *Other* 4-24, 228-40, *Mixedblood* 38-40, 49-55). Krupat, in turn, regards Owens and Vizenor as Native American writers and critics, who champion and exemplify the cross-cultural – “cosmopolitan” and “ethnocritical” – perspectives he considers most beneficial for American Indian literary studies (see *Turn* 63, 111, 124 and *Red Matters* 20-21). My argument has been that the critical agendas of the three critics are unified by their shared

commitment to conceptualising American Indian literature and scholarship as *cross-cultural* historical phenomena, intellectual practices and political acts. Central to the critics' project, as I have summarised, is the study of American Indian writing as a hybridised and dynamic process whereby the "master's language" of Euro-American literary, socio-cultural, critical and political discourses is appropriated and subverted to work as "anticolonial translation" and as repudiation of the "invented" Indian. This critical position bears close relation to postcolonial discursive modes and – particularly in Vizenor's work – to postmodern/poststructuralist theory. In a nutshell, the central argument that cross-cultural critics develop rests on the analysis of the interaction between colonial and counter-colonial discourses and practices: where colonial policies have sought to erase the existence and the voice of Native peoples and traditions, American Indian writing and scholarship attest to their continuance and authority; where the colonial discourse relies on essentialist and ahistorical categories of purity, on fixed paradigms of dominance and submission, American Indian writing and criticism foregrounds the dynamic and historically-grounded interaction between colonisers and colonised, as well as the power of the colonised to intervene in and subvert colonial discourses. Within the critical position represented by Krupat, Owens and Vizenor, the concepts of cross-culturality and hybridity are understood in intensely political terms: in relation and opposition to colonial experiences as well as to prior, and continuing, colonial practices and discourses. The central thrust in the critics' argument is the understanding that American Indian writers and critics unavoidably and necessarily situate themselves in conjunction to those discourses in order to intervene in them: to dismantle, oppose, reverse patterns of dominance, to outline different historical and cultural perspective perspectives, to allow for critical comparisons and to build cross-cultural

allegiances. It is in the context of – in comparison and contrast to – colonial discourses, and to larger national and international discourses, that the most significant socio-political power of American Indian literature and criticism rests.

I have a lot of respect for Krupat's, Owens's and Vizenor's contributions to American Indian scholarship. I share many of the theoretical and methodological standpoints they propose, and particularly, their conceptualisation of how the thematic and stylistic hybridity of contemporary American Indian writing works to subvert, destabilise and Indianise colonial discourses and cultural norms. The critics have played an important part in the development of strong historical and political perspectives in the study of American Indian literary production, placing the study of the literature in relationship with the continuing colonisation of American Indian peoples and its socio-political and cultural implications. Cross-cultural criticism has furthermore prompted a necessary and useful exploration of the parallels between American Indian historical experience and literary theory and of postcolonial experience and theoretical discourse. The interdisciplinary approaches that the critics have proposed have overall advanced the understanding of meaningful connections, similarities and differences between American Indian experiences and writing, other postcolonial, American and "border" experiences and issues. In addition, the scholars have emphasised specific ways through which unique American Indian/tribal epistemologies assert themselves in the linguistic, thematic and imaginative structures of American Indian writing and work to subvert and overlay Euro-American forms and discourses. In a theoretical and institutional environment that still foregoes specificities of American Indian epistemologies and colonial experience, this type of literary criticism has demanded that American Indian/tribal cultural practices and historical situations are taken into account and

studied seriously. Concurrently, the critics have correctly elucidated the versatile cross-cultural negotiations in contemporary American Indian writing and their potential to both illuminate and transcend the essentialist and destructive binaries of the colonial discourse, to build cross-cultural understandings, as well as emotional and political allegiances.

This critical position, however, is not free of problems and weaknesses. Both Krupat and Owens express awareness of complexities and ambivalences inherent in the cross-cultural/postcolonial practices of mimicry, border crossing and subversion that they discuss and support. Those practices, the two critics acknowledge, might indicate a compliance with the coercing and normative cultural practices of the dominant society. (Vizenor, on the other side, rarely engages in direct discussions about the state and methodologies of American Indian literary studies. This is why I do not refer to his work here.) Owens's *Mixedblood Messages* and *I Hear the Train* (especially the chapter "As If an Indian Were Really an Indian") communicate the apprehension that contemporary American Indian literature and scholarship may easily be subsumed by the agendas, values, and expectations of dominant academic and theoretical discourses and institutions. Referencing critics like Brennan and Spivak within postcolonial studies, Owens shares their concern that the processes of "giving voice to the silent" – and the cross-cultural appropriations, subversions and negotiations that those processes necessitate – "are never simple or free of cost" and "unavoidably give voice to the forces that conspire to effect that silence" (*I Hear* 226). For instance, the much-celebrated "hybridity" of American Indian writing may indicate that only American Indian writers and critics who learn "to write like the colonial center" receive recognition, while the most radical, "different" and politically-meaningful American Indian "voices" remain suppressed and

marginalised even further (*I Hear* 222-26). Owens regards Momaday's recognition by the Pulitzer jury in 1969 as an illustration of this duplicitous situation: if Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* did not demonstrate an accomplished use of modernist techniques – “these signposts of privileged discourse” (*Mixedblood* 60) – the novel certainly would not have received such a high recognition by the Euro-American literary establishment. Owens's point is that as American Indian writers satisfy the expectations to imitate and model Euro-American standards of excellence – even when they successfully subvert those standards – the writers unavoidably work to “reinforce the values of the dominant culture” (*Mixedblood* 61). The pertinent concern is that a different kind of American Indian writing, one that “adheres more closely and narrowly to Native American storytelling traditions” (and to American Indian socio-political agendas, I would add) is unlikely to receive wide recognition or to be successfully published (*Mixedblood* 65). Thus, driven by the desire and often by institutional, professional and financial pressures to be published, American Indian writers may choose to not write challenging and too radical American Indian texts: that is, texts that go beyond a “hybridity” that is recognizable and “nonthreatening to the white readership” (76). In such situations, the “Indian-ness” and the “hybridity” of American Indian writing and of American institutional politics erode the cultural-political interests of American Indian peoples and represent instead instances of Indian “exoticism,” “literary tourism,” “ethnostalgia,” and/or institutional “tokenism” (*Mixedblood* 69-82, 159, *I Hear* 213, 225). Krupat similarly agrees that cross-cultural practices and perspectives have the potential “to appropriate, absorb, and nullify” socio-cultural and political issues pertinent to American Indian peoples (“Scholarship” 97, *Turn* 27). He also points out how the deployment of hybridity and of culturally different expressive strategies

in American Indian writing does not necessarily make every Native text anticolonial. “The very fact of difference,” he advises, “whether in form or in content need not always and automatically work in the interest of resistance” (*Turn* 38, N 11). Such concerns, as both Owens and Krupat indicate, are not unique to American Indian literary studies but have been expressed within postcolonial theory (particularly in Spivak’s work) and within studies of multiculturalism (for instance, in David Palumbo-Liu’s introduction to *The Ethnic Canon* in 1995 and “Black” feminist critiques by Hazel Carby and bell hooks).

In summary, Owens’s and Krupat’s judicious observations affirm that new American Indian texts, championed as a different, hybrid and “resistance” type of literature may simply support the status quo: pandering to the socio-political agendas of Western audiences, critical modes and representations of the Indian; working to reinforce old stereotypes and perceptions of the Indian; and, most importantly, covering up, displacing or depoliticising salient Indian issues. Rather than a “subversion” of the colonial discourse, the apparent “mimicry” and “hybridity” of the texts may represent – consciously or unconsciously – its re-assertion. (Such example for Owens is the later work of Sherman Alexie and, to a lesser degree, of Louise Erdrich, the two most commercially successful American Indian writers (*Mixedblood* 71-81, 86, 93-94).) As I shall point out in the next chapter, tribal-centred scholars identify very similar problems within contemporary American Indian literature, but the proposed solutions within the two critical camps are quite different.

While Owens and Krupat readily acknowledge potential problems within the critical perspective and methodology they champion, they also stress that such problems are not indicative of fundamental and unavoidable flaws in the cross-

cultural method. The predicaments and complexities rather indicate directions in which the cross-cultural and postcolonial perspectives in the field of American Indian studies needs to evolve and strengthen. First of all, Krupat and Owens assert the necessity for American Indian scholars to exercise a more rigorous criticism and integrity in their work. The use of comparative methodologies and theories and the study of American Indian texts as cross-cultural products should be put to the task of analysing the new power configurations that celebrated and newly “canonised” American Indian texts have brought to the American (and international) cultural-political scene. Particularly, scholars and teachers of American Indian literature should deconstruct and resist the tendency to readily celebrate the hybridity of American Indian texts and to uncritically assume that those texts are bound to express progressive politics just by virtue of the different socio-cultural and political identity they claim. The discussion of the hybrid and cross-cultural locations and features of American Indian literary creation should evolve to include the consideration and critique of literary (and socio-political) “elitism” and privilege in contemporary American Indian writing, as well as possible practices of exploitation and commercialisation of American Indian themes in American Indian writing. Instead of constructing and perpetuating generic models and expectations about American Indian writing, the task of cross-cultural American Indian scholarship is to put more energy into a rigorous critique of the multifaceted cultural-political work that American Indian writing is doing. Scholars should also be prepared to uncover and comment on potential reactionary aspects in the politics of American Indian writing (as well as in any other American, “ethnic,” “minority” or postcolonial writing). These ideas come across strongly in Owens’s discussions in *Mixedblood*

Messages and in Krupat's in *Voice in the Margin* (92-131) and in *Red Matters* (especially the analysis of Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*, 98-121).

Owens and Krupat, furthermore, assert the need for the field of American Indian studies to situate itself more accurately and distinctively in relation to current postcolonial, multicultural, "border" and American studies discourses. It may be the case – as both Owens and Krupat posit – that postcolonial discourse, as well as American studies scholarship, are universalising or still marginalising American Indian studies and the situation of American Indian peoples in the US. Owens, particularly, is disturbed by the fact that specific American Indian standpoints and "voices" are routinely ignored and erased in current postcolonial discourse and in serious academic studies, despite the intense developments in American Indian literature and scholarship. Thus the fields of postcolonial theory and of American studies maintain unequal power structures in their relations to American Indian studies: while Native American scholars are expected to be cognisant of postcolonial and Americanist critical discourses and to apply those in their specific enquires about American Indian writing and cultural-political situation, there are little expectations or evidence that Americanist and postcolonial scholarship know about and engage with American Indian matters (see Owens in *I Hear* 209-212, *Mixedblood* 36-38 and Krupat in *Red Matters* vii-ix). American Indian studies therefore, needs to develop even more rigorously as an inter-disciplinary field and to claim both its place and its distinctiveness within postcolonial and American studies.

I think that Krupat and Owens foreground an important suggestion in this direction when they propose that critics need to distinguish the (cross-cultural, "hybrid," postcolonial) situation of American Indian peoples as different from that of peoples in postcolonial societies (in India and Africa, for instance) as well as from

that of other marginalised (“ethnic” and “multicultural”) communities in the US (African Americans or Asian Americans, for instance). This argument builds on the work of other scholars, not necessarily connected to the cross-cultural school in American Indian studies, who have also called attention to the specific colonial situation of American Indians in the US and have differentiated that situation from other forms of oppression or marginalisation of “ethnic” groups in the US. For instance, Cherokee anthropologist Robert Thomas (1966), Robert Blauner (1972), Marrio Barrera (1979), Ronald Takaki (1979), Karen Piper (1999, 16-20) and Jace Weaver (in *Other Words* in 2001 and *That the People Might Live* in 1997) all suggest that the term “internal colonialism” – vis-à-vis terms such as “multiculturalism” and “postcolonialism” – describes most accurately the situation of American Indian peoples under continuing settler-state colonialism.¹⁴ The implication of such observations for Native American scholars is that they should not let the concepts of “multiculturalism,” “cross-culturality” and/or “postcolonialism” turn into universalising, homogenising and depoliticising categories within American Indian studies.

Owens and Krupat develop this argument in relation specifically to postcolonial discourse. Colonisers in the form of the US government, Owens points out, still control “the land and the lives of the indigenous inhabitants” and, in this sense, “America [has] never [become] postcolonial” (*I Hear* 214). Krupat makes the same distinction, noting how “there is not yet a ‘post-’ in the colonial status of Native Americans” as they live in conditions of ongoing “domestic imperialism or internal colonialism” (*Turn* 30). American Indian peoples, in other words, live in a situation of continuing colonisation and this fact gives them a specific status within postcolonial discourse. Krupat, consequently, suggests that American Indian

situation and literature should be regarded as a “modality” of postcolonial conditions and literatures (*Turn 32, Red Matters 20*).¹⁵ In summary, Krupat and Owens argue that the foregrounding of the specific geopolitical situation of American Indian peoples in the US – in comparison and contrast with other colonial and postcolonial peoples and countries, as well as with ethnic communities within the US – is one of the most important strategies that contemporary American Indian scholarship could adopt (Krupat, *Red Matters 19*). The value of such an approach, as I understand the critics to assert, is that it puts American Indian peoples and literatures in comparative relations to, in dialogues with and in an international solidarity with other “subaltern” peoples and literatures across the globe, without absorbing or nullifying the specificities and implications of American Indian geopolitical situation and cultural-political goals. I regard these as thoughtful and useful auto-critiques of the cross-cultural position in American Indian studies and of the concept of “hybridity” in the larger postcolonial and multicultural discourses, too.

I think, nonetheless, that there remains one salient gap in the cross-cultural discourse, which Krupat’s, Owens’s and Vizenor’s scholarship fails to address adequately. While the scholars repeatedly acknowledge the unique geopolitical situation of American Indian peoples as both indigenous and still colonised – as peoples who, in Krupat statement, are still importantly and necessarily engaged in struggles for national sovereignty (*Red Matters 22*) – the analytical categories that the scholars propose fall short of conceptualising the implications of this situation in thoroughgoing *political* terms. The grounds of Krupat’s, Owens’s and Vizenor’s argument about the counter-colonial power of American Indian literary and critical discourse rest primarily on *cultural* categories of analysis and are heavily dependent upon conventional postcolonial models (some of them with postmodern

inclinations), which tend to either ignore the political category of “nationalism” or to regard it as a dangerous concept, both theoretically and politically. From the perspectives of the cross-cultural interpretative criticism I have presented in this chapter, the first and foremost feature that distinguishes the “specifics” of American Indian situation and writing is the specific tribal knowledges, values, principles and cultural forms as these overlay and challenge colonial ones. That overlay or challenge is understood in relation to issues of Indian representations, identity reconstruction, tradition transformation and continuance, genre forms, imaginative structures, writer-reader relationships, and so on. I recognise that all these issues are pertinent to the American Indian historical experience and also have a strong political valence, as I have discussed earlier. My objection, however, is that the issue of American Indian national sovereignty – an issue that remains most pertinent and politically significant with regards to the American Indian colonial experience and to American Indian counter-colonial struggles – is conspicuously lacking from cross-cultural critiques.

While Krupat and Owens do make some references to American Indian sovereignty, I find those references vague, unsubstantial and contradictory. Krupat, for instance, in his latest discussion of the current state of American Indian literary scholarship and critical positions, asserts how “anticolonial cosmopolitans [...] fully acknowledge the importance of the issue of sovereignty” and “will wholeheartedly support nationalitarian nationalists” (*Red Matters* 22). On some rare occasions Owens also acknowledges the significance of tribal sovereignty in American Indian anticolonial struggles: for example, when he praises Vizenor for demonstrating “the ability of the tribal voice and tribal sovereignty to resist, outlast and overturn all colonial burdens” (*Mixedblood* 156). The problem I have with such assertions is that

they say very little about how, indeed, cross-cultural criticism engages with and supports, or intends to engage with and support, the issue of nationalism in American Indian critical discourse. Above all, these assertions strike me as illogical and/or barren in the light of the critics' unequivocal assessment of the nationalist positions of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Craig Womack as limiting, essentialist and retrograde. Both Krupat (in *The Turn to the Native and Red Matters*) and Owens (in *Mixedblood Messages*) associate the nationalist standpoint – incorrectly, as I shall argue in the next chapter – with a naïve search for “pre-contact” tribal purity and/or a dangerous reversal of the colonial dichotomies between “us” and “them.” Krupat, in particular, approves of the fact that, according to him, many contemporary American Indian writers reject the category of tribal “nationhood” in favour of “transnational” categories and allegiances (*Turn* 39-69). Owens, in a response to Cook-Lynn's tribal-centred criticism, similarly approves of the fact that “hybrid” writers refuse to participate in nationalist discourses, because these do not pertain to the writers' experience and to the material realities of colonialism (*Mixedblood* 151).

The failure to convincingly engage with the concepts of nationalism and sovereignty, and to define their place within cross-cultural American Indian criticism constitutes, in my view, the major weakness in the critical position represented and developed by Krupat, Owens and Vizenor. In addition, the critics' response to tribal-centred critical perspectives in American Indian studies has been incomplete and often flawed. My discussion of tribal-centred criticism in the chapter that follows offers a further critique of the cross-cultural position in American Indian studies, while analysing strengths and weaknesses of tribal-centred criticism as well. My discussion ultimately seeks to illuminate major controversies between the two positions and to consider whether and how those controversies could be resolved.

NOTES

¹As Krupat notes, the publication year, 1981, of that “special issue” highlights the fact that American canon-reformation issues agitated the academic and critical circles in the early 1980s and stirred general public concerns over cultural diversity and American national identity and over the integrity of American national literature (*Voice* 233).

²Krupat explains that his sense and terminology of “anti-imperial translation” are influenced by Tahal Asad, who in turn is influenced by Walter Benjamin’s and Rudolph Pannwitz’s ideas in Benjamin’s essay “The Task of the Translator” (*Turn* 35). In general, Krupat’s scholarship and language draw heavily on prior texts and theoretical discourses, occasionally to an extent that, in my opinion, muddies the clarity of his specific argument.

³My discussion focuses on Louis Owens’s output as a critic. Since he is also a novelist, it might be interesting to consider how his ideas are reflected in his own creative writing. This is an inquiry that I do not undertake here.

⁴Krupat has focused on Vizenor’s work (two chapter discussions in *The Turn to the Native*) and has also dedicated individual chapters to discussions of Mourning Dove’s *Cogewea* and Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer* (in *Red Matters*). In *The Turn to the Native* Krupat develops a short, synoptic discussion of a few contemporary novels, from Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* to Betty Louise Bell’s *Faces in the Moon* (40-50); the volume also develops a curt discussion of Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (51-55).

⁵Owens drops the issue of desacralisation too quickly, proposing that the risk seems “necessary” since many American Indian writers are obviously willingly to

assume it. I shall return to this issue in chapter three, when I discuss tribal-centred concerns regarding the ethics of research methodologies in American Indian studies.

⁶Owens's essay "As If an Indian Were Really an Indian: Native American Voices and Postcolonial Theory" was first published, under a slightly different title, in the *Paradoxa* journal in 2001. It was then reprinted, with minor changes, in *I Hear the Train*. In my research I refer to the essay in as it appears in that later published version.

⁷Paula Gunn Allen's position with respect to the cross-cultural criticism practiced and advocated by the scholars I have quoted here is ambivalent. In the *Sacred Hoop* she asserts that the concept of "the sacred hoop"—the binding together of narrative, person, community, and the whole earth – and the understanding of the universe as woman-centred ("gynocratic") distinguish American Indian/tribal thought, sensibilities and narrative traditions from Western (linear and mechanical, patriarchal and individualist) consciousness. Allen thus has more interest in asserting ways in which tribal and Western understandings and values differ (and are "unbridgeable"), rather than in discussing "cross-cultural" communications and overlaps in American Indian literature. Accordingly, Krupat has criticised her perspective as essentialist, stereotyping and dualistic/divisive (*Ethnocriticism* 42). I agree with Krupat here: Allen fails to ground her discussions and distinctions in specific historical and material conditions, and often sounds mystifying and ahistorical. (I disagree with Krupat, however, when he suggests that tribal-centred and nationalist scholars like Cook-Lynn and Womack are similarly misguided and essentialising. As I shall discuss in chapter three, the latter scholars have a very different agenda, which Krupat either overlooks or fails to engage with.) At the same

time, Allen's critical and creative writing and some of the critical approaches she adopts, demonstrate interest in and involvement with cross-cultural perspectives, the understanding of hybridity as a position of power and the exploration of mixedblood issues. The latter are aspects that align her position with cross-cultural criticism.

Allen, for example, upholds Vizenor's attack of "terminal creeds" and asserts that the primary "theme" in American Indian experience and writing "is not conflict and devastation but transformation and continuance" (*Sacred* 101); she also describes herself as a "tribal feminist" and as a border intellectual. It seems to me that Allen's position remains very ambivalent and undecided, as well as not very well grounded. (Her critical readings of *Ceremony*, as I shall discuss in chapter four, are another demonstration of her shifting and ambivalent position.) Given Allen's shifting positions, it is not surprising that both cross-cultural and tribal-centred critics (Cook-Lynn) have taken issues with her critical stance/s.

⁸Leslie Fiedler, in his seminal study *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) has identified the fear of miscegenation as a recurring and troubling motif in the writings of canonical white male American novelists.

⁹Owens claims, in a brief moment, a critical difference with Anzaldúa. In his view, Anzaldúa's description of the "boundary zone" as an "open wound" is tragic and victimising (*I Hear* 100). Despite this objection, my sense is that both Owens's and Anzaldúa's conceptualisations of the "borderland" stress its positive and resistance potential.

¹⁰Owens uses of the terms "diaspora" and "diasporic identity" in a manner evoking Stuart Hall (see *I Hear* 208, *Mixedblood* 15, 176).

¹¹I shall be providing an overall summary of Vizenor's ideas and terminology here, rather than an analysis of the numerous individual works in which his critical agenda evolves. I find it difficult, and perhaps unfair, to always relate Vizenor's ideas and characteristic language to specific ("fixed") texts. Vizenor's key ideas and terms evolve and re-occur constantly in his creative and critical writing and in his numerous interviews, so that their first or most "representative" occurrences are almost impossible to pin down. It seems to me that this feature of Vizenor's writing illustrates his interest in creating a Native American discourse and "representations" that emphasise movement and constant transformation – what Vizenor has called "transmotion" – rather than stasis and "representative-ness." In addition, as someone who is interested in "writing in the oral tradition," as Blaeser has put it, Vizenor seems to deliberately return to, re-emphasise, evolve and adapt the same central ideas, which is a method that, indeed, characterises the oral tradition. My overview of Vizenor's theoretical agenda has tried to convey that "transmotive" quality of his ideas.

¹²The concepts of "survivance" and "transmotion" have evolved in the course of Vizenor's diverse and abundant writing and interviews over many years. His *Manifest Manners* (1994) focuses on explaining and discussing those categories.

¹³I think that Vizenor's *creative* work justifies the argument that he is appropriating postmodernism to express trickster discourse. I am not convinced that Vizenor's *critical* writing, on the other side, can be related so securely to tribal traditions; Vizenor's critical language and ideas remain emphatically, and not necessarily subversively, embedded in postmodern theory.

¹⁴Jace Weaver points out that the Cherokee anthropologist Robert Thomas, writing in 1966-1967, was the first to use the term “internal colonialism” in relation to American Indians on the territory of the United States (*That the People* 10). Originally, as Weaver explains elsewhere, the term was a reference to “the subordination of the Scots and Welsh by the English” (*Other Words* 11).

¹⁵Still, Krupat’s discussions of contemporary American Indian novels in *The Turn to the Native* – the study where Krupat seeks to situate American Indian literature as a “modality” of postcolonial literature – rely heavily on Kwame Anthony Appiah’s account of the African postcolonial novel (see particularly 39-41). The study thus contributes little to supporting or illustrating Krupat’s suggestion that American Indian literature occupies, or should occupy, a specific place in relation to postcolonial literary theory. I shall highlight such gaps in cross-cultural criticism in a moment.

Chapter 3

Counter-Colonial Nationalism and Tribal Sovereignty: The Tribal-Centred Perspectives of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Craig Womack

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Craig Womack are among the leading critics in the tribal-centred critical camp, who have taken issues with established cross-cultural approaches in American Indian literature and scholarship. The critical work of these two tribal-centred scholars has become central, though not exclusive, to my understanding of tribal-centred perspectives in American Indian literary studies, and of their clashes and overlaps with cross-cultural perspectives in the field. At the core of Cook-Lynn's and Womack's critical work, as I have come to understand it, is the question of how American Indian studies may and should, contribute to the understanding and support of indigenous anticolonial nationalism and of continuing American Indian struggles for tribal sovereignty.

This question, reminds Cook-Lynn, has been conceptualised as central to American Indian Studies since the formation of the academic discipline in the late 1960s. Referring to the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars in 1970, Cook-Lynn highlights the fact that, in the vision and definition of that "milestone event" for the academic discipline, "the major thrust" of Native American Studies, including the fields of American Indian literature and scholarship, comes from the conception that "the defense of the land and indigenous rights" is the primary grounds for the defence and growth of American Indian cultures, languages and literatures ("Who Stole" 9). Cook-Lynn's point is that American Indian Studies – as Native American scholars have charted the directions for the academic discipline, starting

with that seminal convocation – should strive to pursue and establish a distinctive, tribal “nationalist” perspective in academia. Such perspective seeks to promote the understanding, discussion and support of “Native-nation status and independence” (14). The latter task is regarded as crucial to the discipline in the light of the fact that the struggle for recognition of tribal sovereign powers and for the protection of tribal lands and nationhood (or peoplehood) is at the core of US-American Indian past and present relations; that struggle remains central to American Indian life and concerns in conditions of ongoing US colonisation. The centrality of these issues, as I discussed earlier, is illustrated in the American Indian political activism of the 1960 and 1970s, which assisted, among other things, the development of American Indian writing and American Indian academic disciplines. Accordingly, Cook-Lynn and other scholars who support her position regard critical and methodological perspectives that pertain to issues of tribal sovereignty, lands, nationhood and peoplehood as the most appropriate, pertinent and beneficial perspectives for the academic discipline, whose primary reason for existence and development is to serve the interests of American Indian tribes – or “nations,” in Cook-Lynn’s emphasis – as its primary “beneficiaries” (“Who Stole” 10). This understanding of the underlying perspectives and goals of American Indian Studies is central to the critical position that I refer to as tribal-centred and study as represented in the critical work of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Craig Womack.

In the argument of Cook-Lynn, Womack and other tribal-centred scholars (most but not all of them Native), the sovereignty-driven goals and formative perspectives of American Indian Studies, in general, and of American Indian literature and literary scholarship, in particular, have been “stolen,” to borrow the title and rhetoric of Cook-Lynn’s seminal article “Who Stole Native American Studies?”

(1997). This metaphor of “theft” persists in current tribal-centred discussions: “Who Stole Indian Studies?” to give an example, is the title of the annual conference of the American Indian Studies Consortium in 2004 at Arizona State University. Tribal-centred scholars, in other words, feel that the developments of American Indian scholarship over the last few decades and the established perspectives in the field, have betrayed the initial tribal-centred and “nationalist” agendas for American Indian Studies. Consequently, tribal-centred scholarship, in which Cook-Lynn has a leading role, has increasingly sought to recover and strengthen those forgotten and betrayed agendas. In this sense, as I have previously suggested, tribal-centred criticism represents a relatively recent critical force in American Indian literary studies. My point is that, while tribal-centred perspectives are integral to the formative beginnings of the discipline in the 1960s and 1970s, it seems to me that the tribal-centred critical camp has picked up energy and visibility, and has become progressively active in its scholarly output since the early 1990s, in response and critique to established cross-cultural perspectives in the field that, in the view of tribal-centred scholars, have moved American Indian studies in the wrong direction.¹

One can trace the configuration and evolution of tribal-centred criticism in shorter publications by Cook-Lynn, such as “The Radical Consciousness in Native American Studies” (1991), “The American Indian Fiction Writer: ‘Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, the Third World, and First Nation Sovereignty’” (1993), “American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story” (1996), “Who Stole Native American Studies?” (1997), as well as in her book-length collections *Why I Can’t Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays: A Tribal Voice* (1996) and *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A Voice from Tatekeya’s Earth* (2001). Cook-Lynn has clearly had a formative significance to the development of tribal-centred scholarship not only

through her critical publications – which are one of the earliest in this direction – but also through her work as a founding editor (together with Beatrice Medicine, Roger Buffalohead and William Willard) for *Wicazo Sa Review: A Journal of Native American Studies*. Since its establishment in 1985, the journal has provided a major platform for expression and discussion of tribal-centred perspectives in American Indian Studies. Distinctive publications associated with the tribal-centred school of criticism – all published in *Wicazo Sa Review* – include articles like Jack Forbes’s “Colonialism and Native American Literature: Analysis” (1987) and “Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Implications for Native Studies and for Native Intellectuals” (1998), Winona Stevenson’s “‘Ethnic’ Assimilates ‘Indigenous’: A Study in Intellectual Neocolonialism” (1998) and Robert Allen Warrior’s “The Native American Scholar: Toward a New Intellectual Agenda” (1999). Book-length studies, such as Robert Allen Warrior’s *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1995) and Craig Womack’s *Red on Red: American Indian Literary Separatism* (1999) are further characteristic contributions to tribal-centred perspectives in American Indian literary studies. New and diverse essays and studies – both within and outside of the specific field of American Indian scholarship – by scholars like Arif Dirik (1996), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Sean Teuton (2001), Chadwick Allen (2002) and Maureen Konkle (2004) – indicate that American Indian tribal-centred criticism, and indigenist critical perspectives generally, are both gaining critical ground and are still taking shape.

Within this burgeoning scholarship I identify two major and interconnected directions of criticism. One major course of development in tribal-centred criticism engages with issues regarding writing, research and teaching methodologies within the field, and seeks to critique, denounce and radically transform exploitative,

unethical and/or “token” uses of American Indian topics and representations in contemporary academic and popular culture. Obviously, concerns and criticisms regarding appropriative, colonising and/or disrespectful uses of American Indian material do not constitute a new subject in American Indian experience and critical discourse. Such concerns and criticisms have previously and most conspicuously been directed towards popular culture and towards the study of American Indian cultures and experiences in anthropology and history. Now, as recent and wide-ranging publications and critical discussions indicate, literary and critical writing of established academic status has increasingly become a suspect of similar offences.²

I implied briefly before that cross-cultural critics are similarly concerned about, criticise and seek to guard against exploitative and/or politically stagnant tendencies in American Indian literary writing and scholarship. They acknowledge that some current writing and research practices in the academic literary establishment may be appropriative and primarily profit- and self-interest-driven: pursuing career and commercial self-advancement rather than seeking to benefit Native peoples, to impart perceptive knowledge of American Indian cultures and issues, and to work in the interest of cultural-political resistance.³ As I discussed in the previous chapter, Krupat’s and Owens’s latest critical writing acknowledges and advocates the need to distinguish between literary and critical methods in current Native American studies that function, as Krupat puts it, “in the interest of resistance” from those that work to “appropriate, absorb and nullify” (“Scholarship” 97). Krupat, Owens and other cross-cultural critics have advised awareness and rigorous critique of uses of “Indianness” in current American Indian literature and scholarship that may function to create a culture of American Indian “literary tourism” and tokenism, as well as to erode American Indian cultural-political interests. Cross-cultural scholarship agrees that

academia needs to do more to encourage and accommodate a wide-ranging and leading input in the field from Native people, so that Native people become, in Krupat's words, "the majority of those engaged in the criticism of Native American literature, history and culture" (*Turn* 9-10). As Krupat asserts, cross-cultural critics view such developments in the field as both "a political necessity" and "a historical inevitability" (*ibid*).

Tribal-centred critics, however, extend their criticism and demands for change in methodologies of the field even further. They call attention to the fact that established American Indian scholarship, in most cases, has been short of involvement with tribal communities, has made little effort to seek tribal advice on research and teaching methodologies that may be most appropriate for pan-Indian and/or specific tribal contexts and materials, and has, overall, made insufficient efforts to incorporate indigenous perspectives and values in the academic study of American Indian issues. Instead, the major purposes and methods of American Indian studies, as tribal-centred scholars criticise, have focused on educating (and often on entertaining and benefiting) non-Indian students of Indian cultures. In the light of such deficiencies, Native scholars advocate and work for a radical change in the established methodologies in the discipline. They seek, to evoke a recent idiom that re-occurs in tribal-centred scholarship, to "indigenize the academy" by advancing methodologies for study and research that reflect elders' knowledges, implement Indian teaching and learning styles, seek active involvement with tribal communities and their cultural-political needs and concerns, and develop greater sensitivity to and ability to meet the needs of Indian learners. Critical collections – like *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing About American Indians*, edited by Devon Mihesuah (1998), the recently-published *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming*

Scholarship and Empowering Communities (2004), edited by Devon Mihesuah and Angela Wilson, the study of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), and Mihesuah's latest scholarly publication to date, *So You Want to Write About American Indians?: A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars* (2005) – are key examples of this course of tribal-centred scholarship that seeks, above all, to analyse and transform research and teaching methodologies in the academic discipline. Devon Mihesuah has been a vital critical force in this area of tribal-centred scholarship not only through her critical writing but also through her work, since 1998, as an editor for the *American Indian Quarterly* (AIQ). The journal has been instrumental in initiating discussions on appropriate research and teaching methodologies in American Indian studies, as illustrated by topical special issues like “Writing about (Writing about) American Indians” in 1996 and “Cultural Property in American Indian Literatures” in 1997. Such publications have sought not merely to refine and “sharpen” existing methodological tools, but to re-define and radically transform research and teaching methodologies, so that they serve American Indian communities, learners and needs better. This aspect of tribal-centred criticism is important and related to my discussion but is not central to my examination of underlying differences between tribal-centred and cross-cultural literary and critical approaches.

My study of tribal-centred scholarship focuses more narrowly on tribal-centred critical approaches that respond specifically to cross-cultural, multicultural and cosmopolitan approaches within American Indian literary writing and scholarship, and argue for “nationalist” perspectives in the field. That is, my interest in this research is less on “indigenist” research methods and pedagogies in American Indian studies, and more on the subjects matter and analytical approaches in

American Indian literature and criticism. The latter area, in my view, is the area in which clashes between cross-cultural and tribal-centred perspectives in American Indian literary studies remain most intense and unresolved. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's and Craig Womack's critical work, in turn, is pertinent to both tribal-centred scholarship and to my analysis for several reasons. First and foremost, as I proposed previously, Cook-Lynn has had a formative significance and an ongoing influence in the development of tribal-centred "nationalist" perspectives in the field. Concurrently, her scholarship has perhaps been the most assertive and well-known representation of these perspectives in the academic establishment. In addition, Cook-Lynn's criticism takes issues directly with cross-cultural topics and critical approaches in American Indian literature and criticism. Her critical writing, as Krupat himself offers in *The Turn to the Native*, may well be "the strongest and best account of the 'nationalist,' 'nativist,' and 'anti-cosmopolitan' position" in American Indian scholarship (4). Cook-Lynn's critical input pairs particularly well with Craig Womack's. His study *Red on Red: American Indian Literary Separatism* (1999) together with his recent, insightful commentary on Cook-Lynn's *Anti-Indianism in Modern America* in the *American Indian Quarterly* (2004) represent a contemporary, detailed and focused development of the argument for tribal-centred and nationalist perspectives in American Indian literary scholarship, as well as a critique of cross-cultural approaches in American Indian literary studies from a nationalist perspective. Cook-Lynn's and Womack's ideas are, at the same time, among the most contentious and commonly misinterpreted ones in current academic discourse in the field. Recent discussions of critical models in American Indian literary criticism – for instance, Krupat's *Red Matters* (8-9), Owens's *Mixedblood Messages* (151-66) and Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003), to which I shall shortly return – narrowly and

mistakenly represent both Cook-Lynn's and Womack's arguments as instances of essentialist, retrograde and self-contradicting critical thinking. I consider such perceptions flawed and my analysis seeks to develop a more relevant and constructive understanding of the tribal-centred and nationalist argument. Finally, in her critiques Cook-Lynn functions predominantly as a socio-political and activist critic, and, consequently, her scholarship does not offer sufficiently detailed or diverse literary interpretations of American Indian texts. Womack, in contrast, studies a variety of American Indian texts and genres, and discusses specific strategies for their literary analysis from tribal-centred perspectives. Thus, his work as a literary critic develops an important illustration of tribal-centred literary interpretations and allows for comparisons with cross-cultural analytical models. I think, in short, that the joint study of Cook-Lynn's and Womack's critical views can contribute to a lucid and comprehensive understanding both of the tribal-centred position and of the nature of the split between tribal-centred and cross-cultural approaches.

Cook-Lynn and Womack take issues directly with established cross-cultural perspectives in American Indian literary scholarship, maintaining that their prevalence in the field harms American Indian anticolonial goals. In Cook-Lynn's opinion – as expressed in “Who Stole Native American Studies?” – the dominant current approach to American Indian writing is its study as “a way of subverting the Euro-American canon” (14). That approach has been “disastrous” for a discipline whose original and foremost intent has been the development of critical models that are “useful to living [Indian] people and existing communities” (14). In order to be useful to tribal communities, American Indian literature and scholarship need “to strive,” in Cook-Lynn's words, “for the formation of a Native American canon, not for the reform of the Western canon” (15). This seminal article unequivocally presents American

Indian literary studies in a state of split: in Cook-Lynn's presentation, the critical project that tribal-centred critics envision and advocate for the field is contrary to the (established) cross-cultural one. While cross-cultural criticism preoccupies itself with questions of "cultural contact [...], pluralism, diversity and immigration," as Cook-Lynn explains the critical discord, tribal-centred scholarship is interested in "indigenoussness and sovereignty" ("Who Stole" 25). The latter, in Cook-Lynn's view, circumvents the specific "colonial history [that is] at the core of Indian/White relations," the former seeks to reassert and re-examine that history ("Intellectualism" 124). In other important publications Cook-Lynn continues to characterise tribal-centred and cross-cultural critical positions in comparable antagonistic terms: her latest book of criticism, *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A Voice from Tatekeya's Earth* (2001), for instance, describes the current cross-cultural approaches in the field as "the unfortunate captives of western literary theory" (43) and once again emphasises the urgent political necessity for radically different, tribal-centred perspectives in American Indian literature and scholarship.

Craig Womack's study *Red on Red: American Indian Literary Separatism* (1999) communicates a very similar dissatisfaction with the current state of American Indian literary discourse and uses a similar "separatist" rhetoric to define the tribal-centred "response" to cross-cultural approaches. The language of separatism and divisiveness comes across emphatically in the subtitle of Womack's book, as well as in its introduction, when Womack maintains how "the primary purpose of [his] study is not argue for canonical inclusions or opening up Native literature to a broader audience" and how "the Native literary canon of the Americas" (6) and the "American canon" are "two separate canons" (7). The tendency in tribal-centred criticism to claim a separate status, as well as a somewhat antagonistic relationship to cross-

cultural scholarship – a tendency apparent in Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s rhetorical stance – may also be traced in another influential study in tribal-centred scholarship: in Robert Allen Warrior’s *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, where Warrior introduces and promotes the use of the term “intellectual sovereignty.”⁴

The separatist terminology and rhetorical approach that have entered the tribal-centred position have encouraged many critics to understand that position as grounded, first and foremost, in an argument for independent and “uncontaminated” “tribal” critical approaches and practices, as well as for “separate” and “independent” institutional and discursive locations of American Indian studies as a discipline. Accordingly, the tribal-centred argument has commonly been represented in the current scholarship as simply a “purist,” naïve and unhealthy argument against cross-cultural contact and interaction. I accept that the “separatist” and divisive rhetorical approach, which surfaces both in Cook-Lynn’s and in Womack’s writing, may allow for such narrow, dismissive and counterproductive interpretations: it may alienate scholars, as well as may obscure and dilute the premise of the critics’ otherwise well-grounded argument. Yet, if the academic discourse is to be meaningful and constructive, it should not only respond to weaknesses and limitations in tribal-centred perspectives, but should also make an effort to understand and highlight their strengths and contributions. Little has been done towards achieving the latter goal.

My assertion, in contrast to established perceptions of tribal-centred criticism, is that Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s contention, and the tribal-centred position in general, constitute a very important, timely and well-founded (though perhaps not always attentively expressed) contribution to the awareness of how and why cross-cultural approaches – particularly their exclusive authority and prevalence in the field

– harm tribal political interests, curb the understanding of tribal indigenosity and nationalism, and limit the capacity and purpose of Native literary-critical discourse to express and support American Indians counter-colonial struggles. The discussion below seeks to highlight and explain those contributions of Cook-Lynn's and Womack's critical work and to support my argument that the tribal-centred position is much more meaningful and valuable than currently acknowledged in the academic discourse.

Cook-Lynn's and Womack's central interest as critics, in my understanding, is not to deny, vilify or reverse the fact that American Indian writing and criticism are products of cross-cultural – tribal and Euro-American – influences, experiences, discourses and politics. My assertion here is in direct opposition to critical responses by Native Americanists like Krupat, Owens and Pulitano, who have discussed the critical discord in the field. In Krupat's understanding, as expressed in *The Turn to the Native* (1992) and in *Red Matters* (2002), Cook-Lynn's and Womack's position, and the tribal-centred ("nationalist") argument on the whole, conflates political sovereignty with cultural separatism: as tribal-centred critics assert American Indians' historical-political rights to independent and autonomous political status, maintains Krupat, they simultaneously and mistakenly envisage and argue for an independent and autonomous American Indian literature and American Indian canon (*Turn* 16-18, *Red Matters* 5). As Krupat correctly observes, the suggestion that American Indian literary and critical discourses may or should remain culturally pure and uncontaminated by the many diverse, cross-cultural influences that affect American Indian life, as well as American Indian literary and cultural production, is a naïve and an impossible one (*Turn* 18, *Red Matters* 7).⁵ Referring often to Krupat's work, Elvira Pulitano's recent study, *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003), offers a

very similar understanding and rebuttal of, in her terminology, the “nativist” and “tribalcentric” approach. In Pulitano’s reasoning, tribal-centred criticism (particularly Womack’s *Red on Red*, which is the focus of her discussion), is based on “failed logic, internal contradictions, and linguistic inconsistencies” because it “[overlooks] more than five hundred years of cultural contact and interaction” that affect “any form of Native discourse (including [Womack’s] own)” (61, see also 78-100). Owens’s discussion, in the chapter “Blood Trails” in *Mixedblood Messages*, represents Cook-Lynn’s position in almost identical terms: as an essentialist and inconsistent attempt to discredit mixedblood Indian experience and the reality of cross-cultural exchanges and political negotiations (153).

However, the problem with Krupat’s, Pulitano’s and Owens’s conclusion about the tribal-centred position is that the critics infer, both mistakenly and condescendingly, in my view, that the central and single assumption behind Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s argument is that American Indian literature and scholarship can truly serve American Indian political-cultural agenda only if they liberate and separate themselves from Western, colonising influences. While Cook-Lynn and Womack do deploy (and perhaps unfortunately so) a divisive and dualistic vocabulary, their primary purpose, in my contention, is not to suggest that American Indian literary, scholarly and political discourse could and should develop in some idyllic tribal, mono-cultural circumstances. Nor are the critics primarily and exclusively concerned with the “canonical” and institutional parameters and locations of American Indian literature and scholarship. Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s underlying argument instead is that there is a pressing political need for American Indian literature and scholarship to take in a new, different direction: one that creates space for the recognition and discussion of American Indian nationalism and

sovereignty and of their place in Indian counter-colonial struggles. The categories of nationalism and sovereignty that Cook-Lynn's and Womack's position deploy are not categories that deny the cross-cultural conditions and material histories of American Indian existence and political-cultural goals. Tribal-centred critics, in general, do not imagine and do not argue for the return of some pristine, pre-contact tribal paradigms and material-intellectual settings, as most counter-critiques have implied.⁶ On the contrary, as I shall discuss below, the force and the validity of the critics' demand for the recognition of Indian nationalism and sovereignty as vital categories within American Indian literary criticism are grounded in the recognition and assertion of the fact that American Indian current life, concerns and goals are products of adaptations and responses to cross-cultural conditions and politics created by colonisation.

When Cook-Lynn and Womack critique the established and primary interest in the functioning of American Indian literature as "subversion" of the "Euro-American canon," they do not necessarily seek to denounce the possibility, or the fact, that American Indian literature – as cross-cultural critics have theorised – is interacting with and is subverting dominating Euro-American cultural values and literary forms. Neither is the force of Cook-Lynn's and Womack's argument directed towards asserting that "the Native American canon" and the scholarship that accompanies it are, or should be, culturally pure, separate and/or independent from "the Euro-American" ones. Cook-Lynn, perhaps in an effort to compensate for her often dismissive and caustic tone, warns against such an interpretation of the tribal-centred position. She stresses how "no one should suggest that the urge toward nation-centred dialogue is a call for separatist identity and conflict and monopolisation of intellectual thought and scholarly inquiry" ("Literary and Political" 51, see also "Who Stole" 21). Womack similarly asserts that his tribal-centred approach in *Red on Red* is not one

that “preempts or cancels out all those [critical approaches] that came before it” (2). He further underscores how tribal-centred critics do not “[believe] in some kind of Edenic tribal society uninfluenced by the many worlds in which tribes coexist.” He adds vigorously: “Give us some credit: we are not that stupid” (Rev. of *Anti-Indianism* 138). At the core of Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s objection to cross-cultural scholarship, in my contention, is not the concern that the scholarship emphasises, studies and/or deploys cross-cultural influences and practices. Rather, the critics object to the fact that the major criteria for the significance and political viability of American Indian texts, which cross-cultural criticism uses, are based primarily on considerations of how powerfully or successfully those texts subvert and challenge Euro-American representations of Indians, as well as inform and reform Euro-American views and socio-cultural and political discourses on Indian matters. In cross-cultural discourse, as I interpret the critics’ objection, the significance of American Indian writing emerges chiefly in the context of its functioning within the Euro-American (colonising, dominant) culture, and in consideration of how well the writing deconstructs and unsettles colonial discourses. Such established approaches in the field may have been well intended, both politically and culturally, but, nonetheless, exemplify and promote a deeply seated Eurocentric bias in the understanding and study of American Indian matters: as Cook-Lynn puts it, such critical-literary approaches exemplify a “literary movement of disengagement” from tribal reservation communities and indigenous concerns (“Intellectualism” 130). I view this as a fair criticism because, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, inquiries about how American Indian writing mimics and deconstructs colonial representations and discourses have, indeed, occupied a very prominent place in

American Indian scholarship, as illustrated particularly clearly in Krupat's and Owens's postcolonial approach and in Vizenor's postmodern critical perspective.

In opposition to American Indian criticism that examines American Indian writing "through the lens of a colonialist aesthetic" (*Anti-Indianism* 43) – that is, criticism that remains preoccupied with the counter-discursive forms and policies that American Indian writing brings into play to unsettle and decentre Euro-American colonial discourses – Cook-Lynn argues for literary criticism that is "generated from the inside of tribal culture" ("Intellectualism" 129). Womack describes tribal-centred criticism in similar terms: as "literary criticism that [...] attempts to find Native literature's place *in Indian country* rather than Native literature's place in the canon" [my emphasis] (*Red on Red* 11). I think that it is premature and simplistic to read such quotations as calls for the separation and isolation of American Indian literature from other literatures, canons or theoretical discourses. In my understanding, Cook-Lynn and Womack "simply" suggest that American Indian literature and scholarship should "(re)turn" to (neglected and vital) local tribal spaces and concerns. The proposed critical approaches are tribal-centred in that they seek to engage political and socio-cultural issues that are pertinent, above all, to tribal reservation communities and reflect tribal perspectives on American Indian and counter-colonial political and cultural issues. Such issues today and ever since colonisation, as Cook-Lynn and Womack stress throughout their critical work, centre on Native people's struggles for sovereign rights, for understanding and acknowledgement of Indian nations' political status and rights as legally defined political entities, for defence and reclaiming of tribal land resources, and for strengthening of tribal languages and cultural-religious principles.

To engage with the above issues – a particularly important and unique task that the tribal-centred literary scholar seeks to undertake and encourage – means to study whether and how American Indian writing may or may not engage tribal *and* colonial discourses of indigenusness and nationalism. Such a study, as I understand Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s conceptualisation, involves two major, interconnected strands. One is the understanding and deployment of (colonial) US-Indian treaty discourse in the literature’s interpretation. In Cook-Lynn’s words, scholars should seek to examine American Indian writing “through the lens of the specific language of the specific treaty or accord or national history” (*Anti-Indianism* 43).⁷ Womack further explains that tribal-centred scholarship is interested in examining the “the narration of treaty-protected lands” and “the importance of federal Indian policy in both the production and evaluation” of American Indian writing (*Rev. of Anti-Indianism* 133). Another major strand in tribal-centred interpretations involves the study and foregrounding of, as Cook-Lynn puts it, “the myths and metaphors of sovereign nationalism” that permeate tribal oral traditions and that may or may not inform contemporary American Indian writing (“American Indian Fiction” 30). I shall discuss the significance of these two interconnected aspects of tribal-centred criticism in a moment. Here I shall summarise that the argument behind Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s statements – an argument that runs and evolves throughout the critics’ entire oeuvre – is that scholars need to read American Indian writing by using interpretative perspectives that illuminate and evaluate how distinctly tribal and counter-colonial issues may have bearing on the writing, rather than through interpretative perspectives whose primary concern is to illuminate the cross-cultural borrowings that the writing employs and/or the artistic forms that it uses to deconstruct colonial discourses.

I must admit that the terminology and references that tribal-centred scholars – and particularly Cook-Lynn – use to construct that argument are not always immediately clear and/or sufficiently detailed. In one of the references I have used above, for instance, Cook-Lynn does not offer a detailed or consistent explanation of what she means by “colonialist aesthetic” and/or why the “language of the specific [treaties]” should be so central to tribal-centred nationalist approaches (*Anti-Indianism* 43). When, on another occasion, Cook-Lynn criticises the paramount application of Homi Bhabha’s (and postcolonial) notions of “hybridity” in the study of American Indian writing, her references are, in my view, similarly cursory and underdeveloped (“American Indian Fiction” 26-30). Cook-Lynn’s “response” to cross-cultural criticism, in general, tends to be dismissive and superficial, rather than thorough and methodical. It may be the case that Cook-Lynn’s primary purpose is to reach an (“internal”) audience of tribal-centred fellow critics, whose primary interest is in developing tribal-centred approaches, rather than in situating those approaches in relation to existing cross-cultural and postcolonial theories. (To say the least, many of Cook-Lynn’s articles are published in *Wicazo-Sa Review* and/or are based on presentations and speeches delivered at conferences with decidedly tribal-centred agendas.) Also, to the “uninitiated” reader it may seem that Cook-Lynn’s assertions are incomplete or vague because Cook-Lynn situates her argument in the context of her sound knowledge of US-Indian treaty discourse. Since many scholars do not share that knowledge, and since Cook-Lynn is not as direct and detailed as she could be, some scholars may find it difficult to fully comprehend and appreciate the logical – implicit, rather than explicit – connections that Cook-Lynn makes. A final factor that complicates the understanding of the tribal-centred argument is the fact that it continues to evolve and clarify (which is quite understandable, given its

unconventionality and novelty within academic discourse). This means that scholars seriously interested in Cook-Lynn's position need to be persistent and study her argument as it develops, grows and clarifies. Scholars also need to gain some knowledge in the discourse of the US-Indian treaties and Indian federal law, which tribal-centred critics so profoundly evoke, but which remains a vastly unknown and untaught subject. Once again, my intent is to clarify some of the ambiguities and misunderstandings of the tribal-centred position, as well as to establish a more meaningful "dialogue" between the tribal-centred and the cross-cultural position.

Instrumental to the tribal-centred approach that Cook-Lynn and Womack advocate – as communicated particularly strongly in publications such as Cook-Lynn's "The American Indian Fiction Writer: 'Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, the Third World, and First Nation Sovereignty'" (1993), "Literary and Political Questions of Transformation" (1995) and *Anti-Indianism in Modern America*, as well as in Womack's review of the latter book (2004) – is the understanding and deployment of the knowledge of federal Indian law, of the history and legal provisions of Indian treaties, of the illegitimate appropriation of tribal lands and resources by the US government and corporations, and of the continuing tribal struggles for defence of tribal lands, resources and sovereign rights. The tribal-centred suggestion that American Indian literature and the political-cultural work it is doing need to be (re)evaluated in the context of Indian federal law, US-Indian treaty discourse and the continuing colonial exploitation of tribal lands, discredits the currently prevalent understanding in academia that the tribal-centred position is based on isolationist, "purist," ahistorical or naïve criteria. On the contrary, the categories of critical engagement and exploration that Cook-Lynn, Womack and other tribal-centred scholars propose are deeply rooted in the history and knowledge of how US colonial

(and capitalist) developments and policies continue to affect American Indian peoples, lands, and politics. The tribal-centred position, in other words, is soundly grounded in distinctly “cross-cultural” material and historical realities: it relies on remembering, foregrounding and utilising the material and legal histories of US-tribal relations.

US-tribal treaty discourse and federal Indian law are of particular significance to the tribal-centred and nationalist critical perspective because they, as Chadwick Allen summarises, “continue to offer strong legal and moral bases from which indigenous minority peoples can argue for land and resources rights as well as articulate cultural and identity politics” (*Blood Narrative* 17). Indeed, I discussed in chapter one how treaty discourse – especially tribal rights to certain lands, to distinct political status and self-government – became the driving force behind American Indian activism in the 1960s and 1970s, contributed to the successful reversal of the US government’s termination policies of the 1950s, brought about some positive resolutions on tribal land issues, and reinforced the recognition of some (partial) sovereign rights for American Indian tribes. All major events in that momentous upsurge of contemporary American Indian political movement – the Alcatraz occupation (1969-1971), the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Twenty Points position paper (1972), the Wounded Knee Demonstration and the proclamation of the independent Oglala Nation (1973), the formation of the International Treaty Council (1974) and its appeal for justice before the United Nations in Geneva (1977) – evoked and deployed treaty discourse and tribal treaty rights as powerful political, legal and moral means for American Indians to oppose US colonisation, including opposition to federal and corporate appropriations of tribal lands and resources, and to unfair and authoritarian federal jurisdiction on American Indian reservations.

Perhaps the most important forms of American Indian anticolonial opposition that the knowledge and invocation of treaty discourse allow – as the Red Power movement has illustrated – are the assertion of indigenous sovereignty, the affirmation of tribal rights to Indian lands, resources and self-government, and the demands for a fair compensation for violated political and land agreements. In American Indian political and activist affairs, the use of treaty discourse has become an important strategy for affirming and recovering American Indian histories, political-cultural rights and aspirations, as well as for holding the US government responsible and accountable for its colonial policies against American Indian peoples. Cook-Lynn, Womack and tribal-centred scholarship, in general, draw on and seek to extend and re-validate this historical and activist legacy.⁸

There are good reasons why the US-Indian treaty discourse is such a powerful and meaningful political tool for American Indians and for tribal-centred scholars in their anticolonial struggles. First, the US-Indian treaties represent a well-documented expression of the legal and political relationships between the United States and American Indian tribes. Even though not all existing tribes signed treaties and/or agreements, the vast number of treaty documents and their overall comparable provisions make treaties a generalised record of the historical relationship between the US and the Indians. The officially recognised period of treaty making between different tribal nations and the United States extends between 1778 and 1871 (respectively, the year when the treaty with the Delaware tribe was signed and the year when Congress declared the end of the treaty making process). It is generally accepted today that, as a result of the treaty-making process, there exist about four hundred legally valid treaties that provide evidence of the historical relationships between the US and the tribes, and that still hold political, legal and/or moral

relevance in the present. In addition, as Vine Deloria points out in *Documents of American Indian Diplomacy* (1999), treaty-like official negotiations between the US government and Indian tribes continued until 1914, though the negotiated documents were called “agreements” and “conventions” instead of treaties (252-54). (To offer an example, Indian lands were set aside as tribal reservations through post-1871 agreements.) Deloria further suggests that various contemporary documents since the 1970s – involving Indian land disputes, land claims and water rights, and socio-cultural legal provisions – should be regarded as “modern equivalent[s] of treaty making” in that they involve legally binding negotiations between Indian tribes and US state and federal authorities (ibid, 181). The US-Indian treaty-like negotiations, in brief, form an extensive political-legal record. That record holds a strong political meaning for American Indian tribes because, most importantly, it testifies to the recognition and affirmation, by both American Indians and the US government, of American Indian peoples’ indigenous and sovereign (albeit “domestic”) status. This is a legacy of US histories and policies of settlement and colonisation that American Indian tribes, in general, and tribal-centred scholars, in particular, are particularly keen on highlighting and reclaiming.⁹

A general feature that characterises the contents of the many different treaties – especially in the first few decades of the treaty making process – is the recognition of American Indians as people who have title to the land and who agree to give some of that land to the United States, in the name of a peaceful co-existence on the continent and in exchange of specific, binding and permanent rights. This is an understanding and a process that the European settlers have established and that the newly formed US government adopts, too, recognising American Indians as people who have vested rights to the lands. In *American Indians, American Justice* (1983)

Vine Deloria and Clifford M. Lytle summarise this aspect of US-Indian relations. Following Felix Cohen's 1942 classic study, *Federal Book of Federal Indian Law*, Deloria and Lytle explain that, prior to the establishment of the United States, European settlers had accepted the notion that "the natives were the true owners of the land" (3). That understanding, formulated at the time by the Catholic theologian Francisco de Vitoria, meant that Spaniards and consequent colonists could not claim title to the land in the new world through discovery or conquest. Accordingly, as Deloria and Lytle sum up, settlers, "at least in North America," adopted the practice of treaty-making, recognising Indian ownership of the land and purchasing "Indian land and the rights to live in certain areas [...] at formal treaty sessions" (*American Indians* 3). As the United States formed, the US government continued, at least for a few decades, the established treaty-making presumptions and practices, recognising American Indian tribes as the "sovereigns" of the tribal lands upon which they lived.

There exists an important connection between such legal-political provisions in the (early) treaties and tribal oral traditions. The oral origin stories of the different Indian tribes unequivocally and recurrently chronicle the indigenous status of American Indian peoples and their sacred, unalienable connectedness to the land. The treaty discourse was and is still very important to American Indians because, among other provisions, it ratifies traditional tribal knowledges about American Indians' indigenous connections to the land as knowledges that are recognised, sanctioned and honoured not only by American Indians but also by non-Indians and the US government. A certain degree of ritualism and sacredness that characterises the process and language of treaty discourse may account for, or illustrate, connections between the ideas and provisions in the treaties and those in the sacred tribal oral traditions.¹⁰ In any case, the treaty process and discourse represent both a cross-

cultural, legal-political phenomenon and a re-affirmation of deeply held, traditional and sacred tribal beliefs about American Indian peoples' connectedness to their ancestral lands. This is one major reason why tribal-centred scholars, in Cook-Lynn's words, regard the "treaties" and "[the places], the myths, and metaphors of sovereign nationalism" as fundamental discursive categories in American Indian scholarship that seeks to situate itself in Indian country and to "[function] in the name of [American Indian] people" ("American Indian Fiction" 30). The fact that cross-cultural criticism has ignored – or even disallowed – such discursive categories is a major reason for tribal-centred disaffiliations (or "separatism") from cross-cultural approaches.

The US-Indian treaties, furthermore, acknowledge and secure the (partial, "measured," "domestic") sovereign status of American Indian nations. For that reason, as Chadwick Allen argues in "Postcolonial Theory and the Discourse of Treaties" (2000), indigenous peoples in the US (and in New Zealand that Allen also discusses) seek to "reinststate and reinvigorate [...] the original powers" of the colonial discourse of the treaties, and "to re-establish treaty documents as powerful and authoritative, and as biding on the contemporary settle-nation" (62). The initial treaty making between Indians and European settlers and consequently, the Indian-US government treaty process rest on the presumption that Indian tribes are sovereign nations, capable of entering into legal negotiations with another nation. The arguments and guarantees in the first US-Indian treaties and in the reservation system agreements after 1871– which appealed to both Indians and non-Indians alike – are that, in exchange for some of their lands and/or on the basis of reciprocal provisions, American Indians could continue their life and traditions unimpeded by intrusions and disruptions by non-Indians and/or the US government. In *American Indians, Time and*

the Law (1987) Charles Wilkinson traces provisions in various treaty documents to illustrates how “the idea that Indian treaties guaranteed a substantial separatism” between Indians, on one side, and US settlers and US government, on the other, “has been embodied in the case law from the beginning” (16). “Government negotiators,” points out Wilkinson, “waxed eloquent with promises of tribal homelands [...] where Indian societies would be ‘perpetuated’ and ‘preserved’ as nations” (16). Wilkinson indicates how even opponents to the treaty making process – like president Andrew Jackson in the 1830s – continue Indian-US legal discourse and agreements in a manner that acknowledges Indians’ sovereign rights to have, in president Jackson’s words, “governments of their own choice, subject to no other control from the United States than such as may be necessary to preserve peace on the frontier and between the several tribes” (17). In addition, Indian reservations and other agreements, which followed after the end the treaty-making process, have, time after time, contained a unique “promise of a measured separatism” (14) that has guaranteed – through trust relationships and mutual responsibilities – that tribes could “preserve substantially intact [...] tribal prerogatives” (18, see also 100-106).¹¹ Even though such prerogatives are “measured rather than absolute,” as they involve “supervision and support by the United States” (14), they evocatively define American Indian tribes as peoples of distinct political rights and status in the United States. Aspects of the treaty discourse that I have briefly charted here are also in agreement with traditional tribal understandings and practices, such as the perception of the individual tribes as a sovereign (self-governing) group of people, the acceptance of negotiations and changes to ensure the survival and continuance of “the people,” the reinforcement of peaceful relationships and of external tribal connections and alliances.¹²

In subsequent federal Indian laws, the understanding and provisions of measured, or domestic, American Indian sovereignty are developed most famously by Chief Justice John Marshall in the 1820s and by Felix Cohen in the 1940s. Importantly, those provisions underline that tribal sovereignty is “inherent,” not just granted and/or regulated by the US, in that Indian tribes traditionally and “originally” – prior to their relationships with the US – existed as sovereign powers. The fact that Indian tribes once began their relationships with the US as sovereign authorities remains deeply meaningful and legitimate in US-Indian political and legal relations.¹³ As circumstance changed and the governing, economic and military powers and needs of the US increased, the US government could, and have limited and violated tribal sovereign powers and rights that original treaty agreements guaranteed and promised to uphold perpetually.¹⁴ American Indian sovereign rights and status have, indeed, suffered numerous blows and infringements by the US government, most significantly during the times of the allotment and the termination policies. Nonetheless, tribal partial sovereign rights and status continue to hold a valid legal, political and emotional power, as demonstrated by past and current legal cases, by contemporary Indian activism, and modern tribal political developments.¹⁵ Using US-Indian treaty discourse and federal Indian law, American Indian tribes continue their struggles against US colonialism: struggles to reclaim or protect tribal lands and recourses, to secure political power, to build viable and self-sustaining tribal communities. This is why the remembering, reassertion and re-deployment of treaty discourse are of such great significance to contemporary American Indian politics and to American Indian peoples. (I use the word here to mean distinct political and socio-cultural entities, not individuals.)

Given the paramount importance of the concepts of indigenusness and sovereignty in the treaty-legal discourse between American Indian tribes and the US government and in tribal anticolonial struggles, many American Indians – certainly tribal-centred scholars and activists like Cook-Lynn and Womack – are apprehensive about the fact that there is little knowledge and understanding of those concepts and of the histories behind them; there is also a concern that tribal sovereign rights may be regarded as a thing of the past that has changed, or needs to change, with the change of circumstances. Most alarming for tribal-centred scholars is the established tendency in US culture – and in cross-cultural American Indian literary scholarship – to undermine, intentionally or unintentionally, the notions and understanding of tribal indigenous and sovereign status.

One of Cook-Lynn's and Womack's major objection to cross-cultural approaches in American Indian literary discourse expresses the concern that those approaches focus exclusively on cultural categories and discursive strategies that have to do with cross-cultural mimicry, hybridity and subversion (what Cook-Lynn calls, rather obscurely, "colonialist aesthetic"). The latter categories of analysis leave little room for, and/or have indicated little interest in recognising and engaging the unique and crucial American Indian historical experiences, political status and anticolonial interests that I have outlined above. An additional problem arises from the fact that the literary discourse applies the same theories of hybridity and subversion to the historical experiences and literary writing of various (formerly) minorised and suppressed "ethnic" communities in the US: the resulting generalised approach subsumes specificities of American Indian histories, experiences and current anticolonial goals. Womack summarises this problem ironically, suggesting that the study of literature has turned into "a little more than an English Department version of

the melting pot,” where we “teach an Amy Tan novel now and then, throw in a little Ralph Ellison, a native author once in a while, and string it all together with the same damn Bakhtin quotes we’ve heard a million times” (*Red on Red* 8). The tribal-centred argument, as I interpret it, is that the totalising use of “hybridity” theories in the study of US “multicultural” literatures dilutes and displaces Native people’s unique *political* experience, identity and goals in comparison with other “ethnic” communities in the United States. Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s point is that cross-cultural discourse in American studies – in its generalised use – commonly conflates cross-cultural borrowings and adaptations (which all diverse human communities experience) with political coherence, and also implies an endorsement for cultural *and* political inclusion in the United States. (Such understanding is also encouraged by the association and conflation of American Indians political activism with that of other ethnic and oppressed communities in the United States that, during and after the 1960s, have strived for cultural *and* political inclusion in the US.) Yet, as Cook-Lynn and Womack stress, American Indians do not conceive of themselves as just another “ethnic” and “cross-cultural” group of peoples. Neither do American Indians, as a political body of peoples, fight “simply” for civil rights and for cultural and political inclusion in the United States. American Indian peoples, unlike other ethnic groups, are interested in asserting their rights to sovereignty, on the basis of their unique indigenous, colonial and legal history. Evoking the treaty-discourse I sketched earlier, Cook-Lynn underlines how – regardless of the many cross-cultural experiences and adaptations in American Indian life – the political imperatives that American Indian peoples face in their relations with the United States are not those of “fitting” in. The imperatives, rather, have always been those of evoking, re-asserting and defending tribal (partial) sovereign rights (“Who Stole” 20, 25-27).¹⁶ Cross-cultural scholarship

obscures this very important fact, which remains at the heart of American Indian cross-cultural *political* experiences and struggles.¹⁷

A similar problem of generalising and nullifying American Indian histories and political struggles plagues the use of postcolonial theory in American Indian literary studies. As I proposed in the previous chapter, both Krupat (*Turn* 30-32) and Owens (*I Hear* 214) have recognised the established harmful tendency in postcolonial and/or hybridity theories to generalise diverse cross-cultural/postcolonial and anticolonial experiences, and to lose sight of the unique geopolitical situation and struggles of American Indian peoples. (To add up, such observations do not represent an isolated trend. Postcolonial critics like Leela Ganhdi (1998), for instance, have also recognised and criticised generalising tendencies in orthodox postcolonial methods). While Krupat's and Owens's are thoughtful observations, neither Krupat nor Owens resolves the problem effectively. The critics' acknowledgement that American Indian peoples are not yet postcolonial and that their struggles differ from those of other colonised people does not in itself indicate how postcolonial methods could or should be transformed to allow for the analysis of specificities of American Indian colonial history and current anticolonial tenets. In my contention, such gaps in cross-cultural approaches – rather than a search for “uncontaminated” and “independent” Native perspectives – account for and justify tribal-centred critics' disagreement with the use of postcolonial theory in American Indian literary discourse. Particularly indicative in this respect are Cook-Lynn's remarks in “Who Stole Native American Studies?” and “American Indian Fiction Writers: ‘Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, the Third World, and First Nation Sovereignty.’” Cook-Lynn agrees that there exist shared themes in American Indian and postcolonial experiences and writing – “such as oppression, diaspora and displacement, colonisation, racism, cultural conflict, existence, [and]

resistance” – which cross-cultural/postcolonial scholarship has (justifiably) explored (“American Indian Fiction” 28). Yet, cross-cultural/postcolonial methods fail American Indian decolonising effort in that they fail to project “a modern tribal nationalistic perspective” and thus overlook and discount “not only [...] the historical reality of Indian nations in America, but, also, [...] the contemporary work being done by tribal governmental officials and activists, politicians and grass-root intellectuals seeking sovereign definitions in the new word” (ibid). Hence, with regards to the American Indian situation, postcolonial theory has little to do “with the actual deconstruction of oppressive colonial systems” (“Who Stole” 14).

It should be clear by now that one of tribal-centred critics’ major disagreements with cross-cultural and postcolonial criticism surfaces as two recurrent questions that run through Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s entire scholarship: What could cross-cultural criticism and postcolonial theories of hybridity and subversion say about Indian treaties and about Indian nationhood and sovereignty? Why are the latter categories of analysis persistently neglected in current scholarship? Cherokee critic Sean Teuton has recently re-stated and re-focused these questions in his discussion of tensions between cross-cultural, postcolonial and postmodern categories of hybridity and subversion, on one side, and discourses that seek to re-build and re-claim sources of “tribal-centred” political identity, on the other. Teuton suggests that “acts of subversion” could be both liberating and defeating (632). One of “the debilitating effects” of the politics and theories of subversion on “anticolonial criticism,” as Teuton infers, is that such politics and theories do not seem to distinguish between discourses that may be empowering to deconstruct and undermine, and discourses whose deconstruction and unsettling may be disadvantageous. “Native community organizers,” explains Teuton, “want a theory to

help them decide which structures of power should be subverted: Should indigenous activists subvert treaty rights, for example?” (632). Teuton does not develop this question into a more direct and conclusive argument. Yet, putting his and Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s critiques of “hybridity” and “subversion” discourses together, I think that the main controversy that the critics foreground is this: American Indian anticolonial struggles and discourses do not necessarily revolve around the destabilisation and subversion of (all) colonial discourses. On the contrary, one of the primary political and socio-cultural goals of American Indian tribes is to *reclaim* and *reassert* the stability and the authority of the US-Indian treaty discourse (as well as of other tribal-specific discourses of sovereignty and nationalism). Tribal-centred scholarship, lead by Cook-Lynn, makes a valid and very important point: theories of postcolonial “hybridisation” and “subversion” do not provide an interpretative framework that can account for and discuss the significance of fundamental and “fixed” tribal knowledges and discourses, such as the treaties and the “myths and metaphors of sovereign nationalism” in tribal oral traditions and historical accounts (Cook-Lynn, “American Indian Fiction” 30). The argument, therefore, is that currently valorised theoretical and interpretative approaches in American Indian studies are limiting and off target, and need to change.

Critics like Chadwick Allen in “Postcolonial Theory and the Discourse of Treaties” (2000) and Eric Cheyfitz in “The (Post)colonial Predicament of Native American Studies” (2002) indirectly support the validity of tribal-centred scholars’ critique of the cross-cultural critical perspective and recognise their contribution to American Indian literary (and postcolonial) studies. Allen’s and Cheyfitz’s discussions acknowledge that postcolonial theory needs to engage with US-Indian treaty discourse and Indian federal law, if it is to adequately represent and analyse

American Indian (postcolonial) political realities and struggles, as well as the distinct discursive strategies that American Indian writers may deploy. Chadwick Allen points out how postcolonial theory – which is interested in explaining the disruption or dismantling of “dominant colonial narrative[s]” – cannot account for American Indian literary and activist re-deployments of treaty discourse, which seek to re-assert “the continuing authority of [the] original recognition of American Indian land and sovereignty rights in the US-Indian treaties (82). Cheyfitz similarly argues that, without the discourse and “terminology of US federal Indian law,” postcolonial methods and interpretations of American Indian literature remain incomplete (407). These recent arguments within American and postcolonial studies are in line with tribal-centred critiques of cross-cultural and post-colonial approaches, and support the proposal for new directions in American Indian theoretical and interpretative criticism.

Another argument for change in the theoretical orientation and interpretative focus in American Indian literary studies emerges from Cook-Lynn’s critique of the current “mixedblood” discourse in the field. In articles such as “American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story” (1996), Cook-Lynn objects to the promotion of themes of “mixedblood” and cross-cultural existence in American Indian literature and criticism. She suggests that the paramount interest in such themes, both in the literature and in the scholarship, represents “a literary movement of disengagement” (130) because it reflects a preoccupation with personal identity issues and with Indian lives and experiences that happen on the margins of tribal communities, rather than within them. Questions about what it means to be a mixedblood Indian are indicative of disengagement from tribal reservation communities, since, as Cook-Lynn puts it, “many of the practitioners admit they have

been removed from cultural influence through urbanization and academic professionalization or, even, they suggest, through biology and intermarriage” (“American Indian Intellectualism” 129). In general, the current “mixedblood” definitions of Indian identity (as well as the “disciplinary definitions” of American Indian studies as whole) are inadequate because they do not necessarily reflect tribal realities: they are not “generated from the inside of [tribal] culture” but rather “from the outside looking in” (129).

Cook-Lynn’s argument has easily been classified as a racialised, essentialist and narrow-minded reasoning that is not only hostile to the very real and historical experiences and struggles of mixedblood Indians, but that may also re-inscribe colonial notions of the “pure” Indian. Such, in particular, is the twist of Owens’s response to Cook-Lynn’s critique of American Indian mixedblood discourse in the chapter “Blood Trails” in his *Mixedblood Messages* (153, 156). (Pulitano shares a similar view on Womack’s writing and she quotes Owens’s response approvingly (97).) Yet, such a perception of Cook-Lynn’s opposition to mixedblood discourse in American Indian literature and scholarship communicates a considerable misunderstanding of the premise of her disagreement. Cook-Lynn, as far as I am familiar with her scholarship, does not make an argument against mixedblood discourse on the basis of arguments for racial or cultural purity. (To put it differently, Cook-Lynn does not seek to contend that “real” Indian identity is pure, pre-contact and unaffected by cross-cultural conditions and/or is a mere matter of descent, as implied by Owens’s comparison between Cook-Lynn’s and colonial identity discourses.) Cook-Lynn does not suggest – as she underlines in the same article that Owens frowns upon – that the inquiry about American Indian cross-cultural existence

and mixedblood identity “is not an interesting one” and/or “should never be made” (“American Indian Intellectualism” 123-24). Yet, her central point is that the current prevalence and acclaim of mixedblood discourse creates the wrong and depoliticised impression that the major issues in American Indian life are identity issues or issues of mixedblood/cross-cultural ancestry and existence. Such issues are self-oriented and, important as they may be, move away from vital and communal tribal issues, such as American Indian tribes’ indigenous and nation status, treaty discourse and treaty protected reservation lands, sovereignty rights, and a multitude of other issues important to the tribal (reservation) communities, about which many American Indian writers (are said to) write. Currently, questions and discussions regarding American Indian writers’ engagement or disengagement with such vital issues remain marginal and unexamined at best, or disallowed and nullified at worst. Such marginalisation of issues crucial to contemporary American Indian socio-political life represents yet another illustration of ways in which cross-cultural scholarship in American Indian literary studies “[dispossesses] Indian Nations [...] of sovereignty” (Cook-Lynn, “American Indian Intellectualism” 127).

In addition to displacing discourses of Indian nationhood and sovereignty, the celebration of “hybridised” – mixedblood (in Owens’s terminology) and transnational (in Krupat’s) – Indian identity creates confusion about *tribal-centred* principles, knowledges and experiences that shape Indian/tribal personal and political identity. It is true that Krupat’s cosmopolitan, Owens’s mixedblood and Vizenor’s postmodern (“post-indian” and “trickster”) critiques of the category of Indian identity as invented and constructed help to expose and confront colonising representations of Indianness. Indeed, such critiques, as Sean Teuton acknowledges, can “liberate” Native discourse

from controlling, stultifying and “purist” models of “Indian” identity (627-28). However, the suggestion that “mixedblood,” “transnational” and “postindian” American Indian identity is the most advantageous and progressive identity configuration in contemporary American Indian life undermines the authority of tribal-centred sources of tribal identity. Such sources of identity include the recognition of “constructed” and “locally” produced and validated tribal knowledges about tribal origins and connectedness to ancestral lands, participation in the ongoing life and traditions of the tribe, defining one’s roles in tribal communal life, understanding and acceptance of a core of tribal moral norms, worldviews and mythologies, and a well-grounded commitment and practice to evolving those appropriately (Cook-Lynn, “The American Indian Fiction Writer” 30-31 and “Who Stole Native American Studies?” 10-11, Womack *Red on Red*).¹⁸

Teuton develops perhaps the most detailed and solid critique of the deployment of mixedblood discourse in American Indian literary theory. He argues that the mixedblood and trickster discourse, which “promises to destabilize concretized definitions of American Indian identity and culture,” also works to “inadvertently delegitimize the status of [tribal] experience” (630-31). As “mixedblood” discourse focuses on subverting colonial configurations of (“pure,” “static” and “tragic”) Indian identity, it remains unable to “offer an account” of how Native identity may “develop through [tribal] cultural practice” (Teuton 631). In his critique Teuton draws on ideas and approaches from “realist” theory, supported by critics like Satya Mohanty and Paula Moya.¹⁹ As an advocate for the usefulness of realist theory in the field of American Indian studies, Sean Teuton’s point is that postmodern and postcolonial explanations of Indian identity and experience as hybridised, liberating and fluid are inadequate to the (real) experiences and cultural

practices of American Indians who may construct their identities on the basis of tribal-centred social locations and practices (for instance, tribal experiences on the reservations). Many American Indians, as I understand Teuton's argument, construct a sense of identity through tribal-centred categories of identification: for instance, the body of tribal knowledges and moral norms that do change but that also remains "rooted," constructed and validated by tribal members in their daily experiences and in their participation in community life, tribal-knowledge acquisition and socio-cultural practices (626-41). Since identity is built through experience and ongoing cultural practices, American Indians who participate in tribal-centred, locally and communally validated experiences and practices are likely to objectively explain and understand themselves through such "rooted," tribal-centred categories, which also recover and maintain tribal life, communities, philosophies and aspirations. The "hybrid" theories of Indian identity, therefore, "are unable to offer an account of how [tribal] culture can be recovered, how Native people can grow and develop through [tribal-centred] cultural practice" (631). Accordingly, tribal-centred theoretical and interpretative criticism aims to re-direct inquiries about American Indian identity and categories of identification back to "Indian country."

I should clarify here that in their critiques of cross-cultural celebrations of hybrid Indian identity, tribal-centred scholars often do not acknowledge the fact that cross-cultural scholarship has done a lot to foreground the significance and authority of oral tribal traditions.²⁰ Let us remember that Owens, for all his applause of the liberating potential of Indian hybridised and mixedblood discourse in American Indian writing, also maintains, as I discussed in chapter two, that the writing conveys "a thoroughly 'Indian' story and discourse" (*Other* 69). Vizenor similarly insists that his postmodern "trickster" discourse derives from and affirms core tribal knowledges

and identities. Overall, the many interpretative approaches associated with the cross-cultural school of criticism acknowledge how the deployment and re-assertion of tribal oral traditions and worldviews in American Indian writing supports and continues the authority tribal philosophies and perspectives, and assist the recovery of a self-empowering sense of Indian identity. Yet, there is a crucial difference, I think, in the ways cross-cultural and tribal-centred critics discuss the significance of tribal traditions and knowledges as sources of identity and of socio-political and moral power. Cross-cultural criticism emphasises the capacity and function of tribal traditions and worldviews – as played out in the thematic, stylistic and imaginative structures of the writing – to resist and “delegitimate,” as Krupat puts it, colonial discourses: particularly to critique and reverse perceptions of Indian peoples and cultures as tragically and inevitably disappearing and/or as trapped “between” cultures. Cross-cultural criticism, furthermore, generally conceptualises the relationship between a tribal (personal) identity and tribal traditions/knowledges as a relationship that works to restore a positive sense of Indian (personal and communal) identity and/or to provide mechanisms for American Indians to negotiate cross-cultural experiences.

Tribal-centred scholars, as Womack’s literary interpretations in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* illustrate, are similarly committed to discussing how the deployment of tribal knowledges in American Indian writing “can encompass European literature and effectively Indianize it” (154). Yet, tribal-centred scholarship also seeks to emphasise how the political, social and cultural functions of American Indian traditions in tribal centred-criticism emerge on local, intra-tribal levels, not necessarily on cross-cultural ones. Tribal-centred scholarship wants to foreground the inquiry of how core tribal knowledges, perceptions and practices assist the growth of

American Indians as responsible tribal community members as well as tribal political beings *within* local and tribally-specific contexts. As Womack suggests in *Red on Red*, tribal-centred scholars are interested in studying the place of American Indian traditions and writing in “Indian country” (11) and in relation to “[tribal] national character” (16), rather than as tools for subversion and destabilisation of colonial perceptions, and/or as foundations for a “hybridised” Indian identity. Womack’s point is that critics need to do more work on discussing American Indian writing, traditions and identities “from within the nation, rather than looking toward the outside” (*Red on Red* 12). The development of such neglected critical perspectives, in Womack’s and Cook-Lynn’s argument, represents an exploration and assertion of tribal sovereignty.

Again, I do not think that these arguments claim that the study of the subversive capacity of American Indian “hybridised” identity discourse – particularly, its capacity to “deligitimate” and “Indianize” colonial discourses – is not important. Neither does tribal-centred criticism argue, in my view, that cross-cultural and tribal-centred interpretations of the counter-colonial power of tribal cultural knowledges and practices invalidate each other and/or are necessarily antagonistic. As Womack asserts, his intention as a tribal-centred critic is not to “preempt or cancel out” other approaches to American Indian literature; he sees his tribal-centred critical modes as “a point on [the] spectrum [of American Indian literary criticism], not the spectrum itself” (*Red on Red* 2). Hence, I stress once more that tribal-centred scholarship needs to be understood not as a separation from existing critical discourses in American Indian literary studies, but, on the contrary, as an intervention in them and as a demand for shifts and additions to the established thematic foci and viewpoints. The purpose of such shifts and additions is to ensure that critics study not only how tribal knowledges, beliefs and practices subvert colonising Euro-American

discourses but also, and primarily, how such knowledges, beliefs and practices construct tribal personal, communal and political identity. Indeed, the question of how American Indians negotiate a cross-cultural identity and challenge the colonial perception of the static and doomed Indian has been overexploited in established cross-cultural criticism. A more serious critical inquiry into how contemporary American Indian peoples, writers and characters in American Indian writing develop, or fail to develop, a tribal cultural and political identity and/or to affirm their place as tribal members is overdue.

Womack illustrates interpretative directions that such tribal-centred inquiry could take through a study of a variety of American Indian texts in *Red on Red*: a contemporary telling of a Miskogean origin story by the tribal elder Phillip Deere; Alice Callahan's *Wynema*, Alex Posey's Fus Fixico letters,²¹ Louis Oliver's and Joy Harjo's writing, and Lynn Riggs's gay perspectives on American Indian literature and experience.²² Womack underscores how tribal traditions and narratives explain and validate tribal beginnings in relation to ancestral lands and could thus be read as political narratives that re-assert the inherent indigenoussness and sovereignty of American Indian tribes (see chapter one, "The Creek Nation," and chapter two, "Reading the Oral Tradition for Nationalist Themes"). He also suggests that American Indian writers re-deploy and continue oral political traditions of nationhood and sovereignty when they engage with US-Indian legal discourse and expose the numerous violations of legally guaranteed tribal rights to sovereignty and intact tribal lands (see chapter five, "Fus Fixico: A Literary Voice against the Extinction of Tribal Government"). Womack's discussions of Joy Harjo's "pan-Indian" and Lynn Riggs's gay perspectives on Creek literature, furthermore, highlight how such perspectives could be read not necessarily as an assertion of a "hybrid" Indian identity but, rather,

as a negotiation of a personal identity in connection to tribal knowledges and as a process of understanding and affirming one's place in relation to a tribal community, tribal cultural practices and a tribal national political identity.²³ Womack's purposeful interpretations of the writers' engagement with tribal discourses of indigenism and sovereignty – both in ancient oral traditions and in contemporary cross-cultural and colonial situations – illustrate what Cook-Lynn has called “a modern tribal nationalistic perspective” in American Indian writing and scholarship (“American Indian Fiction” 28).

Finally, Womack's tribal-centred interpretation of Callahan's *Wynema* (107-29) illustrates how scholars may understand and critique creative approaches in American Indian writing that, from a tribal-centred perspective, undercut tribal cultural-political interests. *Wynema* is an “accommodationist” novel, in Womack's reading (116), because it remains concerned predominantly with the cultural and socio-political environment of mainstream America and with mixedblood identity issues; it demonstrates little engagement with important tribal affairs current at the time of the novel's production. The socio-political, personal and communal models of “Indian” identity that the novel proposes support Indians' political assimilation, rather than their political sovereignty. In addition, Callahan's representation of tribal cultural elements and practices in this earliest American Indian novel is vastly inaccurate and indicates a shaky knowledge of tribal traditions (114-19). Womack suggest that, in Callahan's case and in general, the inappropriate use and/or representation of tribal cultures and practices are the result of a writer's (factual and ideological) distancing from the tribal community that produces, validates and evolves those cultures and practices. This suggestion demonstrates, once more, that tribal-centred criticism does not view tribal cultures and identities as “static” and “given” but, on the contrary, as

evolving through ongoing tribal cultural practices and as acquired through experience and participation. Cook-Lynn's critical observation that some contemporary American Indian writers "lack a native conscience" hinges on the same idea ("Literary and Political" 50). Cook-Lynn, like Womack, indicates that the disengagement of American Indian intellectuals and writers from an active involvement with tribal communal practices and concerns could result in culturally inappropriate, politically detrimental and/or self-preoccupied representations of American Indian cultures in contemporary American Indian writing ("American Indian Intellectualism" 124-131). The purpose of Cook-Lynn's and Womack's comments with regard to American Indian literary scholarship is to urge scholars to examine more rigorously – rather than celebratory – the deployment of tribal myths and knowledges, as well as the proposed structures of tribal identity in contemporary American Indian writing. American Indian scholars are responsible, insist Cook-Lynn and Womack, to identify, contextualise and critique incompetent, unacceptable or politically damaging deviations from tribal traditions and tribal socio-cultural practices in the work of Indian and non-Indian writers alike. Such a critique has hardly been undertaken in current American Indian scholarship and is long overdue.

I shall conclude this discussion by restating my argument that tribal-centred criticism does not represent an anachronistic and essentialist call for homogenous and "pure" critical perspectives in American Indian literary studies. It needs to be understood not as a "separatist" theoretical and literary movement but as an intervention in the established cross-cultural approaches in the field. Cook-Lynn's and Womack's tribal-centred criticism identifies and historicises limitations and weaknesses in established "cross-cultural" (cosmopolitan, postcolonial, postmodern) perspectives in American Indian scholarship, and proposes changes in the critical

paradigms that can counterbalance such weaknesses. Tribal-centred critics' disagreement with cross-cultural perspectives is rooted in the realisation that the extraordinary emphasis on hybridity and subversion in American Indian literary criticism – and in cross-cultural/border and postcolonial studies as a whole – has over-generalised and undermined American Indian histories, experiences and cultural-political situations. The major problem with theoretical and interpretative models that focus on the cultural and discursive hybridity of American Indian experience and literature, and on their subversive political power, is that such models fail to account for the fact that American Indian specific histories, experiences and anticolonial interests involve not only the unsettling of dominant colonial narratives, identity configurations and Indian representations, but also the *re-assertion* of (colonial) treaty discourse and of tribal narratives of sovereignty and nationhood, as well as the development of a stable, “centred” and tribal-oriented Indian identity. In general, the ubiquitous practice of reading American Indian writing with the main intent of foregrounding the writing's capacity to “delegitimize” colonial discourses has failed, as tribal-centred scholars point out, to discuss the place and significance of that writing “in Indian country.” In addition, the (well-intended) preoccupation with Euro-American colonial discourses and their unsettling sidelines the understanding and analysis of any inappropriate and uninformed deviations from tribal traditions; likewise, cross-cultural interpretative models have ignored the analysis of politically disempowering representations of Indianness in American Indian writing. Tribal-centred criticism, as I have argued, needs to be regarded as a valuable and needed contribution to American Indian literary studies not merely because it “opposes” cross-cultural approaches in the field, but because it proposes critical and interpretative models that can account more accurately for specificities and

complexities of American Indian histories, colonial legacies, anticolonial goals, and socio-cultural and discursive practices.

Yet, I do not deny the worth and the validity of cross-cultural criticism. Cross-cultural criticism has contributed immensely to the development of contemporary American Indian literary studies in the last three decades; it has helped to bring American Indian literary, theoretical, cultural and political issues to the centre of critical discourses and academic studies; it has clearly argued for and advanced the appreciation of American Indian socio-cultural heritages and literary creation in Euro-American culture. Cross-cultural criticism, furthermore, successfully exposes and challenges legacies of silencing, stereotyping and “invention” of American Indian peoples in US colonial discourses and representations. Cross-cultural analyses of the subversive potential of “hybridity” in American Indian experience and writing help to illuminate and confront essentialist binaries perpetuated in colonial discourses. Those analyses also assist the understanding of how – against the background of fixed and unbridgeable definitions of “self” and “other” that inform and perpetuate the colonial discourse – cross-cultural discursive practices and identity configurations may be politically and psychologically empowering for American Indian peoples. Finally, the interdisciplinary approaches that cross-cultural criticism deploys encourage the exploration of meaningful similarities and differences between American Indian writing, histories, realities and anticolonial goals and those of other peoples in the US and around the globe. All those are important and necessary aspects of theoretical and cultural analysis, which tribal-centred criticism does not undertake, and at times, seems to unjustifiably oppose.

Hence, the ultimate goal of my study of the current split in American Indian literary studies is to suggest that scholars in the field need not only to recognise that

split, understand the reasons for it, and assess its implications, but also – and perhaps more importantly – to strive to bridge it. For all their differences and current critical divisions, cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical methods do not invalidate each other, and I see no reason why they should not work in conjunction. My argument for “understanding” and “bridging” of critical differences that currently divide the field of American Indian studies does not seek to smooth over those differences. On the contrary, by acknowledging and recognising differences – strengths as well as limitations – of the two theoretical-interpretative models, scholars could move towards more comprehensive and valid interpretations of “the political” in American Indian experience and writing. By combining the strengths and balancing the limitations of either critical approach, American Indian scholarship could offer a more complex and responsible reading of American Indian discursive practices, indigenous and colonial legacies, and political-cultural realities.

In view of this argument, the task facing Native Americanists who are interested in discussing the cultural-political and anticolonial work that contemporary American Indian writing may be doing, is to start using cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical methods together: playing off their strengths and weaknesses against each other. This task, in my view, will involve four major areas of interpretative work: 1) The effort to explain and contextualise the subversive, anticolonial potential of the writing’s thematic and stylistic hybridity, as well as its cross-cultural and transnational frames of reference, should continue; 2) Concurrently, critics need to recognise and analyse ways in which American Indian writers may re-assert, or fail to reassert, the authority of tribal notions of sovereignty and nationalism and the (original) provisions of US-Indian treaty discourse. Differences in a text’s functioning to subvert, hybridise and unsettle dominant colonial discourses, on one

hand, and in its functioning to reassert the validity of treaty discourse, on the other, need to be acknowledged and studied. This is an area of discussion that has largely been ignored and merits particular attention; 3) The celebration of hybrid – “mixedblood” and “transnational” – configurations of American Indian identity and experience need to be reconsidered. While Indian “mixedblood” discourse may offer a valid critique of essentialist and oppressive colonial dichotomies, it also fails to account for the realities and the anticolonial potential of Indian identity formation through the experience and re-assertion of tribal cultural practices that are grounded in strong local, tribal-centred frames of reference. Scholars need to both re-examine the meaning of such competing forms of Indian identification and to account for tensions between them; 4) Given the current authority and prevalence of cross-cultural approaches in American Indian literary studies, many academically popular American Indian texts have been studied and taught exclusively from the standpoints of cross-cultural criticism. Useful as cross-cultural approaches are, they also have limitations and gaps that tribal-centred criticism has successfully started to address. Hence, academically popular and “representative” American Indian texts may demand a re-reading that incorporates tribal-centred theoretical and interpretative directions. Perhaps, the overarching direction of these re-readings will be the study of the negotiations, contradictions and tensions that characterise the political functioning of American Indian writing, and that the joint deployment of cross-cultural and tribal-centred methods of interpretation will help us appreciate and explain.

The analyses of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* and Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*, which I develop in Part Two of this research, in chapters four and five, aim to illustrate these possible directions of American Indian interpretative criticism.

NOTES

¹I think that the advance of tribal-centred criticism since the late 1980s and the early 1990s may also be seen as a response to the policies of successive US conservative administrations – the Reagan administration in the 1980s and the Bush senior administration in the early 1990s – which have undermined tribal political powers and rights, as well as eschewed federal responsibilities to tribal communities. In such political conditions, it has become more important than ever that American Indian studies engage with questions regarding tribal political status and rights, and hold the US government responsible for violations of these rights.

²This is not to say that tribal-centred scholars are not concerned about the continuing violation and commodification of indigenous knowledge and spirituality in contemporary popular culture, particularly in view of the fact that New Age shamans, more than ever, claim their “entitlement” to appropriate and market indigenous spiritual knowledge (Whitt). Tribal-centred scholars and Native Americanists in general agree that tribes should have some legal mechanisms in place to stop, or at least limit, such practices. The complexities and problems of devising mechanisms to ensure some protection of American Indian cultural and spiritual rights – in cases when such mechanisms are “handed down” from the federal government, rather than designed and implemented by the tribes themselves – may be exemplified with the US government’s Indian Arts and Crafts Act in 1990. The Act forbids the advertising and marketing of products as “Indian made” if they were not made by Indians themselves. It defines that only a member of an Indian tribe, or someone certified as an Indian Artisan by an Indian tribe, has the right to market American Indian arts and crafts (“Indian Arts and Crafts Act”). Some of the controversies over the Act, however,

involve tribal objections that the law imposes artificial and authoritarian standards for what may constitute Native art, institutes bureaucratic rules about who may identify as a Native artist, and extends government control over American Indian cultural affairs (Jojola 173-74).

³Common and notorious examples that critics often cite include authors and scholars like Carlos Castaneda and Jamake Highwater: their fraudulent claims to Indian expertise and heritage have brought them lucrative publishing success, revenues and professional positions both in popular and academic spheres, while reinforcing stereotypes, encouraging perceptions of American Indian identity and spirituality as commodities, and engaging with subjects that have little or no significance for tribal communities. Such tendencies have been the subject of disapproval and criticism in tribal-centred and cross-cultural scholarship alike (see, for instance, Cook-Lynn's *Why I Can't*, Owens's *Mixedblood* 18, Krupat's "Scholarship" 97).

⁴Admittedly, one can establish more extensive comparisons between the critical work and positions of Warrior, Cook-Lynn and Womack. I do not undertake such a comparison here, due to considerations of the study's length limitations. In addition, as I explain in the chapter, Cook-Lynn's and Womack's scholarship offers a well-balanced representation of tribal-centred political perspectives *and* a wide range of tribal-centred literary interpretations. Warrior's book, in contrast to Womack's, has a narrower interpretative scope, focusing exclusively on Vine Deloria's and John Joseph Mathews's writing. I should add that Elvira Pulitano examines tribal-centred ("nativist") approaches through a study of Warrior's and Womack's work, and establishes some useful comparisons and contrasts in the critics' positions. I think,

nevertheless, that the lack of an extensive discussion of Cook-Lynn's scholarship – which has been fundamental to the development of tribal-centred criticism – makes Pulitano's choice of “representative” critics incomplete.

⁵Krupat's exact words are a clear illustration of what I consider a flawed understanding of the tribal-centred position as one concerned primarily with cultural and discursive autonomy and purity. In *The Turn to the Native* Krupat seeks to “rebut” tribal-centred arguments with the following observation: “to consider [...] Native thinkers [as well as Native literary and critical creation] as ‘autonomous,’ ‘unique,’ ‘self-sufficient,’ or ‘intellectually sovereign’ – comprehensible apart from Western intellectualism – is simply impossible” (18). In *Red Matters* Krupat repeats the same “counter-argument”: “Separatism, for literary studies as for all else, is hardly possible in the world today; were it possible, moreover, it would deprive itself of important opportunities” (7). The problem with Krupat's rebuttal, as I argue in the chapter, is that it narrows and misrepresents key concerns on which tribal-centred critical argument rests.

⁶Such misinterpretation of the tribal-centred position comes across in Krupat's discussions when he suggests that cosmopolitan/cross-cultural criticism, unlike tribal-centred/nationalist one, accounts for the “five-hundred years of contact” that affected American Indian life and cultural-intellectual production (*Red Matters* 20).

⁷The same idea re-occurs in many of Cook-Lynn's publications: for instance, “Who Stole Native American Studies?” (13-17), “American Indian Fiction” (30-31), “American Indian Intellectualism” (123-31), “Literary and Political” (46-47), and *Anti-Indianism* (118-38).

⁸Cook-Lynn and other tribal-centred scholars make recurrent references to the 1960s and 1970s American Indian activism. In addition, the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars in 1970, which Cook-Lynn defines as the forum that charted the developments and agendas of American Indian studies as an academic discipline, grows out of and reflects the political ideas of the Red Power movement.

⁹It is useful to point out in this context that both Cook-Lynn (Crow-Creek-Lakota) and Womack (Creek-Cherokee) are members of tribes that have a rich history of treaty making with the US.

¹⁰In *The Nations Within* Deloria and Lytle point out that treaties remain sacred to many American Indians (8). Robert A Williams's 1997 study, *Linking Arms Together: American Indian Treaty Visions of Law and Peace, 1600-1800*, discusses treaties as "sacred texts" (40), which have both borrowed from and have been integrated into tribal ritualistic and narrative traditions.

¹¹Overall, the understanding and the legal definitions of American Indian sovereignty change shortly after the war in 1812. After that war the political and military powers of the US increase, as do the demands for more lands and resources. Consequently, the US government asserts its exclusive, sovereign powers over all lands (Deloria, "Application" 283, Wilkinson 17). The language of the US-Indian legal discourse also changes: rather than negotiating provisions with Indian tribes, the US, as a single sovereign power, "gives" or "grants" Indians certain rights.

¹²Williams's study *Linking Arms Together* develops extensive parallels between US-Indian treaty discourse and tribal oral traditions.

¹³There is a sense in which the US legal system and its (abstract) principles and visions of justice remain progressive and morally profound, in contrast to US

(concrete) colonial and capitalist developments and policies. Many scholars acknowledge progressive aspects of federal Indian law (see Wilkinson 5, 121-22).

¹⁴For informative and curt discussions on the evolution of the legal definitions of Indian sovereignty see Vine Deloria in *American Indians, American Justice* (3-6) and Wilkinson (54-63, 100-106).

¹⁵Many studies compile and discuss various legal cases that resolve disputes between Indians and the US federal or state authorities – especially about lands, resources and taxes – on the basis of treaty and federal Indian law discourse. See, for instance, Deloria's *American Indians, American Justice* and *Documents of American Indian Diplomacy*, and Wilkinson's *American Indians, Time and the Law*.

¹⁶Robert Warrior and Jace Weaver offer a further comparison in this context when they state how “all racial/ethnic groups exist on a continuum whose poles are wanting ‘in’ and ‘out’ [of the United States]. Their positions on this continuum may shift over time. Native Americans, as a group, consistently have the most persons both rhetorically and otherwise who want to stay or get ‘out’”(9). Vine Deloria, Jr. develops perhaps the most consistent and thorough criticism of the tendency to conflate American Indians with other ethnic/racial groups and movements in the United States (particularly in his *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* and in *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence*). In chapter one I specifically highlighted political differences in American Indian activism and in the Civil Rights movements in the 1960s.

¹⁷Yet another excerpt reflects Cook-Lynn's objection to the failure of “hybridity” discourse to distinguish between the political status and goals of

American Indians and other oppressed groups: “Indian Nations are dispossessed of sovereignty in much of the intellectual discourse in literary studies, and there as elsewhere their natural and legal autonomy is described as simply another American and cultural or ethnic minority” (“American Indian Intellectualism” 127).

¹⁸It may be interesting to consider in this context an essay by Jan Wojcik, entitled “Why No Iroquois Fiction” and published in *Wicazo Sa Review* in 1997. Wojcik seeks to explain the lack of contemporary Iroquois fiction writers and of Iroquois novelists known and established in mainstream academic culture. (This is a conspicuous lack, given that the Iroquois people have a rich history of cross-cultural contact and that the Iroquois is one of the biggest linguistic groups.) Wojcik points out how Iroquois writers have chosen to remain committed to writing about specific tribal contexts and experiences: “to publish reports and editorials in their newspapers and periodicals focused on their contemporary lives, or to fashion new tellings of their ancient myths and legends [...] and [to produce] virtually nothing of the hybrid of the two that makes up much excellent contemporary Native American fiction” (208). Wojcik explains that Iroquois writers’ exclusive focus on intra-tribal realities and forms reflects the urgency to preserve and continue traditional Iroquois (Mohawk) culture, memory and language that have been severely damaged “by the historically oppressive presence of Western culture” (210). Furthermore, the focus on tribal realities and the recounting of old myths reflects the understanding that “for the Mohawks, the most compelling conflicts occur within the reservation”: it is through the understanding of communal intra-dependencies, which the old stories dramatise (even in contemporary and changing contexts), that the people “clarify their moral reasoning” (213). Jack Forbes has made a comparable point in another *Wicazo Sa*

Review article published about a decade earlier, in 1987. Forbes suggests that, currently, Native American newspapers and periodicals represent the most truly American Indian writing, in that they reflect intra-tribal realities and sensibilities, and focus on issues that are of primary significance to tribal communities. As I pointed out earlier, I don't think that Cook-Lynn and Womack infer that tribally committed literature and scholarship should necessarily exclude cross-cultural themes and discourses. Rather, Cook-Lynn and Womack object to the disproportionate interest in cross-cultural tribal realities, which has evolved at the price of sidelining significant intra-tribal knowledges, histories and concerns.

¹⁹“Realist” theory, as Teuton points out, started developing in the 1990s and is associated with minority studies at and around Cornell University (263-33). Major proponents and contributors to realist theory include Satya Mohanty in “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition” (1993) and “Colonial Legacies, Multicultural Futures: Relativism, Objectivity, and the Challenge of Otherness” (1995), *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (1997), *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (2000), Paula Moya's “Postmodernism, ‘Realism’ and, the Politics of Identity: Cherrie Moraga and Chicana Feminism” (1997), and *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (2000), edited by Moya and Michael R. Hames-Garcia. Realist critics suggest that postmodernist understanding of experience and identity – while setting up well-intended political agendas – may be politically limiting and ineffective. As Moya puts it, if one understands experience and identity merely as fluid and constructed, one also detaches those categories from “the historically produced social

facts which constitute social location” (“Postmodernism” 127). “Realist” critics further argue how categories of “identity” and “experience” should not be subverted (or dismantled) also because they are primary categories around which oppressed groups form political allegiances against oppression. In addition, the sense of a “grounded” past, historical experience and reliable socio-cultural knowledge assist people in understanding and recovering from historical traumas or other forms of subjugation and fragmentation. Hence, the conception and the reclamation of identities in relation to specific and “rooted” socio-cultural experiences are important strategies of resistance to oppression and to cultural or personal disintegration. By discussing how “objective” material and cultural realities influence subjective experiences and one’s relation to self and the world, realists seek to avoid both a postmodernist disregard for social locations and an essentialist inscription of those locations as “given” and self-evidently meaningful.

²⁰In *Red on Red*, for instance, Womack wrongly claims that the predominant criticism of American Indian literature has assumed that “Native is assimilated by white, not the other way around” (143). On the contrary, as I pointed out in chapter two and re-stated above, a lot of existing interpretative models (commonly and consistently used in academia) are committed to discussing American Indian writers’ “Indianisation” of dominant (colonial) literary forms and discursive conventions.

²¹Posey’s “letters” are witty articles that were first published in the *Indian Journal* throughout the period of 1902-1908. The articles are first republished as a collection in 1993 under the title of *The Fus Fixico Letters* (eds. Daniel F. Littlefield and Carol A. Petty Hunter).

²²Womack's interpretative approaches are challenging to summarise: he seems unwilling to develop specific critical "models" because he views them as Euramerican constructs and impositions on the texts. As he says, his purpose in *Red on Red* is to write a Creek book rather than a book *about* Creek literature (20-1); that is, the very manner of his critical writing illustrates indigenist critical perspectives. Notice, for instance, that in his introduction Womack defends the need, possibility and integrity of a "Red Stick literary criticism" (11) but does not elaborate on the principles and specific methods of such criticism (12-13) and, in fact, pronouncedly refuses to do so (20-21). He lets his specific interpretations and the comments of his characters, Hotgun and Jim, "informally" convey his concept of a tribally specific literary criticism throughout the chapters. Like Cool-Lynn's, Womack's theoretical and interpretative perspectives are implied rather than directly stated, and emerge in the process of his discussions. The "indirectness" of Womack's and Cook-Lynn's representation of their theoretical and interpretative criticism may account for some of the current misinterpretations of their ideas.

²³Womack's novel *Drowning in Fire* (2001) explores and illustrates further the notion that the formation of a tribal/Creek cross-cultural and gay identity is informed, first and foremost, by Creek cultural and political traditions, as well as by participation in tribal community life and cultural practices.

PART TWO

RE-READING LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *CEREMONY* AND LOUISE ERDRICH'S *TRACKS*

Chapter 4

Cross-Cultural and Tribal-Centred Discourses in *Ceremony*: Achievements and Predicaments of Leslie Silko's Anticolonial Politics

Published in 1977 and still considered one of the most “essential” novels in the study of contemporary American Indian literature, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* is a very suitable text for discussing and illustrating the intersecting deployment of cross-cultural and tribal-centred politics in contemporary American Indian literature and scholarship. On one level, as I shall argue, the novel overtly asserts cultural syncretism and mixedblood identity, and seeks to deligitimate and Indianise colonial discourses, the novel form, and the English language itself. Simultaneously, *Ceremony* seeks to establish distinctive boundaries between the Laguna reservation and the US socio-cultural, governing and corporate institutions and, thus, to reassert the sovereign and treaty-guaranteed rights of Laguna people to manage their own lands and life. The two discourses – of cultural hybridity and of tribal sovereignty – that the novel supports, often work in cooperation with each other and provide a powerful joint critique of US colonialism. The promotion of

mixedblood identity, however, creates a political impasse in the novel and illustrates limitations and contradictions of contemporary identity politics, which emphasise hybrid and transnational dimensions of identity. In my contention, the complex political and identity discourses that the novel develops demand the use of both cross-cultural and tribal-centred methods of analysis.

Ceremony as Counter-Colonial Hybridity Discourse

At the beginning of *Ceremony*, the main mixedblood character, Tayo, wastes away from a treacherous and mysterious illness. Some of the apparent causes and symptoms of that illness are Tayo's inability to negotiate past and present experiences. As a veteran of World War Two, who returns to the Laguna reservation after his six years' experience as a soldier in the Pacific, Tayo is tormented by his failure to come to terms with his "white" world experience of war, violence and destruction, on one hand, and, on the other, with traditional Laguna philosophies and stories of reciprocity and respect for life, which he remembers since childhood. The sickening confusion that Tayo experiences is aggravated by confused and conflicting loyalties to his cousin Rocky, who died in the war, and to uncle Josiah, who also died in Tayo and Rocky's absence. During his life, Rocky staunchly identified with white values, envisioning "success" away from the reservation, while Josiah initiated Tayo in Laguna tribal worldviews, and taught him to value them deeply. Tayo's intense dreaming and differing memories of both characters suggests that, when faced with Rocky's and Josiah's irreparable loss, Tayo grapples with and is unable to reconcile the conflicting value systems that they epitomise. As a consequence, Tayo experiences intense alienation and estrangement from everything, everybody and from himself.

Ceremony's plot of post-war sickness and recovery undoubtedly evokes the motif of the traumatised war veteran in "classic" American war stories like Ernest Hemingway's, for example. The war theme also relates *Ceremony* to many of its 1970s novelistic contemporaries, which reflect the American Vietnam War experience. In addition, Tayo's search for sources of meaning and self-identification, his narrative of a psychologically split identity, the description of his illness in terms of psychological dysfunction and disorientation, and Silko's "unconventional" narrative strategies, all call to mind modernist and postmodernist themes and narratives that distinguish contemporary American literature. Nonetheless, the conflict of values and the psychological dichotomies that Silko presents in her novel are not merely the result of war trauma and modernist angst but, as I shall argue, are primarily the result of physical and psychological colonisation. The particular thematic and stylistic strategies that Silko develops in *Ceremony* are intended to expose and confront that colonisation.

Significantly, the ceremony that eventually heals Tayo, restores his psychological balance and integrates him into the Laguna tribe is a ceremony that becomes symbolic of the curative potential of cultural syncretism and of cross-cultural identity formation. Betonie, the mixedblood medicine man who restores Tayo to health, is created to personify the positive interaction between Indian and white understandings and values. Like Tayo, Betonie lived away from reservation lands, "rode the train" and was educated at a white school (*Ceremony* 121).¹ Yet Betonie is also a keeper and renovator of Navajo and Laguna tribal memories, stories, worldviews and healing rituals. In his life and practice "bouquets of dried sage" and "brown leaves of mountain tobacco" cohabit comfortably with old newspapers,

calendars, telephone books and Coke bottles (C 120). Collected by Betonie's family over "a long time, hundreds of years" (C 120), these items of cultural hybridity have become a part of Betonie's familial and tribal histories, memories and traditions. At the core of Betonie's teaching is the idea that ceremonies must "shift and grow" in a way that reflects the realities of Indian life in and outside of white society (C 126). Betonie maintains that tribal societies and their socio-cultural systems will grow and prevail as they incorporate the very "white" society that has threatened to destroy them. Through Betonie's portrayal, Silko attests unmistakably to the capacity of tribal cultures and peoples to successfully negotiate perceived antagonisms between tribal and Euro-American understandings and experiences. According to the main narrative line that runs through *Ceremony*, the ability to transcend dichotomies and to bridge Indian and non-Indian knowledges "keeps the ceremonies strong" (C 126). Cultural syncretism is one of the major sources of Betonie's healing powers, of Tayo's recovery, and, ultimately, of the well-being of the Laguna lands and peoples.

I shall argue and illustrate how the assertion of cultural syncretism and cross-cultural identity formation in *Ceremony* holds a strong anticolonial meaning. Hybridity and mixedblood discourse in the novel, I maintain in agreement with cross-cultural critics, works as a powerful critique of essentialist discourses of "Indian" identity and culture, and as a challenge to psychological colonisation. Silko's portrayal of the healing ceremony and of a number of mixedbloods in the novel, most significantly Betonie and Tayo, is intended to signify and affirm the transcendence of the binary structures and fixed opposites of colonial and racial discourses. As a critique and opposition to those discourses, the "hybridization and heterogeneity" of

cultures and identities that *Ceremony* supports are, as Owens argues, true “sources of power and rich potential” (*Mixedblood* 35).

Silko sets her affirmation of hybridity against the background of colonial and racial perceptions of, what Vizenor and Owens call, the “invented” Indian: a figure of pure, static and recognisable “otherness,” commonly relegated to the artefacts of the past. Ceremonial Grounds in Gallup, nearby where Betonie lives and where Tayo and half-breeds like him were born, is an emphatic illustration of such colonial inventions of “the Indian.” Ceremonial Grounds have been put to use by “the white men” to represent iconographic Indianness for the contentment of white tourists (*C* 108-117). Tourists come “to see Indians and Indians dancers, [...] Plains hoop dancers, and flying-pole dancers from Northern Mexico [...], an all-Indian rodeo and horse races” (*C* 116), after the place has been cleaned up of all signs of contemporary Indian life, including the sordid signs of poverty and degradation, which are the result of the very real US colonisation of American Indians (*C* 108). The Ceremonial Grounds Indians, as products of the colonial imagination, are stuck in the distant, exotic and vanishing times and are truly allowed an existence only as “simulations,” in Vizenor’s terminology, and as commodified artefacts, “in the process of vanishing just as [they are] supposed to do” (Owens, *Mixedblood* 77). Silko’s representation of Ceremonial Grounds illustrates how the colonial notion and desire of what should constitute “Indianness” work through fictitious and dangerous stereotypes of Indian purity, authenticity and stasis. They obscure and suppress the contemporary realities of American Indian peoples, provide the dominant society with an easy and uninvolved encounter with “the Indian,” deny the realities and injuries that colonialism has brought to Indian life, and maintain that Indians cannot survive colonisation and

modernity. The image and philosophy of hybridity and culture transformation (or “transmotion” in Vizenor’s idiom) that *Ceremony* supports, refute the perception of “the” Indian identity and culture as pure, static and archaic entities that cannot endure and continue in the present world of change, dynamism, modernity and the apparent successes of “white” culture.

Silko dedicates a significant portion of *Ceremony* to indicate how colonial and racial discourses, as cross-cultural and postcolonial critics have argued, hinge on the denial and fear of “contamination” and “miscegenation.” Oppressive discourses rely on and seek to perpetuate rigid and fixed divisions between “self” and “other” because such rigid categorisations make it easy for those in power to, in Fanon’s terminology, “colonise the norm.” Echoing Fanon’s ideas, Elleke Boehmer accentuates once more how “the West [...] conceived of its superiority relative to the perceived lack of power, self-consciousness, or ability to think and rule, of colonized peoples” (qtd. in Madsen 8). The same mechanism justifies and continues racism which, in Stuart Hall’s interpretation, “operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories,” is a “typically binary system of representation” and “constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belonging and otherness” (“New Ethnicities” 255). Toni Morrison, among many other African American theorists and writers, attests to the use of “Africanism” and blackness in American racial imagination as a “serviceable other,” “by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive but desirable; not helpless but licensed and powerful” (“Playing” 52). Likewise, *Ceremony* presents the US “colonisation of the norm” and the propagation of cultural and racial dichotomies – whereby Indian categories of meaning are

rendered useless and inferior, while “white” ones are established as superior and inaccessible – as one the most effective and devastating strategies of Indian colonisation and disempowerment that the US government has deployed at Laguna. In *Ceremony*, a host of characters embody the “serviceable other” and the “colonised subject.” Those characters all internalise the norms of the dominant culture and judge themselves and their “Indianness” by its standards. Rocky and Auntie, Tayo’s mom and Helen Jean, Emo and most of the veterans in the novel, join a multitude of characters from different postcolonial and ethnic literatures who, having experienced different colonialisms and racisms, want to “pass” for white.² Three major dualistic discourses work to effect the psychological colonisation of Laguna Indians in *Ceremony*: American education, Catholicism and racism.

The Indian boarding school and the enforced American education had been key mechanisms of US colonisation throughout the 19th century and up until the mid-20th century.³ In the mid- and late 1940s, which is the historical time frame for the events in *Ceremony*, there was a resurgence of the Indian boarding school system: a US federal educational institution which primary goal was the detribalisation of Indian youth. In 1944 – as Carole Barrett and Marcia Wolter Britton summarise in “‘You didn’t dare try to be Indian’: Oral Histories of Former Indian Boarding School Students” (1997) – the federal government “concluded that, despite the best efforts of more than a century of federally supported Indian education, Indian people were still identifiable as a cultural group separate and apart from other Americans” (7). Consequently, the government decision was “to reopen many off-reservation [educational] facilities in order to accomplish assimilation” (ibid). The purposes of those “new” institutions, like the US government’s earlier attempts to educate

American Indians, were to detribalise and assimilate American Indian youth: to strip them of their tribal identity and culture, to sever their relationships to tribal communities and land bases, and to transform them into “useful” American citizens.

The federal Indian schools commonly imposed the English language and Euro-American concepts of knowledge and behaviour onto Indian children: in this manner the US government sought to destroy indigenous languages and socio-cultural customs, as well as indigenous status and sense of identity. Several scenes in the novel are particularly successful in representing US Indian education policies as, in Fanon’s terminology, colonisation of the mind. The teacher at Tayo and Rocky’s school, for instance, refers to Laguna stories and knowledges to “[explain] what superstition was” and afterwards “[holds] the science textbook up for the class to see the true source of explanations” (C 94). This visually effective scene illustrates how colonial dichotomies and hierarchies are created: the teacher elevates the science book as a solid symbol of the superiority and authority of “white” (scientific and written) knowledge and as a tangible proof of the insignificance of tribal (metaphysical, spiritual and oral) explanations of the world. Rocky – Silko’s most explicit representation of the Indian subject, colonised through American education – creates his sense of value in opposition to and in denial of tribal categories of meaning, in imitation of his American teachers (C 76). He justifies colonisation and the ultimate disappearance of Indian peoples and lands by rejecting his own Indianness and by imagining a life of personal success, which will be possible, as long as “the reservation wasn’t one of [the places]” where he would live (C 77).

Catholicism, as *Ceremony* asserts, is another powerful colonising discourse based on dualism and cultural purity. As a colonial discourse, the Catholic religion

has aimed to create the notion of Indians as heathens and pagans, as people whose spiritual traditions lack moral depth. Tayo's aunt (Rocky's mom) has internalised that idea and is ridden by a sense of shame and guilt. She denounces tribal religious beliefs as morally inferior to Catholic ones and would go "to church by herself, where she could show the people that she was a devout Christian and not immoral or pagan like the rest of the family" (C 77). Auntie embraces Catholic concepts of sin, guilt and suffering, and cherishes the sense of herself as a sufferer and martyr (C 29-30) because those feelings give her a sense of superiority over "pagan" tribal people and religions that have no concepts for sin. Auntie's unhealthy cultivation of sin and guilt as virtues – against the sin-free and guilt-free religious ideas of the Laguna – exposes the arbitrary and contrived nature of the attempts to fix and naturalise the opposition between the "superior" colonial culture, as the norm, and an inferior "other" culture, as a deviation from the norm. Tayo's mother and Helen Jean illustrate poignantly the pervasiveness and damage of such psychological colonisation. Both have internalised the stories of "holy missionary white people who dedicated their lives helping the Indians," by exposing "the deplorable ways of the Indian people" and urging them "to break away from [...] home" (C 68). Ravished by inferiority complexes and self-hatred Laura and Helen Jean try to look "like white girls" (C 68-69), anxiously applying fresh lipstick or curling and cropping their straight Indian hair in their eagerness to pass for white (C 69, 161-166).⁴ Both girls, comparably to Rocky, are eager to "break away" from their Indian selves and homes.

The most complex and violent example of the colonised subject is perhaps the novel's greatest villain, the full-blood Emo. Emo's intense contempt for his Indian self and for all things Indian is exacerbated after he returns to the Laguna reservation

from the war. The American military and patriotic discourse has previously encouraged him, together with many other Indian soldiers, to think of himself as a “first-class” Indian, who can belong with the “superior” white people and their (“patriotic”) ideals. Accordingly, a few war-time occasions demonstrate Emo’s eagerness to substitute his Indian identity for a different –racially “superior” and more culturally accepted – white identity: “I’m Italian tonight” (C 58), claims Emo, as he seeks the attention of white women, attracted by his uniform. Emo’s internalised racism erupts in his violence against the Japanese soldiers and against the Japanese people, as a whole: “We butchered every Jap we found,” brags Emo, “we blew them all to hell. We should’ve dropped bombs on all the rest and blown them off the face of the earth” (C 61). Long after the war is finished, Emo would often “damn those yellow Jap bastards” (C 43). Emo’s violence is motivated not merely by his perception of the Japanese as war enemies but by his hatred of them as the racial, inferior “other.” That is, Emo’s internalised hatred of his Indian self bursts onto another “lesser” and racial other: the Japanese people. Thus, as a soldier away from home, Emo reflects and sustains US colonial and racial prejudices that Indians themselves have experienced on their own lands.⁵ Once “the war was over [and] the uniform was gone” (C 46), the usual US colonial and racist attitudes quickly strip Emo and the rest of the veterans of their sense of being one with the privileged, superior nation. They all sink into drinking patterns, which result from the feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness.⁶ Back at Laguna – a “goddamn dried-up country” where “we don’t got shit” (C 55) – Emo and other veterans re-direct their racial (self-) hatred towards Indian women, like Tayo’s mom and Helen Jean. Indian men’s abuse of women and mixedbloods is a frustrated, weak-spirited reaction to the senses of disempowerment and self-worthlessness, which colonialism and racism have created.

The material and discursive power of colonialism and racism – as Silko’s depiction of the veterans’ attitudes towards both white and Indian women illustrates – also produces sexism. Indian men perceive their bedding a white, “superior” woman as an act of heroism, power and self-validation (C 55). Yet, they interpret Indian women’s intercourse with white men as a virtual emasculation of their male Indian selves, and as a re-assertion of their sense of racial inferiority and colonial disempowerment and dispossession. Mixedbloods, like Tayo, become a subject of hatred and abuse, too, because they are the visible proof of the disgrace. The veterans’ anger, and especially Emo’s violence both at war and at home, is not merely a symptom of war fatigue, as Tayo’s white doctors try to explain the problem away, but a symptom of psychological colonisation and a reaction to the inferiority complexes it has created.

Rocky and Auntie, Laura and Helen Jean, Emo and the rest of the veterans have all internalised the colonial perception of Indian people as the deviant and inferior “other” and justify the rights of the “superior” American knowledge, religion, identity and ideals to “civilise” and/or erase Indian ones.⁷ As Fanon has theorised in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986) and as *Ceremony* illustrates thoroughly, this hierarchical dichotomy produces the desire in the minds of the colonised subjects to erase their indigenous identity and to “turn white,” that is, to imitate and adopt every possible feature of the dominant white culture. In this manner, the essentialist, dualistic and hierarchical discourses, which colonialism and racism deploy, function to obliterate the traditions, communities and identities of the colonised and racialised cultures and peoples. Silko emphatically depicts the working of these essentialist discourses as life threatening, as physically and psychologically destructive for American Indian peoples. Rocky dies an unheroic death as an American soldier in the Pacific, while pursuing his American myth of success and personal advancement.

Laura and Helen Jean take up prostitution and become preys of sexual abuse in the hands of both white and Indian men (C 163, 161). Emo's intense contempt for his Indian self and for all things Indian leads him to murder his Indian buddies Harley and Pinkie (C 252, 259). Tayo's protracted and nearly deadly sickness – both psychological and physical – is the overcharging symbol of those destructive forces.

As colonised Indians, Rocky and the rest – who lack the insight and moral strength to overcome the “sickness” of colonial and racist dichotomies – readily serve the interests of colonisation and racism, validating and reproducing their power and value configurations. These characters illustrate how the assertion of unbridgeable hierarchies and essentialist dualities, between Indianness and whiteness, between tribal and Euro-American cultures, represents an endorsement and continuation of discourses that have disempowered Indians for centuries. Silko makes this aspect of US colonialism an imperative context for interpreting her deployment of hybridity and mixedblood discourse in *Ceremony*. The insistence in the novel that tribal and white societies interact with and affect each other provides a historically accurate account of living cultures' development and transformation, as well as of the material conditions created by colonisation. Hybridity discourse thus works to challenge the colonial perception of Indianness as a dead “thing” of the past, and to reject the notion that colonial hierarchies are objective and “natural.” The affirmation of cultural and identity fluidity, mixing and border-crossing in Betonie's character and ceremony functions, overall, as a critique and rejection of colonial and enslaving definitions of identity and culture. Betonie's hybrid ceremony has a healing power because it teaches and urges Indians to resist the oppressive symbolic systems of colonial discourse. In this sense, *Ceremony*, to quote Gloria Bird's assessment (1993) of the novel's narrative politics, moves “towards a decolonisation of mind and text”

(“Towards”). As a counter discourse, the assertion of hybridity in *Ceremony* seeks to turn Indian consciousness away from the damaging stereotypes and the “terminal creeds” that Emo and the rest have internalised, and to transform colonised, “inferiorised,” and damaging Indian images and self-perceptions into positive, empowering and healthy identities. Indians, as *Ceremony* asserts through Betonie’s and Tayo’s characters, do not have to, and should not, accept colonial definitions of themselves: they have the ability – and responsibility – to create their own identities and to be agents of their own lives. Hybridity discourse in the novel is thus a discourse of subversion and repudiation of US colonialism.

The stylistic and narrative techniques that Silko uses in *Ceremony* similarly seek to challenge the purity and authority of the colonising culture’s knowledges and perspectives by superimposing on them Laguna literary and conceptual models. *Ceremony* opens with a poem that invokes the Laguna first creator and *vocal* storyteller, Ts’its’tsi’nako, and claims that the novel is a “story” that “appears” as Ts’its’tsi’nako “is thinking” about it (C 1). Silko’s choice of a narrative strategy here is an explicit intrusion upon the very genre of the novel that constitutes her medium of expression. The opening that Silko chooses denies, from the onset, the authority and effectiveness of accepted Euro-American individualistic and written literary modes. The authoritative voice that Silko establishes is that of Ts’its’tsi’nako, so that the privileged discourse and narrative model in the novel are those of the Laguna oral and communal storytelling traditions. The establishment of this textual and conceptual authority of Laguna discourse is essential to Tayo’s healing, and symbolically, to the rest of the Laguna Indians because, as I discussed previously, the imposed and internalised authority of the colonial “norm” and discourse constitutes a major source of physical and psychological sickness on the reservation. As Silko puts it in the

novel, “the feelings were twisted, tangled roots, and all the names for the source of this growth were buried under English words, out of reach” (C 69). Silko directly connects the potential for healing with the Indians’ capacity to overthrow the oppressive control of Euro-American discourses and to reassert the vitality of Native discourses and self-expressions.⁸ By opening *Ceremony* with Ts’its’tsi’nako’s invocation, Silko starts her novel, in a very literal sense, as an act of – what Krupat has called, following other postcolonial critics – a “writing back” against the discourses, perspectives and literary models of the colonising culture: the novel represents a “refusal of imperial domination” and challenges “the West’s claim legitimately to speak for all the rest” (*Voice* 17). Owens, likewise, reads the novel in terms of Indian voice reclaiming and intervention in colonial discourses and representations. As he puts it, “Silko is attempting to return to Tayo, and to all Native Americans, the power of speech” (*Other* 98).

Like in other postcolonial texts, the processes of “writing back” and “claiming a voice” in *Ceremony* involve the imitation, hybridisation and subversion of Euro-American literary forms in a manner that makes those forms, in Krupat’s words, “powerfully affected” by “the tongues’ [...] indigenous to America” (*Turn* 36). Silko’s manipulation and “Indianisation” of the Euro-American genre are apparent in the episodic structure and the repetition of key events and words in *Ceremony*, and in the occasional use of Laguna names and words. The particular blend of poetry and prose that constitutes the novel – and that may remind readers of the postmodernist blend of genres – in fact, relates to oral narrative practices, in which listeners do not distinguish formally between the two genres as they cannot say where one line ends and a new one begins. (In this sense, supposedly postmodern writing strategies in

American Indian writing, as Vizenor has asserted, are a tribal phenomenon.) *Ceremony*, comparably to other postcolonial text and, particularly, to African American ones, has a strong participatory quality, addressing and including the reader recurrently. This strategy in the novel is intended, once more, to recreate the quality of traditional oral storytelling, which is keenly aware of its audience as an entity that participates in the act of narrating.⁹

Silko also seeks to “Indianise” and subvert not only Euro-American narrative forms but also Euro-American perceptions and knowledges. The very beginning of the novel demands that the (likely) Euro-American reader accepts the tribal understanding that “mythic” peoples and events – like Ts’its’tsi’nako and the “appearance” of her story – are real and meaningful, and interact with our daily realities. Krupat, among others, observes how Silko asserts this tribal model of perceiving the world in the representation of “Ts’eh Montano and her husband, The Hunter” and “the appearance of the mountain lion,” who, according to the novel’s narrative logic, “are not ‘mythic’ but ‘real’” (*Turn* 41). Elaine Jahner (1979) has further explained compellingly how the very structure and sequence of events in *Ceremony* require from Tayo, as well as from readers, to comprehend and accept the interconnectedness of mythic and real times and happenings. Most significantly, *Ceremony* sustains the idea that Tayo’s real-life experiences re-enact traditional (“mythic”) tribal narratives and knowledges, as Andrew Wiget points out in his 1985 study *Native American Literature* (87-88). The story of Tayo’s sickness and healing is concurrently the story of the drought and regeneration of the Laguna land, for which Tayo is personally responsible because of his initial condemnation of the rain during his World War Two combat experience (*C* 87-88). Tayo’s story thus manifestly

recreates the Laguna myth of the Earth Woman (Nau'ts'ity'i) who, as one of the “mythic” poems in the novel narrates (C 47-9), flees the earth insulted by people’s irresponsible behaviour. Her disappearance brings drought and famine, and it takes hard, collective efforts to bring her back, regain the rain, and heal the earth and the people (C 255-56). The fact that Tayo’s contemporary, real life story follows so closely mythic Laguna narratives, and the Laguna knowledges and belief systems that they convey, serves to validate the authority of tribal ways of knowing and of being in the world, as well as to affirm the capacity of tribal people to preserve and pass that knowledge and experience. At the end of *Ceremony* Silko seeks to reinforce, for one final time, the textual and conceptual validity and control of Laguna perceptive and expressive modes, closing the novel with a poem, followed by an oral-like, ritualistic offering to the sun (C 261-262). In other words, Silko ends the novel by symbolically handing it over to where it began: in the Laguna conceptual and expressive realm.

Viewed comparatively, in relation to Euro-American genres and representations, *Ceremony* – which is expressed in English and in writing, resembles the English modernist and war-veteran prose, and is written in the genre of the novel, for which, if we take Owens’s assertion, “no close Indian prototype exists” (*Other* 10) – turns into, what Owens would call, “a Trojan-horse novel ... contain[ing] a thoroughly ‘Indian’ story and discourse” (*Mixedblood* 69). The novel operates as a counter-colonial discourse as it confronts, thematically and stylistically, the perceived purity and superiority of the language, cultural forms and the intellectual and belief systems of the coloniser. While the novel uses the English language and genre, it creates meaning and demands understanding (especially from its Euro-American readers) through knowledge of tribal (Laguna and Navajo) conceptual and narrative

frameworks. *Ceremony* grants the latter frameworks great cultural, philosophical and textual authority, and, thus, denies the perceived power and entitlement of the dominant culture to control Native perceptions, expressions and representations, and generally, to dominate the production of knowledge and meaning. Finally, the positive narrative resolution of *Ceremony* (that is, Tayo's ultimate healing) draws meaning and persuasive power from tribal traditions, and not only distinguishes the novel from Euro-American modernist and postmodernist literary works – which tend to communicate hopelessness and anguish – but also affirms the “survivance” of American Indian peoples, and defies their stereotypical representations as helpless (and disappearing) victims of colonisation. In short, the cultural and formal hybridity of *Ceremony* – its ability to create meaning through intertwined dependences on Euro-American and tribal (Laguna and Navajo) conceptual and expressive traditions – holds an anticolonial and healing potential for American Indian. It unsettles the monologism and authority of colonial discourses, and reasserts the validity and power of Native artistic and philosophical models.

Silko's deployment of “authentic” Laguna oral narratives in *Ceremony* is another facet of the novel's counter-colonial discursive power. I put the word “authentic” in quotations here to indicate that the Laguna poems in the novel are neither culturally pure nor are the exact same stories that Laguna people told in the past, and continue to tell today. To say the least, the very textual and non-tribal context in which Silko uses the Laguna material, and her own authorial transformations of it, change and hybridise the Laguna oral narratives. The point, however, is that Silko does include in *Ceremony* a few, more or less exact, transcriptions of traditional oral narratives: these are the story segments, arranged in

poetic stanzas in the novel, about Pa'caya'nyi's evil magic that "fools the people" and angers Mother Nau'ts'ity'i (C 46-49), the resulting drought and famine (C 53-54), the successful efforts of Hummingbird and Green Fly to bring Mother Nau'ts'ity'i back (71-72, 82, 105, 113, 151-52, 180) and the final restoration of the land's and people's health (255-56). In a recent article, "Rewriting Ethnography: The Embedded Texts in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*" (2001), Robert Nelson reads Silko's inclusion of these stories as an anticolonial act of "re-appropriation" and liberation of those stories from the "confines" of Euro-American ethnographic texts (49, 52). In Nelson's argument, these story segments "are appropriated, sometimes verbatim, from preexisting ethnographic print texts rather than immediately from remembered oral performance" (48).¹⁰ Nelson's point is that prior to Silko's novel the said Laguna stories existed and were known as texts (by Euro-American readers) primarily as pieces belonging to Western ethnographic collections: the ethnographic pre-text for the Laguna stories is Franz Boas's *Keresan Texts* (based on transcriptions and earlier publications by Elsie Clews Parsons), published in 1928, and for the Navajo stories – Leland Wyman's *The Red Antway of the Navajo*, published in 1965 (55, EN 2, 5). Silko's "verbatim" appropriation of these pre-existing texts, as Nelson contends, has political ramifications because it rejects the ethnographic and Euro-American control over Laguna oral and written expressions, as well as their manipulations and misrepresentations. Nelson supports his view through comparing how the same Laguna stories appear and function in Boas's *Keresan Texts* and in Silko's *Ceremony*.¹¹

I have followed Nelson's lead and extended the comparison between the use of Laguna stories in *Ceremony* and in *Keresan Texts*.¹² The English publication of

Boas's *Keresan Texts*, as I found out, is divided informally into two parts.¹³ The first part comprises story fragments – often variations on the same story – told by different Native informants in the period of 1919 and 1920. The second half of the volume contains Boas's re-arrangement, re-wording and simplification of the original fragments: here Boas re-constructs a consistent narrative by selectively piecing together the Native narratives and formerly published anthropological accounts.¹⁴

Boas's rendition in the second part of *Keresan Texts* reads as a conscious attempt to "improve" the originally transcribed records: he re-orders and re-words the accounts that Native informants have shared so they read as more straightforward and polished narratives by Euro-American standards. His version removes all the repetitions and diversions in the narratives, which distinguish the informants' delivery and reflect some of the most characteristic features of Keresan storytelling. Boas's re-arrangement here also involves, what I consider, a literal erasure of the tribal narrators from the "final" version of the overall narrative: their names, which figure in the first half of the volume, are substituted by the page numbers on which their accounts appear. In contrast, the names of the ethnographers who have contributed to Boas's work do appear in the concluding version. This kind of referencing, both literally and symbolically, removes Native agency and "voice" from Native stories and substitutes them with those of Euro-American ethnographers. In a typically colonial power configuration, Native people are denied the capacity and the authority to speak for themselves and to tell their own stories. Boas's references to the Native informants' narratives as "accounts without text" (*Keresan* 221) affirm similar power relationships. The phrase does not simply denote the narratives' origin in an oral tradition and their verbal delivery to Boas and other ethnographers at the time. Judged within the overall context of Boas's approach, the phrase asserts colonising

hierarchies of value and significance: it suggests that Native oral stories cannot hold authority until someone like Boas rewrites and modifies them according to Euro-American standards for written narratives. Boas's re-arrangement and rewriting of the original Keresan accounts imposes the authority of Western written (and scientific) discourse, and of tribal outsiders, over that of tribal people and tribal modes of expression. In the language of *Ceremony*, these ethnographic textualisations represent, quite literary, "English words" that "bury" Laguna words and meanings, and put them "out of [Laguna people's] reach" (C 69).

Keresan Texts sustains the impression that the presented Keresan stories are a valuable ethnographic material, which ethnographers were lucky to record before its disappearance with the imminent extinction of the Keresan people. In his two-page preface, Boas depicts the narratives as salvaged pieces, lamenting the fact that anthropologists have not managed to obtain all of the Origin Legend, which, in his suggestion, will be forever lost for anthropological study. Both the informants' accounts and Boas's attempts to rearrange them into categories and chronological narratives read as rather lifeless pieces. This impression is created largely by the presentation of the stories as artefacts, detached from actual and living Laguna backgrounds. Despite the fact that those were living Native people, who have delivered the stories just a few years before their publication in *Keresan Texts*, the volume does not create the sense that the stories exist in real, present day situations; rather, they are preserved elements of the ethnographic past of the country. As Nelson observes, Boas even "archaicizes" the Native names, so that the name Jimmy appears phonetically as G'i'mi ("Rewriting" 56, EN 11). Boas's work with Keresan oral traditions reflects and supports the belief, prevalent at the time, that Native people are

on the verge of extinction and that Americans should make an effort to collect and classify Indian cultures while there were still available piece of that part of US history and experience.¹⁵ These observations indicate that *Keresan Texts* – for all the ethnographic value and important historical information that it may hold – is a colonising text, which reflects and extends the US “civilising” and “colonising” policy towards American Indians. In this sense *Keresan Texts* evokes Silko’s description of Gallup’s Ceremonial Grounds in *Ceremony*: both collect and display the Indian “other” that used to live in the great times of the American past and that is now available as an ethnographic, museum piece for Americans to enjoy, study or contemplate.¹⁶

Ceremony functions as a counter discourse in that it rejects both the Ceremonial Grounds and the *Keresan Texts* narratives of Indians’ “otherness,” inferiority and ultimate extinction. In contrast to Boas’s account, Silko’s novel asserts the present-day continuance of the Laguna people and culture. The Laguna oral narratives are alive and dynamic in *Ceremony* because, as I argued previously and as Nelson and other critics point out, they participate in the contemporary life of the Laguna reservation and provide meaningful frames of reference for them. The Laguna oral traditions, as Tayo’s story confirms, do not exist in an abstract and dead world but actively shapes the lives of Laguna people. *Ceremony* also restores the narrative validity and literary significance of tribal stories: on many occasions, as I pointed out, the oral and performative aspects of Silko’s writing technique purposefully push aside written and textual aspects that characterise the “foreign” novelistic form. I also readily support Nelson’s claim that, in contrast to Boas’s scientific and stultified presentation of Keresan story fragments, Silko’s use of those stories in *Ceremony* re-

infuses them with vitality and artistic beauty, and returns them to the sphere of literary and imaginative creation (“Rewriting” 49-50). Perceptively, Nelson notices that even the visual arrangement of the Laguna stories on the pages of *Ceremony* associates the stories with the ancient and living Laguna traditions. The varying stanza lengths resemble a spinal column and thus bring to mind Keresan oral performances, which traditionally end with the phrase “that long is my Aunt Kachena’s backbone” (“Rewriting” 50). Read against the existing ethnographic pre-texts of Laguna oral stories, Silko’s “rewriting” of those texts in *Ceremony* represents, as Nelson eloquently writes, “an act of repatriation, putting those Laguna bones collected by the ethnographers back to their original use: to serve as backbone for a Laguna story about Laguna life in Laguna country” (“Rewriting” 53).

Nelson uses the word “repatriation” to highlight Silko’s successful re-appropriation of Laguna oral narratives from Western ethnographic textualisation and their return to the more appropriate spheres of contemporary American Indian literary writing. As a “Laguna woman,”¹⁷ Silko is simultaneously subverting the colonial discourse of ethnography and is claiming back the Laguna people’s control over their literary production. These acts of cultural and literary politics were particularly significant in the 1970s, at the time of *Ceremony*’s creation, and remain very important today, too. I shall point out, however, that Silko’s act of stories’ “repatriation” in the 1970s may also be read in relation to consequent American Indian political and legal efforts to assert tribal rights to claiming and keeping the material remains of indigenous peoples found on federal public lands. When Silko wrote *Ceremony*, the Antiquities Act of 1906 was still in effect and defended the right of the US government to “own” and manage all indigenous “cultural resources” older

than a hundred years that were found on federal lands (Whitt 147). In effect, that law extended the colonisation of indigenous lands to include and justify the colonisation of indigenous cultures, and of indigenous material and human remains. Generations of American Indians have fought against that “theft of indigenous cultural and genetic resources” (Whitt 150) and their efforts have ultimately lead, in 1990, to the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act. That act establishes, among other things, the exclusive rights of Native American descendants and tribes to own Native American human remains, cultural artefacts and other sensitive cultural items, as well as to request the return of those remains and items from non-tribal museums, agencies and collectors. In *Ceremony* Silko’s reclaiming and “returning” of previously textualised and ethnography-appropriated Laguna narratives may be read as a symbol, and a precursor of the wide ranging Native struggles for the re-appropriation and recuperation of Native agency in matters that have previously been under the exclusive control of colonial discourse and authority.

The discussion so far and the comparison between the Laguna stories’ use in Boas’s *Keresan Texts* and in Silko’s *Ceremony* provide grounds for responding to Paula Gunn Allen’s critique of the novel in “Special Problems in Teaching *Ceremony*” (1990). Allen posits that Silko’s “direct” inclusion of the Laguna narratives may be inappropriate because they are sacred and are “not to be told outside the clan” (88).¹⁸ I agree with Allen’s suggestion that writers and academics should have the ethical responsibility and the cultural sensitivity to not reveal and/or research information that Indian tribes may define as sacred. However, the claim that the particular stories in *Ceremony* fall under tribal requirements for sacred secrecy is debatable, and I shall not discuss the issue here.¹⁹ What I think is important to

recognise about Allen's critique of *Ceremony* is the fact that Allen, as Nelson discusses, does not consider the pre-existing "exposure" of those stories in available ethnographic texts. Silko's (re)deployment of Laguna stories in *Ceremony* cannot be judged without acknowledging its socio-political and cultural functions in relationship with, in contrast to, their prior authoritarian and colonising textualisation in US ethnographic and public discourse. Up until the 1960s and 1970s, representations of American Indians in the US public sphere were created and controlled exclusively by non-Indian politicians, scientists and writers. Prior to *Ceremony*'s publication, Boas's text was perhaps the singular most authoritative "representation" of Laguna oral narratives, and the image of the "doomed" and "vanishing" Indian proliferated well into the 1970s. Given the very real existence and abundance of prior colonising and detrimental discourses of Indianness, which are the typical result of colonisation, a part of Silko's socio-political and cultural role – like that of other contemporary American Indian and postcolonial writers – involves the task of "writing back" and "writing against" those discourses, as cross-cultural and postcolonial critics correctly argue. Silko's work in *Ceremony*, including the "direct" use of Laguna stories, expresses the political and cultural urgency for Native American peoples to gain control over their own cultures and their representations in the dominant society.²⁰ As I discussed, the particular juxtaposition of themes and linguistic strategies that Silko uses demands that the novel is read from a cross-cultural perspective and as an intervention into, disruption and reversal of colonial discourses of Indianness. The latter are tasks that Silko accomplishes admirably well in *Ceremony*.

Ceremony and Tribal Sovereignty Discourse

The socio-cultural and political work that *Ceremony* is doing carries significance that extends beyond the unsettling and rejection of colonial discourses. I argue that the novel also mobilises, what Cook-Lynn has called, “the myths and metaphors of sovereign nationalism” (“American Indian Fiction” 30). *Ceremony* can be read as a re-articulation of US-Indian treaty discourse because it rearticulates the notion of Laguna lands and people as sovereign: a notion that distinguishes original treaty provisions and that American Indians today seek to reassert.

It is true that Laguna Indians came under US jurisdiction only after the end of the Mexican-American war in 1848 and – like the other Indian tribes on the territory of today’s New Mexico – did not participate in the early treaty making process with the US. In their contemporary anticolonial struggles, however, American Indians, as I discussed in chapters one and three, reclaim US-Indian treaty discourse as a generalised and as a politically and legally defensible postulation of tribal indigenous and sovereign rights. Besides, subsequent US Indian law commonly deals with and affects Indian peoples as a group, and encourages generalisations of US-Indian political relationships and rights. (For instance, the General Allotment Act of 1887, which I shall discuss in the next chapter, broke down and diminished Indian lands and communities on all reservations.) *Ceremony*, in my argument, uses and supports treaty discourse because it exposes the fact that the inherent and treaty recognised indigenous and sovereign status of Laguna Indians, as well as their rights to their lands and to self-determination, continue to be severely violated by US colonial, capitalist and military policies. The novel asserts that those rights remain valid and

must be abided by, for the sake of both local Laguna people and of humanity worldwide.

I shall first argue that the particular way in which Silko redeploys oral Laguna traditions in *Ceremony* works as a present-day critique of the US ongoing colonisation of Laguna lands and as a re-expression of Laguna peoples ancient and continuing rights to their tribal lands. *Ceremony* creates one powerful metaphor of sovereign nationalism in the scene that presents Tayo's visit to the Laguna spring, where Josiah has taken him while alive. At that place Tayo recollects how "the people said that even in the driest years nobody could ever remember a time when the spring had dried up" (C 45). He also learns from Josiah – who functions as his early mentor in tribal knowledge – that the spring is the Laguna people's emergence place: "This is where we come from, see. [...] This earth keeps us going" (C 45). Silko uses this scene to rearticulate the indigenous status of Laguna people, communicating their ancient ties to the lands and their far-reaching knowledges and memories about the significance of those lands. Through Josiah, Silko asserts the ongoing presence and validity of Laguna people's notions and histories of their special status, which derives from a unique, earliest and sacred relationship to the land. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the first treaties that European settlers and, later on, US officials signed with Indian tribes also recognised the sanctity and authority of this relationship, accepting that "the natives were the true owners of the land" (Deloria and Lytle, *Federal Book* 3). The manner in which Silko refers to the Laguna origin story in this scene of the novel has political ramifications, in the light of treaty discourse, because it recognises the Laguna tribe as the "sovereign" of the tribal lands upon which they have lived before anybody else. This scene also indicates how the oral tradition – and

the origin stories that Laguna people have told for centuries – “had, and continue to have,” as Womack argues, “a nationalist perspective” (*Red on Red* 26). The oral tradition in *Ceremony* – in this particular case Josiah’s telling of the origin story that the Laguna have been passing on for centuries – is politicised in that it articulates the concept of the Laguna tribe as a peoples (“we”), united by a common land base, shared knowledges, spirituality, and interrelated histories and memories.

Immediately after this both lyrical and politically charged scene follows the Laguna oral narrative about Pa’caya’nyi (C 46-9). Pa’caya’nyi fools the Laguna people, causing them to forget their duty to “the mother corn altar” (C 48). Angered by this violation of sacred and agreed upon principles and responsibilities, mother Nau’ts’ity’i leaves this world and takes with her all the essential elements that sustain life. The ensuing drought and famine seriously threaten the subsistence of Laguna people and lands. In my view, this strategic positioning of the two Laguna narratives one after the other can be read as a commentary and critique of US violations of Laguna sovereignty: the Pa’caya’nyi narrative interrupts and disrupts Laguna life and the scene at the spring, which epitomises the primal connection between the Laguna people and the Laguna land, just as US policies have worked to disrupt and violate Laguna sacred and sovereign relationship to their lands, despite mutual agreements to the contrary, as treaty-discourse indicates.

Ceremony develops further the socio-political analogy between the Pa’caya’nyi narrative and US colonial abuses of Laguna lands and sovereignty. Pa’caya’nyi’s “magic” is the starting point of drought and sickness on Laguna land, and necessitates the subsequent efforts (and stories) of recovery. In the “realities” of Tayo’s tribal life, it is the old uranium mine, “dig[ging] deep into Laguna land” (C

246) that brings results similar to Pa'caya'nyi's "magic": it lured people with promises, but eventually disrupted the fertility of the land, drained most of the underground waters, and caused the famine and drought on the Laguna reservation. The mine took a vast portion of land so that there wasn't "enough land to feed the cattle anymore"; the mining operations also eroded the land and disrupted the "subterranean springs," which flooded the mine and afterwards tasted bitter (C 243-44). Once the US government and the mining corporation "had enough of what they needed" the mining operations stop, leaving behind "the hole in the earth"(C 244) and the sandstones and mud that look "like fresh graves" (C 245). Significantly, the mine is the place where Emo, Leroy and Pinkie brutally murder another Laguna, Harley (C 248-253). The healing ceremony for Tayo, Laguna people and Laguna lands has to converge at the mine, because the mine, as Silko maintains, is the major source of sickness and death on the reservation: like Pa'caya'nyi's evil magic, the mine has disrupted Laguna peoples' connections to their lands, gods and philosophies, and its injurious powers and effects must be confronted.²¹

The uranium mine narrative in *Ceremony* reflects and critiques factual and contemporary (neo)colonial Laguna realities: at the times of *Ceremony*'s creation, a US mining company, the Anaconda Corporation, carried active uranium mining operations on leased Laguna land; their Jackpile Mine was the largest uranium pit mine in the Western Hemisphere. The uranium mining – which began in 1952 and ended in 1981 –has probably been the single most devastating act of US colonial, capitalist and military exploitation of Laguna land and people. In an extensive and compelling article, "Native America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism" (1985), Winona LaDuke and Ward Churchill discuss how the US

industrial invasion of tribal lands – particularly through mining, depletion of water supplies and nuclear contamination, which increased greatly during (and since) the 1970s – constitutes a “new colonization” and devastation of tribal land bases and peoples in the US (125). The presented data details how the development of mining industries on Laguna lands has had lasting damaging effects on Laguna people’s health and welfare, on traditional socio-cultural practices, and on ecology. The most destructive, long-term consequences include nuclear contamination of Laguna lands and ground water, radioactive diseases among Laguna residents and the real threat that they would, as LaDuke and Churchill put it, “cease to function as tribal peoples” (120). The source of that threat leads directly to the US government, since in 1972, as the critics uncover, the Nixon administration had plans to designate Laguna (together with the whole Four Corners Region, which is the home of many Indian tribes) as a “National Sacrifice Area”: “for elimination of water supplies for industrial purposes [...] and the proliferation of nuclear contamination” (119-20). Those plans illustrate the pairing of US colonial and industrial practices with US policies for Indian physical and cultural extermination. Karen Piper’s article “Police Zones: Territory and Identity in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*” (1997) quotes similar facts from the “radioactive” colonial heritage of the Laguna lands.²² It is indicative that the mining of uranium – which is extremely hazardous to human health and natural surroundings – happened in the 1970s exclusively on reservation areas, despite the fact that “only about half of the US uranium resources production” are on tribal lands (LaDuke and Churchill 108). The fact testifies to the working of colonial (and racist) power relationships and hierarchies, which treat Indian peoples and lands as lesser entities: readily “sacrifice-able” for the advancement and well-being of the dominant –“civilised” and “progressive” – race. (This practice is particularly visible in the

economic exploitation of the Third World for the profit and progress of “First World” countries.²³⁾

US violations of treaty rights and colonial exploitations of tribal lands – in the past and today – not only destroy the physical health and the socio-cultural fabric of tribal communities, but also arrest the economic independence and welfare of Indian tribes, and are at the core of major economic problems on Indian reservations. While Indian lands are very rich in natural resources and while US-controlled mining and other economic ventures on Indian lands generate huge profits, Indians remain, as Ward Churchill among others points out, the most impoverished population in the United States (“Bloody Wake” 255-6). Most of the profits made on tribal lands go to American corporations and/or the government that manage the economic activities. Meanwhile Indian tribes receive – in LaDuke and Churchill’s argument – a “pittance”(112), coupled with the depletion and contamination of tribal lands, and the erosion of tribal socio-economic, cultural and political independence (110-11). Silko makes this point in *Ceremony* when she describes not only the drought and famine on reservation lands but also the economic despondency, unemployment and poverty in urban Indian spaces, created as a result of Laguna lands’ economic colonisation and exploitation. Gallup’s Indian shantytown is the place where many Indians migrate after the mine-contaminated Laguna lands can no longer provide adequate livelihood for them (C 114-115, 117). The Indian shantytown, as Betonie remarks, is designated as Gallup’s “dump” (C 117): a reference both to the nuclear contamination of the river, where the Indians live, and to their abject poverty, both of which are occasioned by the economic colonisation of Laguna lands. Meanwhile, the mine developers, “driving in U.S. Government cars” can afford to pay “five thousand dollars” to stifle

any questions about “the test holes they were drilling” (C 243). The colonial depletion of Laguna resources, as *Ceremony* correctly indicates, makes Laguna Indians dependent on finding jobs in the town, where their labour is, in turn, exploited by the created colonial-economic mechanism: “the Gallup people knew they didn’t have to pay [Indians] good wages or put up with anything they didn’t like, because there were plenty more Indians where these had come from” (C 115). In fact, the US government’s efforts of making Indians a dependent, trained and educated workforce for the American economy have always been a major part of US Indian colonial policies – as the Indian boarding school system illustrates, for example. *Ceremony* illuminates the mechanism and the acceleration of those policies in contemporary times.²⁴ US-controlled ventures, both on reservation lands and away from them, Silko argues through the novel, make Indians dependent on those ventures and perpetuate colonial and economic subjugation.²⁵ Ultimately, US colonial policies – symbolised in the novel by the mine – seek to destroy American Indians as tribal peoples by destroying their land bases, their communities, their connections to their lands, and their ways of life. This is the sickening and deadly threat that Tayo has to confront.

The concern with healing, which is at the centre of *Ceremony*, is a direct comment on the virtually lethal effects of the contemporary, industrial colonisation of Laguna people and lands. The exhausted and deserted mine in *Ceremony* – which continuing radioactivity is signalled by the lingering yellow dust of uranium – is a true symbol of that “colonial” sickness.²⁶ Another central thematic and stylistic metaphor in the novel – the drought that afflicts the Laguna lands and that Tayo’s ceremony seeks to heal – is also directly connected to the mine. The mine – in *Ceremony* and in reality – has contaminated the Laguna origin’s spring (C 243-44) and, in reality, has created “the insurmountable problem of contaminated ground

water” (LaDuke and Churchill 125). The drought theme in the novel points to the US government’s violations of Laguna water and land rights. In LaDuke and Churchill’s argument, “most western water is owned (by virtue of treaties) by various Indian tribes” but “in practice [...] the federal government has diminished or voided such prerogatives” (108). Martin Glassner further points out how the US government today formally acknowledges Indian sovereignty, but defines it as non-territorial (qtd. in Piper, “Police Zones” 485). This means that US economic and military interests always have the power to interfere with and dominate tribal attitudes and interests in relation to the tribal lands and resources that they own “on paper.” The US government’s theft of Indian lands and resources thus continues under paper-thin disguise. Silko’s narrative about the mine and its effects makes this ugly colonial situation very clear, and protests vehemently against it.

Thus, I read the intricate connections between sickness, drought and the mine, which the novel establishes, as Silko’s direct critique of US treaty violations. Silko creates the sense that the Laguna land is turned sick and deadly by US controlled companies and by US economic and military interests. It highlights the fact that the US government restricts Indian tribes’ actual control and ownership of their lands, and denies them true sovereignty: a right that is vested in American Indian tribes’ indigenous status and that is also acknowledged and guaranteed by US-Indian original treaties.

The known and “visible” historical fact about the industrial colonisation of Laguna lands at the time is that Laguna Indians themselves decided to lease their lands to the American corporation (as other Indian tribes across the US have done). The larger political processes that have made such leasing possible, however, point

back to US government's political and legal machinations. As LaDuke and Churchill comment (109-10), the powers to make political and economic decisions – including tribal lands and resources leases – are vested in tribal council governments, which the US government created with the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934 (IRA). I discussed in chapter one how IRA, despite its progressive role in comparison to 19th century US Indian policies, commonly created tribal governments that soon became, in Deloria and Lytle's words, "surrogates for the federal government" (*Nations Within* 197-98). The establishment of tribal council governments through IRA policies in the 1930s "[consolidated] political power [and] greased the wheels for modern internal colonialism," allowing the US government to manipulate "internal" tribal decisions and "the tribal economies" (LaDuke and Churchill 110). In addition, the blows on tribal communities and on traditional socio-economic practices (especially through the Allotment Act in 1887), the legal and economic manipulations of the US Indian policies, and the poverty on Indian reservations meant that American Indians – the Laguna Indians, particularly – did not have many choices but had to accept, and even welcome, the US-controlled industrial development. The latter, as I discussed, meant real exploitation of Laguna lands, people and resources. The development of the uranium mine, as Silko makes clear in *Ceremony*, is not an "internally-chosen" tribal socio-economic practice and is orchestrated by those who ride in the "U.S. Government Cars." The mining operations are in stark contradiction with tribal understandings and needs, as symbolised in the metaphoric contrast between the ceremonial-healing yellow pollen and the yellow uranium dust. Awareness of these peculiarities of US Indian legal discourse allows us to read *Ceremony* not only as a repudiation of the continuing theft of tribal lands and as an indictment of US government's violation of Laguna land sovereignty, but also as a protest against the

US government's violation of tribal sovereign rights to self-determination and self-governed economic development.

Despite the colonial sickness that affects the Laguna land and people – both in reality and in the fictional world that *Ceremony* recreates – the novel ends on a positive note. Tayo is restored to health and so is the Laguna land. He “returns home” to a stable life in the Laguna community (C 254). His experience is validated by the Laguna tribal elders, and enters and continues tribal stories, beliefs and knowledges (C 256-57). The positive ending that Silko proposes as a resolution for the novel has raised some disagreements about *Ceremony*'s literary politics. In an authoritative critique, “Literature in a ‘National Sacrifice Area’: Leslie Silko’s *Ceremony*” (1993), Shamoan Zamir holds that such optimistic conclusion is fallacious in the context of the disruptions of colonial capitalism that the novel reflects so powerfully.²⁷ *Ceremony*, in Zamir’s view, upholds mythical solutions – favoured by western modernist texts like T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) – that seek to provide “metaphysical security” in the face of the volatile and complex reality of colonialism and modernisation (408).²⁸ Therefore, Silko’s answer to the problems reflected in the novel – Laguna land’s and people’s destruction – constitutes a “mythification of historical crisis” and “deeply nostalgic recodification [of Pueblo culture]” (400). Zamir’s overarching argument is that the narrative resolution of the novel “articulates an erotico-religious desire for transcendence in the face of power more than [...] an ideology of political resistance to it” (409).

I disagree with Zamir’s interpretation of *Ceremony*'s literary politics because it fails to recognise the affirmation of tribal sovereignty discourse that, in my view, informs and justifies the novel’s affirmative vision. Given the sickening and

potentially lethal conditions that the US economic and governing control has created on the Laguna reservation, I argue that the only viable solution that Silko envisions in *Ceremony* is the restoration and strengthening of sovereign tribal models of governing and development. This proposed resolution is Silko's ultimate re-assertion of treaty discourse and of tribal sovereignty in *Ceremony*. I see such resolution as expressed particularly powerfully through two major thematic elements in the novel that I shall discuss below: 1) Tayo's return to a tribal-centred identity and models of life, which Silko articulates in the politicised terms of nationhood and sovereignty, and 2) the re-assertion of tribal models of development that are in direct opposition to the industrial – ecologically and humanitarially violent – models practiced by the US government and corporations.

At the end of *Ceremony* Tayo “returns home” in a manner that makes the novel an exemplary model of, what William Bevis calls, the “homing-in” plot, which distinguishes the American Indian novel from its American, “lightning out for the territory,” counterparts. Owens confirms how “like virtually every novel written by American Indian, *Ceremony* describes a circular journey toward home and identity” (*Other* 191). Discussions like Bevis's and Owens's illuminate the anticolonial work that Silko's narrative technique accomplishes from a cross-cultural perspective: that is, as a subversion of the Euro-American form of the novel and of the socio-cultural values it expresses. In my earlier discussion I similarly acknowledged the counter-discursive significance of Silko's formal strategies in the novel. Now I want to emphasise how tribal-centred critical perspectives assist the understanding of Tayo's return not only as a symbolic counter-discursive narrative strategy but also, and perhaps primarily, as an assertion of tribal sovereignty.

Within the narrative logic of the novel, Tayo does not simply come home to a pre-given and “metaphysically secure” tribal reality, but he *re-experiences* Laguna oral stories, “mythic” events, and traditional tribal knowledge. He learns and accepts new and more valid ways of being in the world through ancestral tribal stories as conveyed, in different stages of his “return,” by Josiah, Ku’oosh, Betonie and Ts’eh. With the help particularly of Josiah and Betonie, Tayo gains an understanding of tribal history, origins and ties to the land, as well as of tribal responses to colonialism. Through the teachings of Josiah and Ts’eh – for instance, through Josiah’s deer ritual (C 50-52) and through Ts’eh’s practice of seeding and planting (C 254) and of maintaining tribal memory (C 231) – Tayo accepts the knowledge and commits to continuing the practice of honouring and maintaining tribal memory, taking care of the living world and sustaining connections to the land as a *Laguna* person, following the cognitive and moral codes of the Laguna tribe. Tayo’s personal participation in the central Laguna stories – which teach tribal ancestral and ongoing knowledges and views – validate those knowledges and views, and indicate his own active acceptance and contribution to them. In other words, there is a participatory and experiential level to Tayo’s return to the Laguna land, people and tradition, which not only represents the Laguna people and culture as surviving, but also, to bring up Womack’s ideas, “reconstitute[s]” the Laguna tribe “as a nation” (*Red on Red* 26). As Womack explains, to be “recognized as an nation requires an ongoing living culture” (*Red on Red* 56) that distinguishes and teaches a people’s unique spiritual beliefs, philosophies, values and material practices. By depicting Tayo as someone who participates in and acquires aspects of an ongoing, distinctively Laguna culture, Silko asserts the viability of the Laguna tribe as a nation. Tayo’s successful “return” to Laguna is, therefore, objective, justifiable and politically meaningful – not

metaphysical and fallacious, as Zamir suggests – because it reflects and re-legitimizes the recovery and continuance of Laguna-centred cultural practices. That re-legitimation is crucial to Laguna people’s anticolonial affirmation of their sovereign national status.

Since *Ceremony* affirms that the maintenance of an *active* tribal culture is an aspect of political sovereignty, the novel may also be said to urge American Indian youth to actively participate in their tribal traditions. The latter is a particularly important aspect of contemporary tribal cultural and identity politics, given the long history of “Indians” acculturation and assimilation that characterises US Indian policies. (The termination policies in the 1950s, which were still in the air during the novel’s composition, are a good illustration of the persistence of these policies.) The specific historical moment and the tribal sovereignty discourse that *Ceremony* reflects suggest that Tayo’s Laguna return is not an idealistic and escapist resolution of the problems of modernity and colonisation. At the time of the novel’s writing – in the mid- and late 1970s – the growing and successful movement for establishment of tribal colleges and universities indicates that Silko’s argument for tribal youth’s informed and participatory involvement in tribal life and knowledges is not idealistic: on the contrary, it envisions a practically achievable option. Alongside American Indian political and social movements I discussed in chapter one, many tribes in the late 1960s-early 1970s opposed the federal Indian school system. Many tribal-centred educational institutions started at that time and, despite all odds, they are growing and successful today. Tribal educational institutions are defined and managed by their respective tribal nations, function on reservations and stay connected to tribal lands and cultural practices; they are actively involved in the community and its economic

development; the education they provide reflects and emphasises tribal knowledge and values, as well as tribal philosophies and practices of education; their purpose is to nurture and continue tribal cultures, to educate about and protect Indian sovereign rights and to prepare tribal youth for various roles in the community (“Tribal Colleges”). This is not to say that tribal education is disconnected from contemporary developments in the US and in the world – it is not. My point is that its objectives and achievements are the advocacy and maintenance of indigenous identity and status, as well as the endorsement of tribal knowledges and tribal life choices, as valid perspectives for the present and the future. Contemporary achievements of tribal education and the ideas behind them may or may not have influenced Silko’s resolve to “return” Tayo to Laguna. In any case, they support the authority and the historical soundness of that choice as an exercise of tribal sovereignty.²⁹

The suggested politicised reading of Tayo’s return may also help to answer concerns about essentialism in tribal-centred perspectives. The acquisition of a tribal-centred national identity – as Tayo’s story indicates and as tribal-centred critics argue – does not mean a return to a “given,” static and unchanging tribal entities. It always involves and requires *participation* in alive, and hence, changing systems of tribal knowledges and experiences. Tribal cultures – like all cultures – do change and transform, and Betonie’s representation illustrates this situation. Yet, the point that tribal-centred critics make – and that Silko also expresses in *Ceremony*, as I have argued – is that a living tribal culture, for all its changes and transformations, also maintains and continues distinctive core elements – spiritual, cultural, intellectual and political – that construct its people as a nation. Betonie, who is the unmistakable symbol of tribal cultures transformation and adaptation in *Ceremony*, confirms this

argument. While he understands tribal cultures in terms of “transformation” and “growth,” he also expresses the idea that tribal nationhood and sovereignty date back to antiquity, and need to be re-recognised today, as treaty discourse had originally done. Betonie chooses to live in the vicinity of Gallup’s Indian shantytown, asserting his and other Indians’ rights to the lands occupied by the white town:

You know, at one time when my great-grandfather was young,
Navajos lived in all these hills. [...] It strikes me funny, [...] people wondering why I live so close to this filthy town. But see, this hogan was here first. Built long before the white people ever came. It is that town down which is out of place. Not this old medicine man. (C 118)

Betonie’s narrative here, like Josiah’s story about Laguna people’s origins from the land, articulates tribal traditions and knowledges in the politicised terms of tribal nationhood and sovereignty. These ideas represent neither a reversal of colonial – “us” versus “them” – mentality nor clinging to nostalgic, pre-historic notions of “Indianness.” They are rooted in valid tribal knowledges and histories, in a historical understanding of US colonisation of Indian lands, and a justified repudiation of tribal land and sovereignty rights violations.

Ceremony asserts Laguna people’s rights to sovereignty most emphatically when it exposes the fact that the US government’s and corporations’ uses of stolen Laguna lands inflict deadly dangers onto human and natural life. In contrast to the exploitative uses of tribal lands and people, Tayo’s choice at the end of the novel is to be a herder and farmer on the reservation. Again, I do not think that his choice reflects inability or unwillingness to deal with consequences of colonialism and contemporary

industrial realities. I read Tayo's return to a more traditional and agricultural model of socio-economic development as an assertion of Laguna people's rights and abilities to use their lands and resources in a manner consonant with tribal epistemological, social and moral codes. Within the narrative logic of the novel, and in the context of the real colonial and industrial/capitalist "sacrifice" of Native lands and peoples, Tayo's choice is not a retreat from modernity and from the realities of contemporary economic development. Rather, through him, Silko argues for choices of economic development on American Indian reservations that do not turn Native lands and peoples into "resources," appropriated for US colonial interests and for US economic profit. *Ceremony* imagines and constructs the Indian reservation as a site of viable alternatives to US-controlled exploitative and destructive socio-economic developments. The novel, as I shall discuss below, also constructs tribal reservations and communities as sites of resistance to US global imperial and military power.

The tribal sovereignty discourse that, in my view, *Ceremony* supports does not involve separatism from the rest of the world and/or from global realities and concerns. Silko creates a sense of the Laguna connectedness to the larger world early on in the novel when she relates the prolonged, six-year drought on the Laguna reservation to Tayo's cursing the rain in the Philippines jungle during World War Two (C 14). In the course of the novel we also realise that that the uranium, mined at Laguna, had turned into material for "the biggest explosion that ever happened" (C 245) not just on Laguna land but also in the whole world. These details connect Tayo's and the Laguna land's sickness – both related to World War Two experiences – to the local and global threat of the atomic bomb. Accordingly, the uranium mine on the reservation is "the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and

even the earth, had been laid” (C 246). The convergence that *Ceremony* recounts here is well supported by historical facts: the uranium obtained on Laguna lands in the 1940s was used there for the US development and testing of the atomic bomb, that the US later dropped on Japan. The global dimensions of Laguna events, Silko suggests through Betonie’s voice, are encoded in a Laguna story (C 132-38), in which Indian witches create the white people and turn them into agents of local and global destruction: ready to arrange “the final pattern” of “green and yellow and black” rocks, to “lay it across the world / and explode everything” (C 137). My argument is that the particular local-global convergence that *Ceremony* articulates is yet another narrative strategy that supports tribal sovereignty discourse. My ideas evolve, once again, in opposition to Zamir’s critique of the novel, which is one of the few studies that have drawn attention to the intertwined local and global dimensions of *Ceremony*.

Zamir appropriately notices the prominent role that the witchery narrative plays in the articulation of local-global connections in *Ceremony*. That narrative is based on an actual oral Laguna story but, as Zamir correctly explains, Silko changes and enlarges it so much that it is “almost entirely [her] own creation” (401). Zamir makes the important observation that Silko’s globalisation of the original Laguna story is “not found in the Native American cultures of the Southwest” (401). In his view, the all-encompassing dimensions of Silko’s story evoke the “comprehensive cosmological mapping of evil” that is “familiar in Christianity” and in modernist literary texts, which typically seek to transcend and obscure political realities (401).³⁰ Accordingly, Zamir sees Silko’s departure from the “[local oral narratives] of the Southwest” as an instance of “internalisation of global [literary] forms,” which weakens and contradicts Silko’s effort to offer a narrative of “regionalist resistance”

to colonial capitalism (397). I bring up Zamir's argument here because I think it illustrates the limitations of critical interpretations that evaluate the political work of American Indian literary texts only from a cross-cultural and comparative perspective. Zamir's approach is committed to reading the counter-colonial, resistance politics of *Ceremony* as expressed primarily in the novel's capacity to unsettle and depart from colonial discourses and literary forms: a critical strategy, common in postcolonial and cross-cultural criticism. The problem with such an approach – as tribal-centred critics rightly object – is that it ignores the political meanings that a Native American literary text may create in relation to tribal-centred discourses, and particularly to tribal sovereignty discourse.

In disagreement with Zamir's assessment of Silko's literary politics in *Ceremony*, Jeff Karem asserts: "rather than letting external forms impinge on her novel's regional allegiances, Silko creates a regional portrait that claims a proprietary share in the shape of modern history, in effect imposing her localist scheme on the Western world's understanding of itself (23). I agree with Karem but I shall extend his argument and relate it to sovereignty discourse.³¹ First, the global dimensions that Silko gives to the local Laguna narrative function to assert the narrative, ontological and epistemological authority, as well as the "comprehensive," "cosmological" power of indigenous Laguna understandings.³² Furthermore, Silko's transformation of the original Laguna witch story meaningfully reconstructs the generic notion of "white people" to refer specifically to the US government and its violent infringements of tribal sovereignty: Silko's description of the "white people" as people who "slaughter whole tribes" and "[steal] rivers and mountains [and] "the [...] land" (C 136) points unmistakably – especially in the overall historical context that the novel has created –

to the US government's policies of American Indian people's extermination, of obliteration of their tribal status, and of illegal appropriation of tribal lands. The reference to the white people's uncovering of "green and yellow and black" rocks that will "explode everything" (C 137) allude to US government's appropriation of Laguna uranium resources, used to produce the atomic bomb. In the original Laguna story, Indian witches create the white people, and Silko preserves this element in her version in *Ceremony*. In the context of the novel, this element works to suggest, in my view, that any efforts to stop the current destructive role that the US plays in the world will require the assistance of – in fact, will originate in – local Indian agency. Silko, in other words, denies the notion that the local Laguna tribe is insignificant or ineffectual because of the global, destructive dimensions that the US colonial and military power has taken. On the contrary, the Laguna tribe remains a primary "site" for addressing local and global problems arising from the US global industrial and military power.

The atomic bomb, Silko emphasises shortly after the witches narrative, was created "on land the Government took from Cochiti Pueblo" (C 246), while Trinity Site and Los Alamos (C 245-46) – the US nuclear military test grounds and laboratories – have violated "boundaries" with other tribal lands and places where "the mountain lions had always been" (C 246). The argument Silko forwards with her particular references, it seems to me, is that it is a matter of global significance for Laguna people (and for all American Indian tribes, for that matter) to regain control over their lands and their governing, so that the US cannot use tribal "stolen land" to support its globally destructive power. The global implications of Laguna local struggles also require that "human beings" become "one clan again" (C 246). Silko's

argument here is that “the global threat of nuclear destruction,” as Karem puts it, “demands the cooperation of a common humanity (29). In political terms, I see Silko’s assertion as a call for transnational global allegiances that can stand against US colonial, military and capitalist enterprise. Silko thus compellingly illustrates how a commitment to tribal sovereignty and nationalism does not deny the importance of transnational solidarity and global resistance movements.³³

Ceremony and the Predicaments of Mixedblood Discourse

Silko’s political vision in *Ceremony* is not flawless, but deficiencies result not from the novel’s narrative resolutions, but rather from Silko’s affirmation of mixedblood discourse. Two important and uncommon articles by Jana Sequoya, “How(!) Is an Indian: A Contest of Stories” (1993) and “Telling the différence: Representations of Identity in the Discourse of Indianness” (1995), address problems in the identity politics that Silko supports in *Ceremony*. Sequoya argues that perhaps the most significant tension that *Ceremony* contains and cannot reconcile is the conflict between the acculturated tribal mediator, like Silko and Betonie – who identify as Indian persons along the lines of more mainstream, assimilative and “centrifugal” identity configurations – and the more traditional tribal community members – who adhere to local, “centripetal” and “conservative” social goals and structures of identity (“How” 457-60). As Sequoya observes, *Ceremony* enacts this conflict “under [the] cover of a binary relationship between ‘mixed-blood’ and ‘full-blood’” Indians (“Telling” 92). I am drawn to Sequoya’s discussions because they reflect tribal-centred critique of the categorical affirmation of hybrid identity in American Indian literary studies. By extending Sequoya’s ideas, my analysis seeks to

illuminate and support the validity of tribal-centred approaches to identity discourse in the field.

In *Ceremony* all markedly positive characters – not only the major heroes Tayo and Betonie, but also Night Swan (the Mexican dancer) and Betonie's grandmother (Descheeny's wife) – are mixedbloods, identified through their cross-cultural experiences and through some physical/racial features, like their light-coloured eyes. The most conspicuous fullblood Laguna Indians in the novel, Rocky and Emo, are not very likeable characters at all, and they both eventually “disappear” from the reservation: Rocky dies a meaningless death away from Laguna, and Emo, who is the greatest villain in the novel, is banished by the FBI (for the “accidental” murder of Pinkie) and lands somewhere in California (C 260). I want to point out that this conspicuously binary (and perhaps unintentional) opposition that Silko constructs in terms of mixedblood and fullblood Laguna identity verges on essentialism. It is true, as I posited earlier, that Silko's affirmation of cross-cultural identity syncretism and identity formation aims to challenge the established colonialist understanding that Indian identities are statically “authentic,” as well as culturally and racially pure and “other.” Tayo and Betonie's hybridity does work to confront such harmful colonial and racialised perceptions of Indian identity and of cultural identity in general. Simultaneously, however, Silko creates a different kind of essentialist dualism, in which cultural (and racial) hybridity becomes the positive and progressive identity “norm,” while the non-hybrid – the fullblood – Indian identity represents a negative, retrograde, and “doomed” configuration. Certainly, by foregrounding Emo's and Rocky's fullblood status and, simultaneously, their complete rejection of their Laguna identities, Silko wants to communicate the idea that a cultural identity is a matter of

cultural practice and community participation, rather than of race and descent. Tayo's mixedblood status and his ability to participate in and continue Laguna traditions reassert the same idea. Yet, Silko's representation also noticeably attaches the capacity to practice and continue Laguna traditions to a racially and culturally defined group: that of "the mixedbloods" and of the cultural "hybrids." Conversely, Emo's and Rocky's failure to continue tribal practices and ethos is associated in the novel with the racial and cultural categories of "the fullbloods," who also prove unable to be cultural hybrids. In short, the valorisation of mixedblood (and hybridity) discourse in *Ceremony*, which starts off as a discourse that resists colonial and racial essentialist hierarchies, ends up re-establishing new, yet, comparable categories, designating "hybrids" as the new dominant and more valuable cultural and racial group. Silko's deployment of mixedblood discourse thus illustrates how the current uncritical celebration of hybridity may undermine the very potential of hybridity to resist essentialism and the power relationships associated with it.³⁴

The identification of tribal survival and continuance with syncretic and mixedblood identity in *Ceremony* is problematic not only because it supports a kind of "hybridity essentialism," but also because hybridity discourse – as tribal-centred critics have elaborated – undermines the validity of tribal-centred identities and of the tribal-centred experiences and cultural practices that build those identities. The working of the latter adverse dynamic may be observed in the way *Ceremony* establishes an opposition between the mixedblood medicine man, Betonie, and the fullblood Laguna traditionalist, Ku'oosh. The novel shows Ku'oosh as incapable of dealing with problems of modern life (C 36-37), while Betonie's "modernisation" and hybridisation of tribal rituals signifies the creative survival and transformation of

tribal traditions and peoples. Clearly, with this representation Silko makes the point that tribal cultures, like all living cultures, undergo changes. Yet, tribal cultures evolve in ways that do not reject “traditionalism” but rather incorporate new elements within it. Betonie himself makes this point clear when he describes tribal tradition transformations through the metaphors of “growth” (C 126). The representation of the Laguna village’s kiva – which is the centre of traditional Laguna life – similarly indicates the ancient and ongoing incorporation of foreign elements even within the most “traditional” pueblo traditions and settings: in the kiva, as Dennis Cutchins notices, Tayo is made to sit on a chair with the words “St. Joseph mission stenciled in white paint on the back” (C 256) (“So that” 88). These representations correctly indicate that the syncretism and the contemporary persistence of tribal cultural practices are not predicated upon the rejection of old tribal traditions. The identity discourse in *Ceremony*, nonetheless, affirms Betonie’s “progressiveness” at the cost of undermining Ku’oosh’s traditionalism. Hence, the particular contrast between Betonie and Ku’oosh invites the understanding that, in Sequoya’s words, “the unreformed Indian [is] the residue of history” (“Telling” 92). Silko’s explicit configuration of mixedblood tribal identity (Tayo and Betonie) as a symbol of Laguna survival and revitalisation, Sequoya contends convincingly, defines and validates the terms of tribal change and revitalisation according to the “interests of the most acculturated class” within the tribal community (“Telling” 93). In the process, the ongoing validity and reality of tribal-centred members’ experiences and ethos are undermined.

The affirmation of mixedblood and hybrid identity in *Ceremony* may be said to reflect and represent Silko’s own (acculturated) position in relation to the Laguna

culture and community, and her more “emancipated” life away from the reservation. Let us remember that Paula Gunn Allen links Silko’s (possible) violation of tribal sacred secrecy in *Ceremony* to Silko’s marginal relationship to the Laguna community (“Special” 88). In an early interview with Larry Evers and Dennym Carr (1976), Silko herself refers to her acculturated and (more or less) outsider status in relation to the Laguna tribe as a factor that gives her “great latitude” in using Laguna material in her writing, “by contrast” with fully integrated tribal members, like Simon Ortiz (13, see also Sequoya, “Telling” 97-8). Silko’s own experience and words suggest that hybrid identity configurations correlate with some distancing and separation from the ongoing and different experiences and practices of tribal-centred, reservation-based Laguna. The implications of this situation have commonly been glossed over and/or interpreted in optimistic terms: as a necessary condition for voice reclaiming.

Betonie – the most conspicuous figure of hybridity and of cross-cultural tribal identity in *Ceremony* – mirrors the hybrid identity conditions in Silko’s life. He lives on the fringes of both the Pueblo and the Navajo communities, and the novel creates the impression that he is an “individualist,” rather than an integrated member of the tribal community. He seems to use tribal traditions with “great latitude,” and while he is apparently intended as a non-traditional medicine man (in contrast to the traditionalist Ku’oosh), his portrayal suggests that he is far more “progressive” and adaptive than allowed within the Navajo tradition and community life. Regardless of how progressive a Navajo medicine man can be, his role in the community is to be somewhat conservative, too: to keep the traditions and the ceremonies as close to the original models as possible for the sake of the people. This is so because people

believe that the ceremonies have been given to them from their gods at the very beginning of life: thus the ceremonies are sacred and also belong to the whole community. One individual simply cannot introduce radical changes to them in the way Betonie does. Within the context of tribal and communal cultural practices, Betonie's radical changes to the ceremonies represent and/or will be considered an act of disrespect for and alienation from the community.³⁵ In short, Silko's depiction of Betonie in relation to the Laguna and Navajo communities confirms the point that the assertion of hybrid identity configurations does involve a significant departure from actual tribal life and tribal cultural practices. It is also "characterized by excess of individualism," as Cook-Lynn observes in her protest against the promotion of hybridity discourse in American Indian literature ("American Indian Intellectualism" 127). Shamoan Zamir similarly notices that *Ceremony* places a strong emphasis on individualism and departs from ongoing narratives and cultural practices in tribal communities. In particular, Betonie's re-enactment of the traditional Navajo coyote ritual in *Ceremony* (C 139-44, 258) "shifts the focus from collective action," which characterises the real tribal ritual, "to the individual hero" (407).³⁶ I agree and should also add that the settings and the performances of Betonie's Navajo ceremonies in *Ceremony* are inappropriately individualist. In the novel Betonie always performs his ceremonies privately and individually on Tayo (with the assistance of a helper for the Coyote Transformation). In reality, Navajo ceremonies are collective events: the whole village gets involved and contributes to them. The participation of the entire community is what gives meaning and power to the ceremonies.³⁷ Yet, ceremonies in *Ceremony* are notably void of people and of community action. Tayo's healing quest that follows Betonie's ceremony is remarkably solitary and individualist, too, as Zamir correctly points out (407). In contrast, the traditional Laguna narrative about

Hummingbird and Fly – which Tayo’s story purportedly re-enacts and reaffirms – is propelled by collective action and joint communal efforts. My observations thus support Zamir conclusion that “the individualist emphasis in Silko’s narrative constitutes Silko’s [...] most significant departure from Native sources” (407).

The discussion I have offered here points to a central contradiction in the political discourse that Silko develops in *Ceremony*. On one side Silko affirms, as I discussed previously, the ongoing reality and authority of tribal-centred knowledges and cultural practices, which evolve and strengthen through participatory involvement in tribal community life and in relation to tribal lands: these form the basis for the assertion of tribal sovereignty discourse, both in *Ceremony* and in reality. Yet, Silko’s advocacy of “mixedblood” identity configurations and experiences – which is characterised in the novel by individualism and distancing from tribal-centred cultural practices – undercuts the authority and significance of tribal knowledges, community involvement and tribal-centred experiences and practices. The customarily “celebration” of *Ceremony*’s hybridity fails to account for this contradictions, and smoothes over predicaments and tensions in the current articulations of American Indian anticolonial literary politic that I have sought to unpack and explain.

I shall apply and extend the ideas and arguments developed in relation to Silko’s *Ceremony* in my reading of Louise Erdrich’s novel *Tracks*. My reading shall continue to examine relationships between tribal-centred and cross-cultural politics, and shall also trace similarities and differences in the political and literary negotiations and contradictions contained in the two novels.

NOTES

¹I reference future citation from *Ceremony* as *C*.

²Allen's protagonist Ephanie from *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983) narrates of a similar desire and reasons "to pass" for white. So does Pauline in Erdrich's *Tracks*, as I shall discuss in the next chapter. African American novels and protagonists reflect comparable consequences of racial colonisation: for example, Clare Kendry in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) and Pecola in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

³Federal funding for the "civilisation" and detribalisation of American Indians through American education began as early as 1802. In 1878, the *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, "endorsed education [in American knowledge and customs] as the quickest way to civilize Indians" (Barrett and Britton 5, see also 1969 report of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare "*Indian Education: A National Tragedy, A National Challenge*"). The federal effort at achieving this goal began in an organised fashion in 1879 with the establishment of Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Following Captain Richard Henry Pratt's principles of Indian education, the schools forbid the use of tribal languages and the practice of tribal customs and religions on its grounds, minimised contact with the Indian home and family, mandated "civilised" American appearance (clothes and hair styles), trained students in "white" service and industrial (rather than academic) jobs and educated them in American patriotism. The "peak years" for that policy "were the 1890s through 1930s" (Barrett and Britton 5). There was a temporary retreat from the boarding school system: from the late 1920s through the mid 1940s. In 1928 a document known as the Meriam report launched a scathing criticism of the boarding

schools and commissioner John Collier tried to initiate some progressive reforms. In 1944, however, the US government revived the practice of the boarding schools and its assimilatory aims. That practice continued till the 1960s and 1970s, when many tribes started to effectively oppose it.

⁴Silko's depiction of Helen Jean and Tayo's mother extends Fanon's analysis of the convergence between colonialism and racism to illuminate convergences between colonisation and sexism. Helen Jean's sense of identity is violated, on one side, by American racial and colonial prejudices toward Indians: though she is educated, she can't be a secretary, as white society would only "accept" her as a cleaner (C162). Simultaneously, as a marginalised woman, Helen is very vulnerable to sexual abuse by white men (C 163). She is equally defenceless against the physical and sexual abuse of Indian men, who "[would take] turns holding and hitting her" (C 161).

⁵While *Ceremony* refers to World War Two experiences, the representation of the racist attitudes towards the Japanese in the novel may also be read as a critique of the racist implications of the US military involvements in Korea in the 1950s and in Vietnam in the 1960s: those events are close contemporaries of *Ceremony*'s creation. To extend the parallel, I shall point out that critics – for instance, Richard Slotkin – have suggested that there are strong parallels between the American involvement in Vietnam in the 1960s and the US westward expansion in the 19th century. In *American Cultural Studies* (1997) Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean point out how the US public and military discourse in the 1960s and 1970s referred to the Vietnam jungle as "Indian country", while American soldiers often called their Vietnamese enemies Indians. Campbell and Kean add: "American soldiers in Vietnam talked

about ‘slopes’ and ‘gooks’ in a way which helped to dehumanise their enemies in a manner which drew on the racial epithets used against the Japanese in the Second World War” (253).

⁶In *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran explain in detail the connection between Indian drinking problems and US colonialism and racism (94-140).

⁷I want to emphasise again that Rocky’s pursuit of Euro-American values, education and personal advancement could seem completely acceptable and justifiable. So could Auntie’s practice of the Catholic religion. Euro-American scientific knowledge and Catholicism are not destructive in themselves. What is wrong and injurious about them is their use by the US government to validate colonisation and racial prejudice and to obliterate native knowledges, religious practices and sense of indigenous identity. The conflicts in *Ceremony* between Euro-American and tribal knowledges and practices, as Silko represents them, are neither symbolical nor unconditional. They demonstrate the working of colonialism as a system of oppression, subjugation and deliberate destruction of tribal cultures and peoples.

⁸Jeff Karem’s article “Keeping the Native on the Reservation: The Struggle for Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*” (2001) offers a compelling study of unpublished exchanges between Silko and her editor at Viking Press, Richard Seaver. Karem makes the excellent observation that *Ceremony*’s editor tried to alter Silko’s depiction of the English language and discourses as ones that oppress Native peoples and “bury” native modes of knowledge, expression and healing. Seaver suggested that Silko changed the paragraph about the sources of confusion and entanglement to: “the

feelings were twisted, tangled roots, all the names, Indian names, white names, buried out of reach” (qtd. in Karem 25). As Karem points out, “Seaver’s version suggests an equal relationship between the Indian and white names, in which both suffer the fate of being ‘buried out of reach’ in Tayo’s consciousness” (25). Karem correctly argues that such revision would have removed Silko’s intensely political point that “the white words are not themselves buried, but are burying Native words as they assume dominance. By erasing the political confrontation staged in Silko’s description, Seaver exonerates the English language of any responsibility for the problems facing Tayo and the reservation” (25).

⁹Numerous critical studies of *Ceremony*, which I do not refer to in my discussion, analyse in depth “Laguna-like” linguistic, structural and thematic elements in the text. A few popular examples include early discussions in the 1979 special symposium issue on *Ceremony* in the *American Indian Quarterly* and Louis Owens’s discussion in *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992) – all reprinted in Allan Chavkin’s casebook on *Ceremony*. The articles in the symposium issue of the *American Indian Quarterly* – which has laid the foundations for the scholarly discussion of *Ceremony* – all focus on interpreting ways in which the novel both nourishes and is nourished by Laguna and Navajo cultural traditions. For instance, Paula Gunn Allen’s article, “The Psychological Landscape of *Ceremony*,” interprets Tayo’s healing as an enactment of traditional Keres beliefs in the union between a person and land and between male and female aspects of the psyche. (These are ideas that Allen develops further in her later discussions of *Ceremony*.) Susan J. Scarberry’s “Memory as Medicine: The Power of Recollection in *Ceremony*” discusses *Ceremony* as a novel that draws on and restores tribal cultural

memory and thus “ensures the preservation of tribal heritage” (19). Carol Mitchell’s “*Ceremony* as Ritual” praises Silko’s skills at integrating traditional Laguna beliefs with the life of contemporary Indians and asserting the continuity and present-day significance of those beliefs. Other useful and broadly used articles that discuss the thematic and stylistic hybridity of *Ceremony* are Peter G. Beidler’s “Animals and Human Development in the Contemporary American Indian Novel” (1979), Norma Wilson’s “Outlook for Survival” (1980), Paula Gunn Allen’s “The Feminine Landscape of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*” (1983), Edith Swan’s “Laguna Symbolic Geography and Silko’s *Ceremony*” (1988), Susan Blumenthal’s “Spotted Cattle and Deer: Spirit Guides and Symbols of Endurance and Healing in *Ceremony*” (1990), Patricia Riley’s “The Mixed Blood Writer as Interpreter and Mythmaker” (1992), James Ruppert’s “Dialogism and Mediation in Leslie Silko’s *Ceremony*” (1993) and “No Boundaries, Only Transitions: *Ceremony*” (1995) and many others.

¹⁰In a 1996 article Wolfgang Hochbruck similarly points out that the Laguna stories Silko deploys in *Ceremony* are “almost verbatim identical” with Boas’s versions in *Keresan Texts* (137). In another article, “The Kaupata Motif in Silko’s *Ceremony*: A Study of Literary Homology” (1999), Nelson compares specifically the story about Sun Man and the Gambler as textualised in *Keresan Texts* and in *Ceremony*.

¹¹I often use interchangeable references to Keresan and Laguna traditions and I want to clarify that usage. The reference to Keresan tribes and traditions is the more generic and inclusive one. It encompasses several tribes and reservations in New Mexico: Acoma, Cochiti, Laguna, San Felipe, Santa Ana, Santo Domingo and Zia.

Each reservation has several communities or villages (Confederation of American Indians 161-94).

¹²In fact, I first researched Boas's *Keresan Texts* following the advice of Dr Roberta Hill at UW-Madison. Dr Hill thought, correctly, that a comparison between Boas's and Silko's uses of Laguna stories might help my analysis of Paula Gunn Allen's criticism of Silko in "Special Problems in Teaching *Ceremony*" (1990). That initial research subsequently led me to Nelson's article, which pursues that exact purpose. I have extended Nelson's comparison between *Keresan Texts* and *Ceremony* because I think that a further discussion might be useful to those who are interested in the subject matter but do not have an easy access to Boas's record. Indeed, that record is not readily available even in well-developed university libraries: as Nelson points out, *Keresan Texts* is "out of print [and] impossible to come by except through special interlibrary loan" ("Rewriting" 53).

¹³*Keresan Tests* consists of two separate volumes: one in Keresan (which was published in 1925 and became the core text for the English publication a few years later) and another in English. I am discussing the English publication.

¹⁴Nelson's claim that Boas's *Keresan Texts* impairs the logic of the original Keresan narrative is not entirely accurate. Only the story fragments delivered by Native informants in the first half of Boas's volume appear in the illogical order that Nelson draws attention to ("Rewriting" 25): the account of community disruption resulting from peoples' fooling with Pa'caya'nyi's magic, comes after the narrative of recovery through the help of Hummingbird and the rest. The organisation of the stories is illogical because it reflects the actual time during which the Native informants' stories were transcribed (respectively 1919 and 1920) and does not seek

to reproduce the logic of the Keresan narrative. Indeed, this first part of Boas's anthropological account illustrates how the Euro-American anthropologic method disrupts the internal narrative coherence and meaning of "real" tribal stories. In the second half of the volume, which features not the original transcripts but Boas's own writing and comments, Boas does re-assemble the original fragments so that they reflect correctly the disruption/recovery motif of the traditional oral story (see *Keresan Texts* 236-37). The rearrangement, however, as I discuss in the chapter, raises other problems.

¹⁵In the early 20th century Euro-American anthropologists shared the belief that American Indian cultural and social traditions were dying: this explains the scholarly urge to study and document them before their disappearance. That sentiment towards American Indian peoples and cultures is not new in the American culture. It had been in place ever since the Revolution. As Roy Pearce writes in *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (1953) the founding fathers, especially Thomas Jefferson and his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784), encouraged the scientific study (the collection and classification) of American Indian cultures and languages, as they were believed to be on their way to extinction (80-96). The establishment of the American Ethnological Society in 1842 and of the Smithsonian Institution in 1846 also had the major aim of studying American Indians and their cultures before their vanishing (Pearce 129-30). Another well-known project in the US culture in the early 20th century that invoked a similar purpose and rhetoric was Edward S. Curtis's photographic and ethnographic work (1907- 1930), published in twenty volumes as *The North American Indian*. As Mick Gidley discusses, the

dominant motif in Curtis's work is the representation of Indians as "the Vanishing Race."

¹⁶I am not denying unconditionally the value of the early anthropological study of American Indian cultures. I rather highlight the fact that it represents an extension of colonial practices and attitudes. In the name of fairness, I also want to acknowledge the production, under Boas's guidance, of more considerate and sensitive ethnographic records of American Indian traditions. One example is Ella Deloria's *Dakota Texts* published in 1932 as volume 14 in the same series of the Publications of the American Ethnological Society (with Franz Boas as a general editor). Ella Deloria's introduction and arrangement of the volume communicate her own personal involvement with and understanding of Dakota culture, language and people. Ella Deloria, for instance, first presents the stories in the Lakota language and provides a literal and a free translation after each story. Thus I felt that her collection, unlike *Keresan Texts*, establishes a vital link between the original oral performances and their textualisation in the volume; Deloria's free translations also awaken readers to the value and enjoyment of the traditional narratives as literary pieces.

Anthropological work such as Ella Deloria's, that demonstrates a strong tribal perspective in the presentation of material, was encouraged and assisted by Boas.

¹⁷My reference here is to an earlier Nelson's essay on Silko, entitled "A Laguna Woman" (1999). Other studies have unequivocally identified Silko as a "Laguna woman" as well: the title of Melody Graulich's collection of critical essays on Silko, for instance, is *Yellow Woman* (1993), and Silko herself has identified with the Laguna mythic Yellow woman (Evers and Carr 12).

¹⁸Allen may be responsible for a similar misuse of tribal traditions that she criticises. Her critique of *Ceremony* came up at around the same time as Allen's own *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* (1989) and *Grandmothers of the Light* (1991). Both books, as many critics have observed, directly incorporate tribal oral (and potentially sacred) stories and constitute a violation and appropriation of those stories, if judged by Allen's own criteria set up in her critique of *Ceremony*. Even Allen's acclaimed book of criticism *The Sacred Hoop*, which was first published in 1986, contains numerous references to and summaries of traditional (spiritual, religious) Keresan stories. It is also worth recalling here that Allen's earlier and well-known opinion on *Ceremony*, as published in her book of criticism *The Sacred Hoop*, is very favourable. In her chapter on *Ceremony* Allen interprets Tayo's story as a re-enactment of Laguna spiritual beliefs concerning the ceremonial nature of men and women, the unity between land and person, and between ceremonies and stories. In another chapter ("Whose Dream Is This Anyway?") in the same volume Allen discusses Silko's insertion of "a clan story from Laguna" (95) as used "in a ceremonial way [...] illuminating the connection between the ritual tradition, the storytelling tradition and a contemporary working out in a novel of both tribal forms" (96). In short, Allen's comments on the use of Keresan oral traditions in contemporary American Indian writing (including her own) seem quite ambivalent and contradictory.

¹⁹In "How (!) Is an Indian?" (1993), Jana Sequoya quotes two Laguna traditionalists, according to whom the Laguna oral stories that Silko uses in *Ceremony* are not sacred and transgressive but "like T.V. – just for entertainment" (EN2, 469). Sequoya, however, acknowledges the significance of Allen's critique because it

brings up the issue of tribal secrecy and its complexity in the context of the teaching and study of American Indian literature. I agree: a significant aim of Allen's discussion is to protest against "the kind of ceremonial investigations of *Ceremony* done by some researchers" that is intrusive, profane and disrespectful of powerful and sensitive tribal knowledge ("Special" 87). In "Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy" (1999) Paul Taylor engages with Allen's and Sequoyia's concerns about tribal secrecy in relation to *Ceremony*. Taylor holds the idea that cultural outsiders understand the Laguna traditions in *Ceremony* only as "features of the plot," not in terms of their real (and probably sacred) functions in the tribal culture (29). In this sense, Silko's deployment of traditional tribal material in non-tribal "storytelling" contexts does not give cultural outsiders power and authority in the actual uses of that traditional material. On the contrary, *Ceremony* re-conceals and re-sacralises Laguna cultural traditions that have been exposed to Euro-American influences (32). Taylor makes a good point here. Indeed, cultural insiders and cultural outsiders extract different meanings from one and the same cultural artefact. Besides, the literary environment of the novel invites the reading of cultural elements not necessarily in terms of their "true" cultural function but, indeed, in terms of their function as literary devices.

²⁰Shortly after the publication of *Ceremony* in 1979, Silko launches a more direct "old-time Indian attack" against "white ethnologists like Boas and Swanton," who routinely "intruded" into Native American communities to gather tribal material ("Old-Time" 211). The same article criticises writers, like Oliver La Farge and Gary Snyder, who received prestigious literary prizes for their attempts to write with "Indian" consciousness and sensibility, without a proper knowledge and understanding of Indian cultures ("Old-Time" 212-15). (Oliver La Farge's novel,

Laughing Boy, invokes Navajo life and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1929. Gary Snyder's *Turtle Island* won Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1974.)

²¹Silko establishes a similar connection between the mine and Pa'caya'nyi's story in *Storyteller* (1981) and in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today* (1996).

²²Piper points out that *Ceremony* was published in the same year in which "the Laguna tribe received a warning that the Rio Pagate, the main river that runs through the reservation" was contaminated with radioactive waste from the mine; it had similarly been revealed that buildings and roads that had been constructed with mining waste were radioactive ("Police Zones" 483). It is also worth emphasizing the fact that two years after the publication of *Ceremony*, in July 1979, "the worst nuclear accident in U.S. history" happened on Navajo lands in New Mexico; it was caused by the irresponsible management of the United Nuclear mining corporation (Venables 354, see also LaDuke and Churchill 114-15).

²³The contemporary expropriation of Indian lands and resources through the established US political and corporate mechanisms of power and control continues today: recent decisions by the Bush administration threaten to open many tribal sacred sites for commercial development; the government straightforwardly justifies relentless eco-violations there in the name of resolving the US "energy crisis." Good general commentary on the anti-tribal slant in the policies of the Bush administration appears in two recent articles in the journal of *Sierra*. In the November/December 2002 issue, which is dedicated to Native American Sacred Sites, Valerie Taliman (Navajo) and Winona LaDuke (Ojibwa) discuss how US federal decisions and

resource-extraction industries continue to violate and endanger tribal sacred sites and the practice of tribal religions, beliefs and ways of life.

²⁴The termination policies of the 1950s may have provided Silko with ample material to reflect upon the US colonial policies aimed at Americanising, urbanising and industrialising American Indians, and ultimately, at destroying them as tribal peoples.

²⁵As LaDuke and Churchill discuss, Anaconda's closing of the Jackpile mine in 1981 is a good illustration of economic-colonial dependency created by US colonialism: the closing of the mine "left the reservation's income earners not only jobless, but with skills not readily transferable to other forms of employment" (124).

²⁶LaDuke and Churchill comment that the costs for clean-up of the deserted mine and of the radioactive waste will cost the Laguna tribe "a sum larger than what it received in royalties from Anaconda [Corporation]." The critics continue: "Unlike Anaconda, the Laguna people cannot simply move away, leaving the mess behind" (124). The building and the roads on Laguna that Anaconda provided for the Laguna Indians at the time were also radioactive as the company "had used low grade uranium ore" in the constructions (125). I have not been able to find any information that suggests that the Jackpit mine has been decontaminated and/or that the Laguna people have been compensated for the severe health and ecological damages they have endured on their lands. (The US government passed a Radiation Exposure Compensation Act in 1990 but the act compensates only individual uranium miners.)

²⁷An early review of *Ceremony* – by Hayden Carruth for *Harper's* in June 1977 – has similarly pointed out that the novel is too optimistic and fails to address historic and political issues in American Indian-US relations. Kenneth Roemer has

also discussed the ending of *Ceremony*. His suggestion is that the hopeful and clear (though not simplistic) ending of the novel may be among the factors that have contributed to the popularity of the novel among mainstream readers and to its canonisation (“Silko’s Arroyos” 24-5). Roemer writes: “Certainly this type of ending would be a great relief to many readers. It relieves the dramatic tensions of the protagonist’s narrative and reassures the readers that, despite societal oppression and family tragedies, there are traditional forces of regeneration that can still help Indians to survive and survive beautifully”(25). However, Roemer also sees *Ceremony*’s ending as concerned with “cycles of balance and imbalance” (24), which characterise Laguna traditional thought. The ending, in other words, does not necessarily aim to obscure historical problems but acknowledges the enduring force and authority of tribal forms and experiences.

²⁸Alan Velie is another critic who has been interested in parallels between *Ceremony* and Western narrative forms (specifically the Grail narratives) and Zamir acknowledges Velie’s earlier analysis in an endnote (412, EN 29). Velie calls *Ceremony* a “Laguna grail story” (*Four* 105-121) and offers a brief discussion of Betonie as Gawain and of Tayo as Percival. However, there is a significant difference in Velie’s and Zamir’s discussions. Velie looks appreciatively on possible similarities between *Ceremony* and Grail narratives. For him such similarities attest to the fact that Leslie Marmon Silko is, to evoke the title of his critical collection, an “Indian literary master.” Evidently, Euro-American models of interpretation and evaluation of *Ceremony* dominate Velie’s analysis. Zamir, on the other side, finds the parallels between *Ceremony*, the Grail narratives and high modernist texts, like T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, deeply problematic. In his argument, they erode the anticolonial,

resistance potential of the novel. Jeff Karem also discusses similarities and differences in Velie's and Zamir's responses to *Ceremony* (22).

²⁹Major events in the development of tribal education since the late 1960s include the following: in 1968 the Navajo nation created the first tribal college; in 1972 the first six tribal colleges established the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC); in 1989 the *Tribal College Journal* was officially launched. Today, there are 34 tribal colleges and universities.

³⁰Zamir further discusses the contrast between Laguna narratives and Western (Grail) narratives as a contrast between gift (tribal) and sacrificial (western) narratives, which also represent contrasting socio-economic structures. Zamir argues that *Ceremony* comes closer to sacrificial rather than to gift narratives because, according to him, Silko makes Betonie's ceremony, Tayo's healing and, ultimately, the regeneration of the Laguna land, dependent on the human sacrifice of Harley. In order to complete the ceremony and the healing, Tayo has to witness Emo's torture and killing of Harley and to resist interfering and continuing the cycle of violence. According to Zamir, this narrative resolution "internalizes the very logic of capitalist sacrifice that Silko's work sets out to resist" (400) and aligns *Ceremony* with the narrative patterns of western culture (with the Grail Legend narratives as a prototypical example). I do not discuss this aspect of Zamir's argument because other critics have already contested it. In a recent article, for example, Jeff Karem suggests that what is central to the resolution of the novel (and to the regeneration of the land) is not Harley's sacrifice (Emo's action versus Tayo's inaction) but Tayo's active, spiritually and mentally aware decision of how to react to the violence he is witnessing at the mine. His choice is, as Karem puts it, a "rejection of all resolutions

rooted in violence, sacrificial or otherwise” (30). David L. Moore (1993) indirectly counters Zamir’s interpretation, as well. Although Moore does not discuss Harley’s sacrifice, he endorses Tayo’s choice in the novel because that choice moves Tayo outside the “antinomies of colonial dynamics, of Indian hating white hating Indian” (386, see also 389-90). I support Karem’s and Moore’s interpretations.

³¹Karem, as I pointed out earlier, studies disagreements between Silko and her editor at Viking Press, Richard Seaver, over *Ceremony*’s editing prior to publication. Karem points out how “Seaver’s battery of revisions suggested a discomfort with the globalising aspirations of Silko’s novel and a preference for a more contained narrative of reservation life” (21). Karem suggests that Silko’s struggle for her version of the novel represents an opposition to Euro-American (publisher) pressures to contain the significance of contemporary American Indian literature and the commentaries it makes only to local problems and scenes.

³²Silko uses and develops this strategy in *Almanac of the Dead* as well, where she insists that the whole history of the New World is contained in ancient Mayan prophecies.

³³Silko’s next novel, *Almanac of the Dead*, develops comprehensively the idea of global allegiances against US capitalist and imperial enterprise.

³⁴Robert Young has articulated a similar concern with the promotion of “hybridity” in postcolonial studies.

³⁵My argument here has benefited from conversations with Dr Roberta Hill.

³⁶Zamir’s discussion here resembles Robert Nelson’s analysis, which I discussed earlier. Like Nelson, Zamir compares the deployment of traditional tribal narratives in *Ceremony* and in an earlier anthropological text. Nelson praises

politically positive renditions of Laguna stories that *Ceremony* accomplishes in contrast with Boas's *Keresan Texts*, while Zamir points at politically "negative" transformation that *Ceremony* makes to the Navajo narratives in the novel. The latter's ethnographic pretext is Leland Wyman's *The Red Antway of the Navajo* (1965). (As Zamir notes (EN 35, 36), Robert Bell's early article, "Circular Design in *Ceremony*" (1979) has established the connection between *Ceremony*, the Coyote transformation and *The Red Antway of the Navajo* but has not offered a comprehensive comparative analysis.)

³⁷John Bierhorst's account in "The Night Chant: A Navajo Ceremonial" (1974), for instance, makes it clear that Navajo ceremonies involve the whole Navajo community.

Chapter 5

Voice Reclaiming, Sovereignty Discourse and Identity Politics

in *Tracks*

Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) is perhaps the novel most conducive to interpretations that seek to examine comparatively Silko's and Erdrich's literary politics. *Tracks*, the novel that succeeds *The Beet Queen* (1986), is Erdrich's most obviously political novel and has come to be seen as a response to Silko's accusations in "Here is an Odd Artifact for the Fairy-Tale Shelf" (1986) that Erdrich's fiction lacks political intent.¹ Like Silko's *Ceremony*, Erdrich's *Tracks* is a work informed by strong cultural-political and anticolonial agendas, whose interpretation calls for a combined use of cross-cultural and tribal-centred approaches.

Erdrich's creation of *Tracks* is not merely a response to external pressures about the subject matter and the political vision of her writing. The composition and publication history of *Tracks* reveals that Erdrich's interest in writing an emphatically political novel was not newly emerging in the mid-1980s but rather marks Erdrich's first attempt as a novelist about a decade earlier. Judging by information that Erdrich and the late Michael Dorris share in interviews, Erdrich must have composed the first draft of *Tracks* between the years 1978 and 1982, and had a manuscript of about 300 to 400 pages before the publication of *Love Medicine* in 1984. She then revised that manuscript after the publication of *The Beet Queen* (Grantham 12-13, Coltelli 29, Schumacher 177, Chavkin and Chavkin 223, 232, 238). *Tracks* precedes the previously published *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen* not only in terms of composition history but also in terms of narrative chronology, as it narrates the

earliest events in the trilogy. Accordingly, Michael Dorris, Erdrich's husband and collaborator at the time, emphasises in an interview with Laura Coltelli (1985) how *Tracks* is a "pre-quel" rather than a sequel to the earlier novels (28).

Erdrich's professional experience in the late 1970s may have some bearing on the strong political agenda of *Tracks*. In the summer of 1979 Erdrich became the editor of the Boston Indian Council newspaper, *The Circle*, and the articles from that time testify to Erdrich's engagement with American Indian socio-political and cultural concerns during the late 1970s and early 1980s.² The Council and its newspaper at the time clearly asserted American Indian treaty rights and self-determination, promoted Indian perspectives (on reservations and in urban centres), offered support with health, social, family and legal issues and engaged in contemporary Indian political and legal activities (such as AIM support, AIM walk rallies and lobbying for the Religious Freedom Act). Erdrich's work for *The Circle* and her involvement with urban Indian communities and with American Indian political and cultural activism at the time must have provided a formative influence for her development as a writer. Erdrich confirms, in a 1993 interview with Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin, how her experience as an editor of *The Circle* helped her feel "assurance about telling what [she] needed to tell" (235).³ Erdrich's editorial work for the Boston Indian Council newspaper brought her closer to American Indian political struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, and the strong political intent of *Tracks* reflects Erdrich's understanding and support of those struggles.

It may also be the case that the socio-political stagnation of the mid-1980s provided an additional impetus for Erdrich's final revision and publication of *Tracks* in 1988. Both Erdrich and Dorris express concerns in their interviews from the mid-1980s – for instance, with Hertha Dawn Wong in 1986 (33) and with Sharon White

and Glenda Burnside in 1988 (113-14) – that the political climate of the 1980s neutralised many of the positive political and social achievements of the previous decade; Reagan presidency and administration (1980-1988) was particularly damaging for American Indian people, because it cut large amounts of money from Indian welfare, health and legal funds.⁴ With the US government failing its “Indian” promises yet again, Erdrich’s revisiting and reassessment in *Tracks* of one of the most devastating and deceitful incidents in US Indian history – the Allotment Act of 1887 and its effects on the Ojibwa people through the early 1920s – acquires an even greater political significance.

Like *Ceremony*, *Tracks* develops a forceful critique of US colonisation of American Indian peoples through two interconnected discourses: 1) Cross-cultural discourse, which challenges colonial representations of “Indianness,” colonial hierarchies of value and difference, and the psychological colonisation they have created; 2) Tribal sovereignty discourse, which exposes and denounces the dispossession of the Anishinabe tribe through treaty violations, and especially through the Allotment Act, and demands a settlement of those violations through reassertion of the Anishinabe tribe’s ongoing sovereign rights.

Denouncing the Discourse of the Colonisers: Nanapush and Pauline as Political Opponents

Erdrich uses a peculiar and very effective structuring and thematic technique in *Tracks*: she alternates and opposes the stories of two disparate narrators, Nanapush and Pauline. This narrative strategy overtly connects the novel to cross-cultural (postcolonial and postmodern) politics of voice reclaiming and of appropriation and

subversion of colonial discourses. While both narrators tell vivid and gripping stories, their focus, purpose and narrative styles differ widely, and Erdrich makes the differences between the two first person narratives strongly historicised and politicised. Nanapush's stories may often be reflective and inter-subjective, yet they remain deeply connected to Anishinabe ethos, consciousness and expressive modes: they assert implicitly indigenous Anishinabe philosophies, knowledges and identities. Nanapush's is clearly, and literary, the voice of the Anishinabe people's continuance and resistance to colonisation. Pauline's account and self-awareness, on the other hand, increasingly move away from tribal perspectives, people and narrative models. Like Rocky in *Ceremony*, Pauline becomes the mentally colonised subject who develops an inferiority complex about her Indian identity and heritage, rejects them violently and seeks total assimilation into the dominant culture.

Through the voice of Nanapush, Erdrich opens *Tracks* in a way comparable to Silko's opening of *Ceremony* with Ts'its'tsi'nako's story: the two introductory strategies work to intrude upon and reject Euro-American individualistic and written modes of expression, and to assert the authority of tribal narrative and cognitive models. When Nanapush opens the novel, he represents his personal history as evolving from and interwoven with that of his people: the pronoun "we" rather than "I" dominates his account (*Tracks* 1)⁵; he calls the ancient name of his people, the Anishinabe, almost immediately (*T* 1), while delaying the reference to himself by personal name (*T* 2, 32). He always identifies himself and his people as Anishinabe rather than as Chippewa. The former name affirms Anishinabe indigenous identities and cultures, as it is the tribe's name in the old tribal language and is commonly translated as "original men." "Chippewa," in contrast, is the anglicised tribal name, which the US government (and Pauline) like to use.⁶ Erdrich also maintains the

impression that Nanapush's story is dialogical and unmediated, delivered in the manner of the oral tradition: Nanapush speaks directly to Lulu, his adopted daughter and a tribal relative (*T* 1), and his consecutive sections in the novel are interspersed with affectionate words addressed at Lulu that underscore the unmediated oral and familial nature of his narrative (*T* 32, 57, 116, 226). The repetitions and parallels in the sentence structure (*T* 1, 2), the direct forms of address that Nanapush uses ("granddaughter," "my girl"), the one-sentence paragraphs, the abundance of linking words and conjunctions – all of which are very conspicuous in the first few pages of Nanapush's story – evoke the form, stream and pauses of an oral traditional narrative. Nanapush's selection of words – for instance, the use of "spotted sickness" instead of smallpox or measles, and the positioning of historical events in relation to cardinal directions and names used by the Anishinabe (*T* 1) – has a vernacular quality and expresses a subtle denial of colonial discursive control over meaning and communication. These oralised and Indianised features of Nanapush's "speech" unsettle the authority of Euro-American cognitive and expressive models, and, as Nancy Peterson summarises, "[signal] the need for indigenous peoples to tell their own stories and their own histories" ("History" 181).

In other words, *Tracks*, like *Ceremony*, establishes itself from the onset as a "resistant," counter-discursive text that, as Owens argues in the language of orthodox postcolonial theory, is capable of "appropriating the master discourse [and of] abrogating its authority" (*Mixedblood* 4). The narrative strategies that both Silko and Erdrich introduce at the very beginning of their novels seek to transform the English language and the Euro-American literary forms in a manner that serves the purposes of, in Owens's words again, a "thoroughly 'Indian' story and discourse" (*Mixedblood* 69).

Like *Ceremony*, *Tracks* represents the act of storytelling – of having Indian voices and perspectives heard and reasserted – as essential to tribal survival and to tribal anticolonial resistance. Tayo and the Laguna lands and people in *Ceremony* survive and are restored to health through the power of ancient Laguna and Navajo stories, which Tayo re-learns and re-lives with Betonie’s help. Likewise, *Tracks* depicts the vigour of tribal stories, and Nanapush’s capacity to “activate” and keep them alive, as curative and vital to the Anishinabe people’s life, disrupted by colonialism. Nanapush’s stories seek to pull Lulu – his audience and symbol of Anishinabe youth – emotionally and intellectually towards a tribal “centre.” The stories transmit familial and tribal histories and knowledges to Lulu, and thus establish continuity between tribal-familial past and the young generation, and continue tribal memories and traditions. By passing on to Lulu tribal memories, understandings and ethics, Nanapush aims to strengthen her sense of tribal kinship and responsibilities and to help her build an understanding of herself as a tribal person. Accordingly, Nanapush’s account pursues the anticolonial and anti-assimilationist purpose of dissuading Lulu from marrying into the Morrissey family. The Morrissey, as readers and Lulu learn from Nanapush, are “government Indians” eager to turn their backs on traditional ways for their own personal gains. By discouraging Lulu from marrying into that family, the narrative teaches Lulu to resist assimilation and colonial policies, and to continue her life as a tribal person. Most memorably, Nanapush’s storytelling powers combine with his healing abilities and physically save Lulu, when her feet are frostbitten. Nanapush’s traditional stories and chants guard off the doctor’s recommended amputation – which would have eventually killed a lively “butterfly” child like Lulu (*T* 166-69) – by establishing a “string” of words that pull her away from the sickness and restore her back to health

(*T* 167). Lulu's rescue from both death and immobility has a great symbolic significance in the novel because she represents the future generation of the Anishinabe, to whom and for whom Nanapush is telling his and the tribe's hi/story. Her survival and future as a tribal person, achieved through Nanapush's storytelling, mean that the tribe will survive and prevail, despite all adversities.

Nanapush's voice opposes colonisation, reasserts tribal perspectives and seeks to restore tribal cohesiveness also because it tells the story of Lulu's mother, Fleur. Fleur is the most traditional among the Anishinabe and incarnates the ancient power of tribal knowledges and beliefs. She is also the character most severely affected and devastated by the loss of tribal lands through the US government's machinations, and she eventually has to leave the reservation. Nanapush's story communicates to Lulu the mythic powers that Fleur commanded, and thus re-asserts the real authority and vitality of Anishinabe spiritual beliefs. The stories also ask Lulu to forgive Fleur for leaving Lulu and the reservation behind. Nanapush demands that Lulu understand her mother's decision within the context of colonisation that has weakened Fleur's emotional and physical powers (*T* 218-19). Fleur has made a mistake and even if Lulu does not forgive her, Nanapush's tribal histories and chronicles of colonisation teach Lulu, and the Anishinabe youth, historical and political awareness.⁷ By seeking to reconcile Lulu and Fleur, the story seeks to bring Anishinabe families and the whole tribe together, and to heal tribal dissipation and assimilation that colonial policies have effected and aimed to perpetuate.

The healing and the restoration of tribal cohesiveness and of strong tribal identity that Nanapush wants to achieve are necessitated by colonial damages. The latter have produced psychologically colonised subjects like Pauline, the second

narrator of *Tracks*. In her rejection and open hatred of her Indian self and in her fierce and crazed embrace of colonial discourses and Catholicism, Pauline evokes, combines and surpasses the internalised colonialism of Rocky, Auntie, Emo and Helen Jean in *Ceremony*. When Pauline starts her narrative, one of the first things that she relates about herself is her desire to turn white. Comparably to Nanapush, Pauline evokes her ancestry but only to justify her rejection of her Indian identity, a purpose markedly contrary to Nanapush's. She mentions her familial connections: "we [the Puyats] were mixed-bloods" and then concludes: "I wanted to be like my grandfather, pure Canadian" (*T* 14). Pauline's desire to be white is a symptom of the mental colonisation that Fanon describes: it replicates the discourse of the colonisers and their ways of thinking about the Indians. Pauline confirms: "I saw the world through the eyes of the world outside us" (*T* 14). Judging herself and "the Indians" through the eyes of the colonisers, Pauline is full of shame and disdain for her Indian identity and cultural backgrounds. Like Rocky, who refuses to participate in the deer ritual out of an internalised shame for the supposed inferiority of tribal cultural and spiritual beliefs (*C* 50-52), Pauline "would not bead" and "would not speak [the Anishinabe] language" (*T* 14). Her perceptions invoke the white culture's favoured concept of Indians as the backward, uncivilised and unworthy "other." Pauline's internalised Indian loathing reflects on her perception of herself as a woman: "I was [...] so poor-looking I was invisible [...] to the men [...] a skinny, big-nosed girl with staring eyes" (*T* 15-16). Comparably to Helen-Jean in *Ceremony*, who is anxious to improve her deplorable Indian looks with white-girls' lipstick and hairstyle, Pauline dreams of possessing white femininity, wishing she "owned a pair of shoes like those that passed on the feet of white girls" (*T* 15). From the very beginning of her narrative, therefore, Pauline emerges as the racially and sexually colonised Indian.

The colonisation of the mind, as I have discussed in relation to Rocky, produces the aspiration in the minds of the colonised to imitate the white culture in hope that they may become successful and meaningful by its standards. Resembling Rocky, who “was always going to win” (C 51) as long as “the reservation wasn’t one of [the places]” where he would live (C 77), Pauline asserts: “I was made for better” and insists on being sent to “the white town” (T 14). Pauline did not “learn the lace making trade from the nuns” in Argus, as she had aspired, but instead “swept the floors in a butcher shop” (T 14). Her experience evokes that of Helen-Jean in *Ceremony* who, aspiring (and trained) for a secretarial job, is only tolerated as a cleaner in the white world (C 162). Both experiences reflect the dominant culture’s view of Indians as deficient and unworthy: this is the very view that Pauline and Helen-Jean (as well as Rocky) simultaneously internalise and seek to exorcise. The contrast between Pauline’s association of the white town with refinement and culture (“the lace trade”) and the crude reality of the butcher shop provides an ironic perspective on the favoured colonial distinction between white and Indian societies along the “civilised white” and the “savage Indian” dichotomy. The butcher store is the place where the three white men rape Fleur; it also evokes meat excess from the slaughtered animals, at times when the Anishinabe on the reservation die of starvation. Thus the symbolism of the butcher store in Argus, comparably to the uranium mine in *Ceremony*, exposes the violence of US colonialism against the indigenous people, women and nature (animals).⁸ Pauline does not recognise that violence but internalises it, and turns it towards herself and her people. Emo’s violence in *Ceremony*, as I discussed, can be interpreted along similar lines.

Erdrich uses the theme of “return” to enhance the difference between Pauline’s and Nanapush’s perspectives. In contrast to Nanapush (as well as to Fleur and Lulu), whose return to the reservation from the “white town” represent a return to tribal identity and ethos, Pauline returns from Argus to a life with the most acculturated family in the community, the Morrissey. For a second time in her account she seeks to reject her connection to her Indian ancestry: “I do believe I was kin to Bernadette Morrissey” (*T* 64), she claims, eager to associate with Bernadette’s adopted white ways, education and material wealth. That wealth, Pauline recognises appreciatively, is “from acquiring allotments that many old Chippewa did not know how to keep” (*T* 63). Hence, Pauline’s siding with the Morrissey also involves an indirect approval of the Allotment policy and of US colonisation. Pauline’s reference to the Ojibwa with their government name “Chippewa” is a further indication of her internalisation and support of colonial discourse.

Pauline’s relation to Fleur is another element of characterisation in *Tracks* that exposes Pauline’s colonised psychology. After Pauline returns from Argus, she is tormented by memories of Fleur’s rape by the white men in the butcher store and of the men’s subsequent freezing to death in the meat locker (*T* 62). A passive witness of both the rape and the men’s freezing, Pauline has developed an accomplice’s sense of guilt, which concurs with her Indian- and self-loathing and foreshadows her subsequent obsession with purging through fanatic Catholicism.⁹ Whereas Nanapush’s narrative focuses on Fleur to reinforce her ancestral knowledges and powers and to expose wrongs of colonisation, Pauline seeks to overlay and suppress Fleur’s authority and to validate colonisation. She repeatedly dreams of Fleur, yet “not as she was on the reservation, living in the woods,” but as the woman who the

white butchers in Argus “beat [...], entered and rode” (*T* 65). Critics have suggested that Fleur’s rape can be read as symbolic of the colonial culture’s brutal assault on Ojibwa lands and ways (Armstrong 17). However, Pauline’s recurrent imagining and even re-living of Fleur’s rape – “I felt all,” she claims (*T* 66) – do not represent a form of empathy with Fleur or a protest against colonial and sexual violence. On the contrary, Pauline understands Fleur’s rape and her own tormented “re-living” of it as a deserved punishment for who they are as Indian women. This interpretation is consistent with Pauline’s racial self-hatred, repressed sexuality and loathing for her body. Such reading is also supported by the fact that, at some later point, Pauline starts to insist that she, her arms, were responsible for locking the rapists in the freezer – “not Russell’s and not Fleur’s” (*T* 66). Pauline does not perceive her imagined act as a form of opposition to or a redressing of the cruelty against Fleur (and Anishinabe ways), but as mortal sin: “For that reason,” Pauline infers, “at the Judgment, it would be my soul sacrificed, my poor body turned on the devil’s wheel” (*T* 66). Pauline’s imagining of the events within colonial and Catholic frameworks – as Ojibwa religious codes do not conceptualise afterlife punishment – both justify colonial violence and show willingness to pardon it or to suffer its consequences. By insisting that she herself is the one who revenged and the one who would be punished, Pauline also wants to establish control over Fleur’s powers and over Fleur’s fierce resistance to colonisation. That idea reverberates in Pauline’s description of Fleur as “the hinge.” When Pauline depicts Fleur as “the one who closed [...] or swung open” the door between the people and the Ojibwa lake spirit(s), Pauline simultaneously superimposes her own role as a “doorway” to Catholicism: “there would be [...] another door. And it would be Pauline who opened it, same as she closed the Argus

lockers. Not Fleur Pillager” (*T* 139). Pauline, in short, turns to fanatic Catholicism as a means to overpower Fleur and to invalidate her resistance to colonisation.¹⁰

As Pauline retreats into the Catholic convent, she articulates her third and most radical withdrawal from her Indian family and community: “I was an orphan and my parents had died in grace” (*T* 137). Initially Pauline associated herself with her “half-white” mother and “pure Canadian” grandfather, then with a community member, Bernadette Morrissey, and her white ways. The final claim to orphan-hood signifies Pauline’s utter and intentional disassociation from any Indian familial or communal ties. A few moments later Pauline fortifies that denunciation: “‘The Indians,’ I said now, ‘them’” (*T* 138). All Pauline’s relatives have indeed died from the illness and starvation brought by colonisation, but Pauline asserts that they died “in grace” (*T* 137). Hers is language and thinking that validate colonisation and present its deadly and cruel consequences as ennobling and dignifying. In line with Fanon’s theory of the psychologically colonised subject, Pauline’s total internalisation of the colonial perspective, as Susan Friedman points out (112-15), completes the mental erasure of her Indian racial identity. “Despite my deceptive feature,” Pauline maintains in the convent, “I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white” (*T* 137). The particular word that expresses Pauline’s deep desire to “pass” sounds like “holy” and the phonic quality of the word is important as Pauline imagines hearing the Christian god talking to her. By suggesting that Pauline identifies whiteness with holiness, Erdrich indicates – like Silko in her portrayal of Auntie – how colonial and racial discourses have operated in the sphere of spiritual beliefs as well. As a religion co-opted by colonialism, Catholicism has aimed to assert its spiritual and moral superiority over tribal spiritual traditions. Although Pauline cannot deny the power of

tribal spiritual beings (and particularly of Misshipeshu), she sees those spiritual beings solely as evil incarnations of the Devil. Pauline's pursuit of whiteness and Catholicism consequently involves her obsession with purification from the supposed shameful and sinful ways of Indians and their beliefs. "They could starve and fornicate, expose their young for dogs and crows, worship the bones of animals and the brown liquor in a jar," establishes Pauline and extends the contrast: "I would have none of it. I would be chosen, His own, wiped clean" (*T* 196). Pauline thus validates the colonising notion that Indians are heathens, whose life and spiritual traditions are foul and lack moral depth. The severe repressions and self-mortifications that Pauline practices after her conversion represent her attempt to exorcise the sins of her "former" Indian body: her tormenting sexual desires, her intercourses with Napoleon, her unwanted pregnancy. Pauline's Catholicism is another feature that sets her up as an opposite to Nanapush, who presents and embodies tribal spiritual traditions as sources of power, balance and of emotional wealth and comfort. The contrast between Pauline's fanatic and masochistic practice of the Catholic religion and Nanapush's humorous and life-affirming ways once again lays bare and confronts the American colonial imaging of "white" cultures as civilised and of "Indian" cultures as savage.

Erdrich defines Nanapush and Pauline as contesting narrators primarily through their accounts of colonisation and its repercussions. Nanapush defines colonisation as a destructive force for the community. His narratives definitively link the dwindling of the Anishinabe, the land loss and the factions among the community to US colonial policies. His is not an account about the "Vanishing Indian" but about the terrible "cost" of colonisation for American Indian peoples. In contrast, Pauline inscribes the illness and death, the starvation and the social ills on the reservation as

indicative of Indian's "natural" and inevitable doom. Early on in her account Pauline justifies her desire to go to the white town with the assertion that "to hang back is to perish" (*T* 14). She expresses and perpetuates the myth of the "doomed Indian" that the white culture has most commonly resorted to in order to justify the colonisation of the Indians and the taking of their land: "Our lord," Pauline muses, "had obviously made the whites more shrewd, as they grew in number, all around [...] while the Indians receded and coughed to death and drank" (*T* 139). Pauline's words here support the Puritan notion of predestination as the explanation of white success and Indian failure. The deadly coughing and drinking among Indians are not ills inflicted by white culture, in her view, but simply proofs of Indians' physical and moral inferiority. In Pauline's perspective, it is because of their "natural" failures, not because of colonisation, that Indians are destined to vanish and give way to a superior and nobler race.

Accordingly, unlike Nanapush, who is aiming to recall and pass on the story of tribal past and ways, Pauline is actively erasing the memories of her past, family, and "former" Indian self. She does not address her narrative to a specific and direct recipient, as Nanapush does. Her story becomes increasingly self-centred, introverted and messianic. It is meaningful that Pauline's narrative style changes with her growing alienation from indigenous sources of identity. Initially her story has a somewhat communal quality and shares some characteristics with Nanapush's voice: Pauline identifies with the community and their gossip and uses the communal "we" in her account of events. (Students, for example, have said that they did not immediately recognise the change of narrative voices in the first few sections of the novel.) As Pauline moves away from the community and into fanatic Catholicism, her

narrative style changes accordingly: her stories become less direct and event-based; they focus on her own mental and psychological states and increasingly resemble a western novelistic account rather than a communal narrative or gossip. Thus Pauline's narrative "voice" further characterises her as Nanapush's opposite. The contest of stories and perspectives that Pauline and Nanapush articulate are the respective stories of colonisation and decolonisation.

Pauline's support and perpetuation of the colonial myth of the vanishing Indian is evident in her self-appointed function as an agent of death for the Indians. She learns from Bernadette how to lay the dead in a Catholic manner and starts "administering" that knowledge. Witnessing the death of an Indian schoolmate, Mary Pepewas, Pauline recounts: "Perhaps, hand over hand, I could have drawn her back to shore [of life], but I saw very clearly that she wanted to be gone. I understood that. That is why I put my fingers in the air between us, and I cut where the rope was frayed down to string" (*T* 68).¹¹ Her words support the notion that Indians are dying by choice and once again suggest that colonisation has nothing to do with Indians' unfortunate "fate." Pauline takes up the role of a missionary of Indians death, eager to gather for Christ the souls of dead Indians (*T* 140). She is responsible for several deaths in the novel. She murders her lover Napoleon (*T* 202-3), makes cruel attempts to abort her child and then to prevent live delivery (*T* 131, 135). Her passivity causes the death of Fleur's second baby (*T* 156-8), and she impedes the healing ceremony that Moses and Nanapush prepare for Fleur (*T* 189-90). Pauline, in short, is a narrator who seeks to sustain and make happen the colonial myth of Indians as a dying-off race. Her fascination with Indians' death sets her in sharp contrast with the life-saviour and healer Nanapush, and unambiguously presents colonisation as deadly.

Significantly, Pauline ends her narrative with the acceptance – “from Superior’s hand” – of a new name for herself, “Leopolda” (*T* 205). Pauline’s acceptance of a nun’s name and identity functions in the novel as an overarching symbol of her renunciation of her Indian self, of her justification of white structures of power and control, and of her desire to assimilate into them. It is interesting that her former name, Pauline, already had Christian connotations: like St Paul, Pauline thinks of herself as a God’s messenger (Friedman 114).¹² This name, nonetheless, also connects her to her former Indian self that she wants to abandon, so she “asks for the grace [...] to leave Pauline behind” (*T* 205). Yet, Pauline’s new name seems to extend her connections to her Indian past: the name “Leopolda,” as Victoria Brehm discusses in “The Metamorphoses of an Ojibwa *Manido*” (1996), evokes the powerful Anishinabe manitou Misshepesu, which is also known as the “underwater lion.” By assuming a similar name, however, Pauline is not aiming to covertly reinstate the power of tribal spiritual beliefs. On the contrary, her new name reflects her conviction that she has destroyed Misshepesu – when she strangled her lover, Napoleon, by the lake (*T* 204) – so that now she feels entitled to take his name (Brehm 695). Thus Pauline’s new name, Leopolda, aims to assert her much desired victory over indigenous identity, knowledge and spiritual beliefs.¹³

Pauline’s change of her name at the end of her account evokes an episode from the beginning of Nanapush’s narrative: Nanapush talks about having changed the name of a Pillager child into Moses – an unmistakably Biblical name – in order to delude death inflicted by colonisation (*T* 35-36). The contrast between the reasons for which Nanapush and Pauline resort to name changes may be read as another example of the battle between anticolonial and colonising discourses. By naming a Pillager

child Moses, Nanapush saves him – like Lulu – from dying. The ideological significance of his act is that it asserts how tribal identities and ways can persist and oppose both colonial forces and colonial discourses that seek to effect tribal destruction and assimilation. The symbolism of Nanapush’s own name and behaviour connects Nanapush to the trickster Naanabozho and assumes a counter-colonial function. Naanabozho is a central figure of the Ojibwa origin stories, associated with the Ojibwa most important social and cultural practices, and with healing (Vecsey 85-98). Like his namesake, Nanapush is a life-giver, a healer and helper. Naanabozho, as Kate McCafferty highlights, brought the Ojibwa their language and, accordingly, Nanapush is an accomplished storyteller and “a master of verbal medicine” (739). Finally, Naanabozho is the giver of the Grand Medicine Society (midewiwin) that, as Victoria Brehm explains, evolved “as a medicine rite designed to purge the Ojibwa society of the ills, both physical and psychological, associated with European contact” (691). Nanapush similarly, as I have pointed out, has the political function of asserting tribal perspectives and opposing “the ills” of Euro-American colonialism. The name symbolism that surrounds Nanapush re-inscribes and revitalises the authority of Anishinabe views, and maintains that Anishinabe people can restore themselves to health, vitality and power.

Pauline’s embracing of a new name, on the other side, validates missionary Catholicism as one of the forces of colonisation. The new name – like Rocky’s and Emo’s adoption of Euro-American names and identities in *Ceremony* (C 223, 58) – signals Pauline’s erasure of her Indian self and seeks to contain the “underwater lion” and the tribal spiritual beliefs that it evokes. Pauline’s name change symbolically

confirms her view that tribal identities and ways are on the way to extinction. She invokes that idea just before she adopts her new name:

The land will be sold and divided. Fleur's cabin will tumble into the ground and be covered by leaves. The place will be haunted I suppose, but no one will have ears sharp enough to hear the Pillagers' low voices, or the vision to see their still shadows. The trembling old fools with their conjuring tricks will die off and the young, like Lulu and Nector, will return from the government schools blinded and defeated. (*T* 204-5)

It is clear that at the end of her narrative Pauline imagines and welcomes a pending destruction and assimilation of the Anishinabe by both natural forces and colonial policies, such as the Allotment Act and the Indian boarding school. As Sheila Hassell Hughes points out, "Pauline speaks as a would-be prophet, ushering in the terrible transformation for which she proudly hopes" (102).

It is Pauline's colonised vision that Nanapush's narrative both exposes and resists. Through Nanapush's account, Erdrich offers a historical perspective on the real and insidious threats that colonisation has posed to tribal existence, lifestyle, community and lands. Nanapush's version of the same events that constitute Pauline's narrative chronicles and explains how the sickness and the dissipation of the Anishinabe are not natural and pre-destined phenomena, but a material consequence of colonisation. Opening his narrative, Nanapush recounts the two most devastating sicknesses he remembers from about fifty years ago: the "spotted sickness" (*T* 1) and "the consumption" (*T* 2). Both phrases evoke the policies of physical and cultural extermination that have characterised the Euro-American colonisation of American

Indian tribes. By naming the “spotted sickness” as a cause for tribal devastation, Nanapush keeps the memory of how indigenous populations were decimated by European diseases for which they did not have immunity. Significantly, the deadly spread of those diseases, particularly the “spotted sickness” (smallpox), was not merely “natural” but was used against Indian tribes as a biological warfare and as a means of colonisation and genocide.¹⁴ Nanapush’s memory of the smallpox epidemic is historically correct. From 1869 to 1870 – the time period Nanapush recalls at the beginning of his story – North Dakota was “afflicted with outbreaks of smallpox,” as Nancy Peterson points out (“History” 179).¹⁵ The “new sickness” that Nanapush further recalls – “the consumption, it was called by young Father Damien” (*T* 2) – is spread by contact with non-Natives and is equally devastating. Kathleen Brogan writes that tuberculosis was “the most deadly of diseases threatening Native American populations, with mortality rates far higher than among Euro-American communities” (39). Brogan accurately suggests that the reference to tuberculosis by the name of consumption (a popular 19th-century name) and the fact that that name is delivered by a white person in the novel “carry a figurative burden” and “[point] to the eating away of Chippewa culture through [white] disease, loss of land, and assimilation” (45). The state of Anishinabe “sickness,” as Nanapush correctly recognises in contrast to Pauline, is a consequence of colonial, rather than natural, forces of destruction.

Through Nanapush, Erdrich also confronts the dominant culture’s perception, expressed in Pauline’s account, that tribal devastation is the result of natural “loss” of food resources and/or of Indian laziness. The food scarcity that Nanapush dwells on at the opening of his narrative – “the last buffalo hunt,” “the last bear shot,” “the last beaver [trapped]” (*T* 2) – is a direct result of colonisation, and the novel gradually

unfolds that connection. While winter hungers had always been a part of Ojibwa life, colonisation brought unprecedented and dire starvation. In the historical time reflected in the novel policies of starvation were a part of US strategies for Indians tribes' subjugation. The US government pursued deliberate policies of starvation particularly with respect to the Plains Indians: whites killed buffalo intentionally in the implementation of a government tactic intended to force Indians into reservations; in the 1880s the buffalo, as Nanapush remembers, was exterminated and the Plains Indians lost a major food resource. Ojibwa lands and traditional lifestyles have furthermore been severely afflicted by US colonial land policies in the 19th century. The latter, consequently, is yet another major force in the near colonial destruction of the Ojibwa, as Nanapush recounts in *Tracks*. The 1880s – the period of time that Nanapush defines indirectly at the beginning of his narrative – is a period during which the US government had started restricting the Ojibwa tribe to reservation lands in a manner that severely reduced tribal hunting grounds and means for sustenance and livelihood (Stanley Murray 24). The loss of land led directly to starvation and impoverishment on the reservation. (Murray indicates that 151 people there died of starvation in the winter of 1886-1887 (24).) Nanapush, as I shall elaborate later on in the chapter, also places Anishinabe hardship in the context of US government's policies of land fragmentation and theft through the Allotment Act in 1887, the divisions in the tribe that the Act created, and the dissipation and alienation of tribal youth through the Indian boarding school. My point, once again, is that Nanapush's chronicle historicises and represents Anishinabe dire circumstances as consequences of US colonisation.

Hence, the overarching purpose of Nanapush's narrative as a counter-discourse is, first, to offer a historically accurate memory and account of colonisation, and to denounce its justification and "naturalisation" in the colonial discourse rehearsed by Pauline. Secondly, Nanapush counteracts the threats and predictions of tribal extinction that US colonial discourse articulates and that Pauline's voice reaffirms. His overall chronicle and, particularly, his "vision" for the tribe's future at the end of the novel overwrite and turn the colonial discourse around. In Nanapush's concluding narrative Lulu returns from the boarding school and her return fights off Pauline's grim and smug prophecy of inevitable tribal extinction. Nanapush connects Lulu's coming back to Fleur in a number of ways and thus establishes continuity between tribal sources of meaning, spirituality and empowerment, symbolised by Fleur, and the present and future tribal descendants, represented by Lulu. He asserts a direct similarity between Lulu and Fleur: "your grin was bold as your mother's" (*T* 226). Stepping off the bus, Lulu rushed towards Nanapush and Margaret and they, "like creaking oaks, held on, braced [themselves] together in the fierce dry wind" (*T* 226). This final image in the novel, as Kathleen Brogan points out (53), recalls the powerful wind that Fleur raised previously in acts of defiance against the violation of her body in Argus (*T* 28) and of her land on the reservation (*T* 222). The story that prevails at the end of *Tracks* is Nanapush's and it asserts the continuance of tribal cultures and peoples and their "fierce" anticolonial resolve. Erdrich gives Nanapush the final word in *Tracks* and thus supplants and denounces Pauline's narrative of colonisation.

Readers can find conformation of Nanapush's "victory" in the lives of Lulu and of Marie (Pauline's abandoned daughter) as they continue in *Love Medicine*, the

next novel in narrative chronology of Erdrich's sequel. Lulu and Marie attest to the validity of Nanapush's vision – not of Pauline's – about the future of the tribe. Both women have been disconnected from their tribal backgrounds and heritage, as Pauline has envisioned in *Tracks*, but they turn into mature tribal persons, as Nanapush has affirmed. Even more, one of "Lulu's boys" in *Love Medicine*, Gary Nanapush, is a renowned Indian activist, associated with the American Indian Movement. The "fate" of Lulu and Marie, as it evolves in the sequel, confirms the political growth of Ojibwa people and the continuing political struggle of native peoples against assimilation and colonisation.

To sum up, Erdrich ostensibly sets up Pauline and Nanapush as contesting narrators in *Tracks*. They both present accounts of Anishinabe history but those accounts personify opposing political attitudes towards tribal identity and status, towards tribal past and colonial history, and towards tribal future. Both in its content and its form Nanapush's narrative reasserts indigenous identity, tribal practices and knowledges and, concurrently, exposes and counters colonisation and acculturation. In contrast, the content and the form of Pauline's sections in the novel express an ostensible rejection of all things Indian and, at the same time, an adoption and perpetuation of colonialism. Erdrich communicates clearly that Nanapush prevails in the contest of narratives. He is the narrator who opens and closes the novel and thus has a much greater narrative authority and power than Pauline. Because his narrative has a specific living recipient, it acquires a more active and valid social function than Pauline's. Nanapush is also a far more likeable and honourable narrator than Pauline.¹⁶ His thoughtful and life-affirming accounts and ways prevail over Pauline's tribal- and self-denial, over her mortification and obsession with death, over her

racial, sexual and religious psychopathologies. From a postcolonial interpretative perspective, the contest between Pauline's and Nanapush's stories represents unmistakably the ideological contest between colonising and counter-colonial discourses. Nanapush "deligitimates" the validity of Pauline's colonised perspective in *Tracks* and his discursive power signifies American Indians' recuperation of voice and "talking back" against Euro-American representations and discourses of Indianness.

The discursive battle between Nanapush and Pauline in *Tracks* is also a battle between "hybridity" and "purity" discourses. Nanapush's perspective, like Betonie's in *Ceremony*, affirms the healing and liberating potential of hybridity: the ability to negotiate cross-cultural knowledges and conditions created by colonisation, and to use them for counter-colonial purposes. In contrast, Pauline's colonised perspective is marked by obsession with racial and cultural purity and with the hierarchies of value that the colonial and racial "fear of contamination" creates and perpetuates. Her psychological instability and mortifying manias result from and mirror the detrimental effects of this essentialist and dichotomised thinking.

As a "bridger" of Anishinabe and Euro-American knowledges and practices in *Tracks*, Nanapush virtually "writes back" against colonial discourses and symbolises the counter-discursive objectives of Erdrich's own writing practice. Early on in the novel Nanapush uses his knowledge of the English language and writing to put his name down and to claim Lulu as his daughter (*T* 61). This "writing" act, as we learn towards the end of the novel, allows Nanapush to "reclaim" Lulu from the Indian boarding school and to return her back home, on the reservation (*T* 225). By claiming Lulu back, Nanapush ensures that she will mature among tribal relatives like him and Margaret. The idea that the novel supports is that their love, teaching and

transmission of meaningful and life-affirming tribal ways of being in the world will fight off the alienation, bitterness and rejection of tribal self that the boarding school experience is known to have produced in Native children. Nanapush asserted the reliability of that prospect for Lulu earlier in the novel by affirming how “once [tribal youth] live in our lives and speak our language, they slowly seem to become like us” (*T* 167). The novel’s concluding suggestion is that – thanks to Nanapush’s writing act – Lulu will be able to recover from the alienation inflicted by the boarding school and by the experience of colonisation, in general.

Nanapush’s counter-colonial power and ability to reclaim tribal identities and perspectives draw on the hybrid legacies of colonisation. Like Betonie and Tayo in *Ceremony*, like Lulu in *Tracks*, and like many “non-fictional” Indian persons, Nanapush was educated in a “white” school and had to learn the English language and discursive conventions of the dominant culture. As he tells Lulu, he “had a Jesuit education in the halls of Saint John” and could speak and write “good English” (*T* 33). Yet, appalled by the deception and ruthlessness of US colonisation and erasure of Native identities and cultures, Nanapush, at first, “ran back to the woods and forgot all [his] prayers” (*T* 33). By the end of the novel, however, Nanapush has realised and embraced the positive potential of his mixed – tribal and colonial – knowledge and position. The English language and writing that he had to learn and that he had originally rejected as mechanisms of colonisation, become the tools that enable Lulu’s return and allow Nanapush a “new way of wielding influence [through] leading others with a pen and piece of paper” (*T* 209). Nanapush’s concluding act of “produc[ing] papers” (*T* 225) affirms and regenerates tribal traditions and identities through the appropriation of the “colonisers’ tools,” and his success can be read as an analogy for Erdrich’s own writing. Through Nanapush, Erdrich expresses the argument that

Tracks (and American Indian writing generally) is a hybrid postcolonial practice, which imitates and adopts the English language and the literary forms of US colonisation, and uses them, to quote Owens, for “thoroughly Indian” counter-discursive political purposes (*Mixedblood* 69). The postcolonial hybridity that characterises both Nanapush’s and Erdrich’s storytelling and writing practices subverts colonisation, legitimates the authority of tribal cultures and identities, and affirms their continuance.

The hybridity discourse in *Tracks* is important and fascinating also because Erdrich’s depiction of Nanapush and Pauline complicates the understanding of “hybridity” as a practice and condition that is inherently political, resistant and counter-colonial. The novel shows Pauline capable, like Nanapush, of negotiating cross-cultural/postcolonial knowledges and opportunities. Nancy Peterson, for instance, suggests (peripherally and in an endnote) that Pauline’s passing for white could be read as an attempt to circumvent and oppose the racial “discrimination that the Catholic Church practiced in the nineteenth-century North Dakota” (“History” 191, EN 19). By becoming a Catholic nun, Pauline gains spiritual authority and economic security that colonial institutions, as Valerie Sherer Mathes points out, have taken away from American Indian women (20-24). Furthermore, Susan Friedman indicates (121) how on several occasions Pauline shows a marked contempt for the institutional authority of the church: retorting to Superior (*T* 138) and passing judgements even on Christ (*T* 192).¹⁷ Finally, Kate McCafferty argues compellingly that Pauline, even as she becomes a nun, continues to see the world in Chippewa spiritual terms. Pauline, in McCafferty’s interpretation, practices “Wa’bano witchery,” which is a Chippewa medicine practice that takes “the medicine path of disease and death” (740). As a an evil shaman and a “cross-over virtuoso”

Pauline/Leopolda “utilizes the Roman Catholic Church to expand [the Chippewa Wa’bano practice]” and, from this perspective, her joining the church can be seen as “an act of inverse assimilation” (747).¹⁸ These observations confirm that the cross-cultural “spaces” and knowledges created by colonisation can, indeed, be empowering and subversive. The recognition of Pauline’s “hybridity” is important from yet another perspective: it indicates that in developing Pauline’s character – a person mentally deranged by colonial impositions and discourses of “purity” – Erdrich moves away from the early popular and colonialist imagining of the American Indian mixedblood as “tragically split.” While Pauline is not a successful “bridger” of cultures, a role that Nanapush enacts, she is not a sentimental and tragic Indian either.

Yet, Nanapush’s and Pauline’s hybridity articulate different socio-political messages. Pauline’s cross-cultural “mediations” pursue, as McCafferty puts it, Pauline’s “competitive self-aggrandizement in opposition to her tribe” (746). Pauline’s uses of “hybridity” seek a solely personal empowerment, support the break up of tribal structures, and erase the history of colonisation. Nanapush’s and Pauline’s different uses of cross-cultural conditions indicate that cultural hybridity can be a profitable state and location for many individuals. However, hybridity becomes politically meaningful and counter-discursive only if and when it engages with material histories of oppression and supports communities’ opposition to that oppression.

The particular juxtaposition of narrators in *Tracks*, the contest between their perspectives on tribal history and colonisation, the specific strategies that Erdrich uses to distinguish their narrative styles, and finally, the theme of Nanapush’s empowerment through writing, place the novel in relation to cross-cultural and postcolonial literary politics and strategies for voice reclaiming and for intervention

and subversion of colonial discourses and representations of “Indianness.” As my interpretation has illustrated, the political discourse in which *Tracks* engages, necessitates and benefits from cross-cultural and postcolonial critical approaches. Like in *Ceremony*, however, the complex political discourses in *Tracks* demand that the novel is read from a tribal-centred perspective, too.

US-Indian Treaty Discourse in *Tracks*

Nanapush’s account communicates not only the novel’s intention to unsettle colonial discourses and narrative conventions but also urges readers to understand the novel in relation to US-Indian treaty discourse. That discourse both recognises the sovereignty of the Anishinabe tribe and exposes the US government’s violations of that sovereignty.

The Anishinabe, as Nanapush establishes from the onset, have signed treaties with the US government: after “our long fight west to Nadouissieux land,” he remembers, “we signed the treaty [there]” (*T* 1). Nanapush’s memory is historically and chronologically accurate: the times he remembers in 1912, when he starts his narrative, and his advanced age at the time of narration indicate that he was able to witness and can recall the period of the US-Indian treaty making, and particularly the times of the US governments policies of Indian removal and relocation, between 1828-1887. By introducing the word “treaty” at the very beginning of the novel, Erdrich demands that readers understand and accept the historical fact that the Indian tribes and the US government have entered into legal and political relationships. The reasons for the relationships, as Nanapush’s words accurately suggest, were mainly to negotiate peace and land ownership between the tribes and the US government. The

invocation of the US-Indian treaty making process at the very beginning of *Tracks* foregrounds the fact that the Indians tribes have historically had legal and political rights and sovereign status, which the US government has recognised and pledged to uphold, on the basis of mutual agreements, interests and responsibilities.

Yet, Nanapush's words also confirm how the US government has manipulated and abrogated tribal sovereign status and treaty rights, taking tribal lands and "bringing exile in a storm of government papers" (*T* 2). Nanapush, as his account communicates, protested the violations: he "spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake" (*T* 2). Apparently the US government refused to hear Nanapush's legally and politically justifiable resistance and assertion of sovereign powers. Through Nanapush's words, Erdrich demands from readers to recognise how the US government has manipulated its own legal discourses and provisions, and violated previously guaranteed sovereign powers and rights of Indian tribes.

Nanapush's account of the US government's violation of tribal sovereignty, of tribal land theft and of forced assimilation refers historically to the Allotment policies from the late 19th and early 20th century. Although Nanapush does not refer directly to specific "government papers," the particular time frame of the novel and the unfolding events point to the General Allotment Act of 1887 (also known as Dawes Act) as central to the narrative of sovereignty violation and land dispossession in *Tracks*. The Allotment Act is perhaps the US government's single most destructive, nationwide policy that "breach[ed] numerous treaty provisions," as Deloria and Lytle point out (*American Indians* 10) and as Nanapush's protest indicates in *Tracks*. The Act resulted in a tremendous and unprecedented loss of Indian lands across the US,

not only immediately after the implementation of the policy, but also 25 years after its beginning, when Indians were allowed to sell their allotments. The formal beginning of Nanapush's narrative in 1912 is significant in the context of the Allotment Act and its consequences because in that year the trust period was up and Indian owners were expected to either start paying taxes for their allotted lands or to sell them.¹⁹

Nanapush draws attention to the massive and illegal theft of tribal landholdings early on in his account when he narrates, in the of the winter of 1912, about the government's agents, who survey and measure the Anishinabe land, and prepare to "sweep the marks of [tribal] boundaries off the map like a pattern of straws" (*T* 8). A few years later, in his narrative for the winter of 1918 and the spring of 1919, Nanapush chronicles the reality and the massive scale of tribal land reductions. The map that Father Damien brings during that time marks tribal and government lands, and on it Fleur Pillager's lake Matchimanito plot, as Nanapush recalls, is "a small blue triangle [Nanapush] could cover with [his] hand" (*T* 173). Most of the map shows, "in pale and rotten pink" squares, "the lands that were gone out of the tribe – to deaths with no heirs, to sales, to the lumber company" (*T* 173). Erdrich's subtitles Nanapush's narrative of that time "Skeleton Winter" (165) and the ominous title can be read as a reference to the devastating shrinkage of tribal lands. Though estimated vary slightly, historical record indicates that, as a result of the Allotment Act, tribally owned lands came down from 147 million acres in 1887 to 55 million by 1930s (McLaughlin 65). Nanapush's narrative, accordingly, records how the violations of treaty rights have had the major aim and the key result of taking away Indian lands. Nanapush's purpose is not only to expose the lasting material,

socio-economic and emotional harms that the Allotment Act has inflicted upon the Anishinabe tribe, but also – and primarily – to challenge its legality and morality.

The key concept of the Allotment policies was to divide up all reservation lands, which traditionally were maintained communally by the tribes, into individually allotted plots. The purpose of the legislative act was to turn Indians into landowners and farmers and to integrate them into American society. Those aims may have been “somewhat idealistic” and well-intended, as Deloria and Lytle points out, if one assumes, as the US government did, that American Indians wanted to leave behind their tribal lands, their socio-economic structures and beliefs, and to be “peacefully assimilated with full citizen rights” into the US society (*American Indians* 9). Yet many American Indians, as Nanapush’s account confirms, did not share the visions and goals that the US government had for them, but wanted to keep their ancient ties to tribal lands, to continue tribal socio-cultural models of life, and, generally, to exercise their rights of sovereignty. The Allotment Act, in Nanapush’s perspective, is immoral and illegal, first and foremost because it has infringed upon the sovereignty of Anishinabe lands and self-government.

The Anishinabe rights to their lands are guaranteed not only by the treaty relationships that Nanapush refers to, but are also vested in the Anishinabe ancient connections to those lands: a situation that the US-Indian treaties themselves have initially recognised and confirmed. Nanapush, in a manner comparable to Betonie’s in *Ceremony*, evokes ancient tribal knowledges in an decidedly political and anticolonial way: to assert the primacy of Anishinabe people’s ties to their tribal lands and the Anishinabe spiritual and historical “rights” to live on those lands. Nanapush stresses that the land on lake Matchimanito, which the US land agents are about to claim for

logging through the policies of the Allotment Act, is the place where the Anishinabe sacred spirit Misshepesu lives, and where it has appeared to the Old Man Pillager when the Anishinabe first migrated to that area (*T* 175). This is also the land where the Pillager ancestors – the most traditional clan – died and were buried (*T* 3). Within the context of treaty discourse, these references are, what Cook-Lynn calls, “metaphors of sovereignty” because they testify to the ancient and unalienable connectedness of tribal peoples to their lands. Nanapush’s portrayal of Fleur Pillager underscores further material and spiritual connections between the land and the Anishinabe. When he tells Lulu of her birth, for instance, Nanapush compares Fleur’s labour cries to those of the Ojibwa spiritual beings that inhabit Ojibwa lands, the manitous: “it was as if the Manitous all through the woods spoke through Fleur, loose, arguing. I recognised them. Turtle’s quavering scratch, the Eagle’s high shriek, Loon’s crazy bitterness, Otter, the howl of Wolf, Bear’s low rasp” (*T* 59).²⁰ These words affirm that the Anishinabe connection to the land is at once spiritual, ancestral and epistemological. The deployment of land-specific tribal figures in both *Ceremony* and *Tracks* also underscores material and spiritual relations between the land and its indigenous inhabitants. Spiritual beings like the mountain lion, hummingbird and buzzard and the katsinas in *Ceremony* are specific to the natural landscape of the Southwest and of the Laguna reservation. The water spirit Misshepesu, the Bear and the other manitouk in *Tracks* are particular to the woodlands people, to the Great Lakes region and to the Ojibwa spiritual system. These tribal figures have a powerful political, not only cultural and religious, meaning in the novels. Because they encode the tribes’ ties to a specific geographic place, they affirm how that place is historically tribal in a way it is not and cannot be for the United States. This is the state of affairs that the treaties between Indian tribes and European-US settlers recognise officially

(Deloria and Lytle, *American Indians* 3). The persistent and multifaceted emphasis in *Ceremony* and *Tracks* on the tribes' integral relations to their lands is a re-articulation and a metaphor of tribal sovereign rights.

Tracks asks readers to recognise the Allotment Act policies as a violation not only of tribal land rights and as a policy of tribal land theft, but also as a violation of the tribe's treaty-guaranteed rights to manage their own governing and socio-economic affairs. The Allotment Act allowed the US government to manipulate and control internal tribal life, communities and economies. The government's policies, as Nanapush recounts, have bitterly divided reservation into two factions: on one side are families like the Morrissey, the Pukwan, and the Lazarre, and on the other are "old-timers" like the Pillager, the Nanapush and the Kashpaw. The former are "government Indians," as Nanapush calls them, who create and take up "cracks and crevices between the clans" as they cooperate with the US government's Indian Affairs agents to secure profitable parcels of reservation land for themselves (*T* 184). The US government supports financially and legally those pro-American tribal factions and assists their raise to power and authority in the tribe because these new tribal elites are ready to be "servants," in Nanapush's language, of the US government's political and economic interests on remaining reservation lands. The conflict between the "old-timers" and the government Indians is a political one because it illuminates how the US government has abrogated the tribe's rights to govern themselves and to defend the majority interests of the tribe. Through violation of tribal sovereignty, the US government has gained control over internal tribal affairs and decisions, and is able to manipulate them for its colonial and industrial interests.

Erdrich, like Silko in *Ceremony*, indicates that the violation of treaty land and self-government rights also impede the economic independence and welfare of Indian

tribes, and make them dependent on and controlled by the US government. The Allotment policy, as Nanapush narrates, has already severely diminished the available resources for practicing traditional Anishinabe activities, such as hunting, trapping and gathering, and has thus led to poverty and starvation among the people. “Some,” as Nanapush remembers, “had sold their allotment land for one hundred poundweight of flour” (T 8). Later on, Nanapush, Fleur, Eli and Margaret drain themselves physically and nearly deplete their available natural resources in the struggle to raise the required tax money for their lands: they strip and sell every bit of cranberry bark they can get around Matchimanito (T 176), while Eli tans and sells piles of “muskrat, beaver, otter hides” (T 190) and is ready to “trap a hundred mink” (T 211) to secure Fleur’s land. The house at Matchimanito, where they all live during that winter to make living easier and cheaper, is now full of “a constant shuffling and scratching, a money sound that dragged around us, an irritation” (T 176). Nanapush’s words here both expose and critique the mechanisms of economic subjugation that accompany Indian tribes’ loss of sovereignty.

Both *Tracks* and *Ceremony* connect the loss of tribal lands to US companies and industries, together with the forced adoption of US socio-economic industrial models of development, to a state of sickness and depravation in both human beings and in the land. In *Ceremony* the loss of tribal lands, tribal self-government and tribal economic practices is directly related to the drought in the land and to the uranium sickness that has the capacity to destroy not just Laguna but the entire world. In *Tracks* the starvation and the depletion of natural resources are similarly the result of the US government’s imposition of its economic and governing models on the Anishinabe tribe. While the conflict between tribal and colonial models of development in *Tracks* does not have *Ceremony*’s global dimensions, Erdrich still

indicates that the repercussions of that conflict affect not only the Anishinabe lands and people, but have a large-scale effect on the environment, too. Both novels suggest that the US government's control over American Indian tribes' lands, internal affairs and lifestyles, engenders destructive and potentially lethal conditions for people on *and* beyond tribal reservations. *Tracks*, unlike *Ceremony*, does not propose models of tribal development that may be able to oppose and stop the destructive practices imposed by the US government and the logging industry. Erdrich, nonetheless, implies that possible resolutions of the colonial sickness and depravation of peoples and lands will require the restoration and the strengthening of tribal sovereignty: only then could the Anishinabe manage their lands and affairs free from the manipulations and interests of the US government and corporations. Given the times in which *Tracks* is set – in the midst of the dissolution of tribal lands and communities through the Allotment Act – it may be indicative that Erdrich refuses to offer overtly positive resolutions of the events and problems reflected in the narrative. The ending of the novel in the year of 1924, as I shall discuss below, adds an important aspect to the discourse of sovereignty that Erdrich engages with.

I argued earlier that Lulu's return home articulates an optimistic view for the tribe's future and for the successful continuance of tribal people, cultures and practices. As Nanapush gets ready to welcome Lulu back home, he announces that "the year was 1924" (*T* 225). I have already suggested that Erdrich selects the time frame and the temporal historical references in the novel carefully and deliberately. The use of this particular year in Nanapush's narrative is also very meaningful. Although the novel does not mention this explicitly, 1924 is the year in which Congress passed the American Indian Citizenship Act. The Act granted US

citizenship and citizenship rights to all American Indians on the territory of the USA. The passing of the Citizenship Act also indicated that, from the US government's point of view, the assimilative mission of the Allotment policies – to turn American Indians into “civilised” American landowners and citizens – had been, more or less, accomplished. The implications of the Citizenship Act for the American Indian peoples and for tribal sovereignty are ambivalent and contradictory, as almost all US Indian laws are. Erdrich's resolution of *Tracks*, in my view, captures that ambiguity in a skilful and politically meaningful way that has remained largely unrecognised in critical interpretations of the novel.

The tentative optimism at the end of *Tracks* may reflect the potential for empowerment contained in the 1924 legislative act. The exclusion of American Indians from US citizenship prior to 1924 was commonly used by the US government against Indian interests: to deny Indians civil rights, to construct them as “savages” and to further justify and facilitate US claims to Indian lands. The exclusion of Indians from citizenship easily created the useful ideological myth in the public discourse that Indians were alien occupants of the lands that the US citizens “rightfully” wanted (Mariah Smith 135).²¹ While the US government upheld the idea that Indian tribes are “domestic nations,” the government's actual policies neither recognised tribal sovereignty nor gave Indian tribes the rights to have some participation and authority in US public discourse and national politics. The Allotment Act, as I discussed previously, reflects that situation and the attacks on tribal sovereignty despite the tentative recognition of Indian tribes' special status in federal Indian law. In short, the US government has used the exclusion of American Indians from citizenship to limit tribal political powers and sovereignty, rather than

the other way around. The Citizenship Act has a positive significance in that it started the slow reversal of negative Indian stereotypes and perceptions of Indians as “uncivilised” savages that had for decades been politically and morally ruinous for American Indians. The Act also began a (deliberately sluggish) process whereby American Indians gained the power to participate in US national politics and, thus, the prospect to influence the US government’s decisions on Indian issues. (However, as Eric Cheyfitz remarks, the Act did not give Indians the right to vote. American Indians won that right unequivocally only in the late 1960s during the American Indian and Civil Rights movements (413).) The partial positive implications of the Citizenship Act account for its support by a number of educated and influential American Indians at the time: Zitkala-Ša and Luther Standing Bear, for instance, lobbied for the passing of the Act.

Indeed, *Tracks* suggests that Nanapush utilises not only his English language and writing skills to bring Lulu back. The return of Lulu is made possible because he had his legal rights as Lulu’s father acknowledged by the US government authorities, in the face of the Indian boarding school (*T* 225). The tentative optimism at the end of the novel suggests, through its overt reference to the Citizenship Act, that American Indians are finding “loophole[s],” to quote Nanapush (*T* 225), in US Indian law that they will be able to use for personal and tribal empowerment.

At the same time, however, *Tracks* refuses to accept the provisions of the Citizenship Act and of contemporary US Indian law, in general, as a satisfactory resolution of tribal needs and demands. Nanapush’s voice at the end of the novel is far from celebratory. He admits that in order to reclaim Lulu successfully he had to become a tribal chair and to get involved with Indian politics, which are heavily manipulated and orchestrated by the US government. Nanapush describes his new

position in the federally controlled tribal politics, with both irony and bitterness, as the position of a “bureaucrat,” who has become a part of the colonial machine that “[sinks its] barbed pens into the lives of Indians” (*T* 225). As a tribal chair – a position of likely authority and power – Nanapush has “wires [...] tied to the hands and the arms” (*T* 185). The image that Erdrich creates here, I argue, is purposefully pessimistic and politically significant.

Erdrich suggests that federal Indian legislation, including the seemingly progressive Citizenship Act, remains a mechanism for political control and colonisation of American Indian tribes. Federal Indian law has consistently worked to advance the assimilation of Native people and to deny the separate, sovereign status of Indian tribes, guaranteed by the US-Indian treaties. The latter concern has been a key and legitimate reason for the rejection of the Citizenship Act by many Indian tribes in the 1920s.²² The “granting” of US citizenship to all Indian people in the United States is simultaneously an act of “imposition” of that citizenship, of obliteration of Indian nations’ separate and sovereign status, and thus a successive blow on tribal sovereignty. The Citizenship Act gave Indians individual political rights as citizens in the broad US national context, while it simultaneously eroded the political and legal power of tribal claims to sovereignty and to earlier treaty provisions. Eric Cheyfitz emphasises this paradox and the essentially colonial nature of the 1924 “progressive” legislation:

At best the Indian Citizenship Act was and is a double-edged sword, at once an assimilationist attack on tribal existence and a leverage for empowerment in the larger nation [...]. The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 in no way affects the colonial status of federally recognized Indian tribes but only ironizes it by

presenting us with the legal paradox of sovereign citizens who are at the same time colonial subjects. (413)

Nanapush's discontent with his political position at the end of *Tracks* communicates frustration with that very paradox. As much as Nanapush gains self-empowerment and can assist tribal revitalisation through participation in and subversion of federal Indian politics, he is aware of the fact that those politics remain colonial in nature and continue to supplant tribal sovereignty. Thus, to ignore Nanapush's dissatisfaction in relation to his political choice at the end of the novel – as the established criticism of the novel often does – means to obscure this very important political point that *Tracks* articulates. By insisting that Nanapush's hands and arms are tied as a chairman (*T* 185), and that government-controlled bureaucrats continue to “sink their barbed pens into the lives of Indians” (*T* 225), Erdrich suggests that a true positive resolution of the problems reflected in the novel is possible only if the Anishinabe tribe regains its sovereignty, and is able to take independent decisions about its internal affairs.

Early on in his account Nanapush complains how his name “loses power every time that it is written and stored in a government file” (*T* 32). He articulates a similar point at the end of the novel, protesting the fact that the Anishinabe tribe has lost power and “can be scattered by a wind” as it has become “a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives, policy” (*T* 225). From the perspectives of US-Indian treaty discourse, I read Erdrich's reference here as a final indictment of the US government's violation of tribal treaty rights. The US government, Erdrich implies, has abrogated the authority and power of the first government documents that carried Indian names: the original US-Indian treaties, which recognised Indian tribe's sovereign rights. The file cabinets of successive

government documents are a record not only of tribal disempowerment but also of the US government's broken promises and violations of its own legal and moral discourse. Nanapush's words, frustrated and bitter as they may be, hold political power because they work, to evoke the title of Nancy Peterson's recent study (2001), against the US government's "historical amnesia." Despite the government's attempts to bury tribal treaty rights under "a blizzard of legal forms" (T 225), the historical records and tribal memory remain valid, and warrant that Indian tribes will seek to reclaim their legally guaranteed sovereignty. As American Indian activism since the 1960s confirms, Lulu's generation is determined to use the political power of the treaties and to fight for tribal sovereign rights.

Why Should Fleur Disappear? : Hybridity Discourse and its Political Contradictions in *Tracks*

Like in Silko's *Ceremony*, the most problematic aspect of Erdrich's politics in *Tracks* arises from the manner in which the affirmation of hybridity in the novel works to displace the most traditional tribal members. An article by Gloria Bird, "Searching for Evidence of Colonialism at Work: A Reading of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" (1992), advances an argument comparable to Sequoya's critique of *Ceremony*. Bird similarly posits that the hybrid identity discourse in *Tracks* may support colonising, rather than anticolonial politics. By suggesting that traditional characters like Fleur and Moses will disappear because they cannot embrace "hybridity," Erdrich inadvertently perpetuates the favoured colonial discourses of savagism and "the vanishing Indian." I want to explore Bird's idea because it echoes tribal-centred concerns about "hybridity" discourse as a discourse that may undermine the significance of tribal-centred categories of identity and experience.

Judging from Erdrich's portrayal of Fleur in *Tracks*, there is no doubt that Fleur incarnates the most traditional Anishinabe identities and socio-cultural practices. She is of the Pillagers, who are the most traditional Anishinabe clan. According to the narrative's presentation, the Pillagers incarnate the tribe's notions and memories of the ancient spiritual connection between humans, Ojibwa gods and Ojibwa lands. The Old Man Pillager is related to the most powerful among the Ojibwa gods, the underwater manitou Misshepesu (*T* 175) and the testimony of that relation is Lake Matchimanito and the lands around it, where both the Pillagers and the Misshepesu live. Fleur Pillager's life revolves around seeking intimacy with and strength from the Ojibwa spirit beings and, particularly, from the powerful and often terrifying Misshepesu, who in the novel figures as Fleur's "spirit guardian" (Van Dyke 15).²³ Fleur thus engages in the most traditional spiritual practices for the Anishinabe, which purpose is to receive protection and power from the ancient spirits.²⁴ One of the most memorable demonstrations in the novel of Fleur's ancient spiritual powers is the tornado she causes in Argus after her rape. McCafferty explains that the tornado relates Fleur to the winds produced by "the tent-shaker, 'Je'sako" (740) that represents a powerful "avenue of medicine practice" among the Anishinabe (736). Fleur resorts to that practice accordingly because its traditional purpose is to help solving problem situations and to restore health.²⁵ Erdrich, in addition, associates Fleur with another powerful being in the Ojibwa spiritual tradition: the Sacred Bear. There are four bears on the clan markers of the Pillager (*T* 5), Fleur goes hunting in the body of a bear (*T* 12) and a bear, perhaps "a spirit bear," according to Nanapush (*T* 60), appears at Lulu's birth and assists Fleur's difficult delivery. The bear symbolism is important because it signifies Fleur's social identity as a traditional Ojibwa and also her spiritual importance. The bear, as Nora Baker Barry discusses in

detail, also has a great shamanic significance in Ojibwa mythology and in the rituals of the Grand Medicine Society, the midewiwin, where bears function as “guardians of portals to spiritual power” (26). As an Anishinabe person, who incarnates traditional spiritual knowledge, power and relation to indigenous lands, Fleur has a vast symbolic significance in the novel. Both Nanapush and Pauline recognise that significance and articulate it evocatively: Nanapush calls Fleur “the funnel of our history” (*T* 178), while for Pauline, Fleur is “the hinge” between the Ojibwa and Misshepesu (*T* 139). It is clear that in Erdrich’s representation Fleur functions symbolically as the character that connects the Anishinabe to their lands and to traditional sources of memory, knowledge and spiritual belief.

I discussed how Nanapush’s characterisation has similar connotations: like Fleur he represents and asserts the authority and power of Anishinabe perspectives. Yet Nanapush is also a syncretic character, who is able to mediate tribal and non-tribal socio-cultural practices and political roles. The symbolism of Fleur’s portrayal, on the other hand, defines her as the “unreformed,” non-hybrid and “static” Anishinabe person, who is unable or unwilling to “hybridise” tribal cultural-spiritual practices.²⁶ Nonetheless, Fleur’s name – and I have already pointed out that names are significant in *Tracks* – simultaneously indicates that Anishinabe tribal traditions are neither pure nor static. The name has French origins and in an earlier novel, *The Beet Queen*, Erdrich directly explains how “Fleur [...] is French for flower” (177). Fleur’s name alludes to the early history of cultural and economic exchange between the Anishinabe and the French fur traders that, according to missionaries’ records, started in 1618.²⁷ For that reason, critics have rightly interpreted Fleur’s name as Erdrich’s reference to the traditional “syncretism of Indian cultures,” which “have absorbed and continue to adapt aspects of Euro-American culture” (Friedman 118, also EN 36,

131). Fleur's name symbolism recognises the fact that tribal cultures, like any living culture and tradition, are organic and change continuously as they adopt foreign elements they come into contact with. Such foreign and new elements are gradually integrated into traditional tribal practices and themselves become traditional. In *Ceremony*, as I pointed out, Silko communicates a comparable idea with the representation of the Laguna village kiva, which is the most traditional site of Laguna life but which has, nonetheless, adopted and "Indianised" foreign elements, such as the St. Joseph mission chair (C 256). The kiva's representation in *Ceremony* and the symbolism of Fleur's name in *Tracks* correctly indicate that the hybridity of tribal cultures and identities cannot be singled out as an exclusively modern phenomenon, or as a phenomenon that rests upon the disappearance of "old" tribal socio-cultural practices and structures of identification. Against the background of these ideas, the representation of Fleur as the "non-hybrid" traditionalist who is bound to "disappear" with the advance of modernity is contradictory and calls for examination.

Fleur's voicelessness in *Tracks* relates to her problematic portrayal in the novel as the disappearing traditional Indian. *Tracks* constructs Fleur as central to the narrative – both Nanapush and Pauline tell their versions of stories about Fleur – and also as the incarnation of the tribal spiritual, cultural and political traditions that the novel ostensibly seeks to defend and continue. At the same time, Fleur never takes the role of a primary narrator. Her voice is absent from the narrative, that is, from the stories about Fleur.

Critics have addressed the issue of Fleur's silence and have often interpreted it in positive terms. Sheila Hassell Hughes, for instance, agrees that the trope of "tonguelessness," both in traditional Indian literatures and in contemporary American Indian writing, is a sign of disempowerment and alienation (102). Yet,

Hughes posits that the authority of speaking and self-representation “is not the only kind of authority that Native Americans have theorised” (102). She argues convincingly that tribal traditions, knowledges and memories “[depend] upon the sharing and circulation of lived experience” and “live by means of multiple voices, of the transference from tongue to tongue” (103). Nanapush’s extension and continuation of Fleur’s story for the future generation (Lulu), as I pointed out previously, seek to assert Fleur’s power through such sharing and circulation. Also, because the novel constructs Nanapush as competent both in oral narrative and in writing, “there is no absolute dichotomy between the oral and the textual in his voice. [...] Nanapush has spanned Native and white cultures and modes of communication and does not need to submit to a white translator or recorder” (91). Hughes further suggests that Fleur’s “silence” in *Tracks* demands that the privileged Euro-American reader “learn to listen to the other’s silence as well as speech” (107). In addition, the transmission and continuation of Fleur’s story through Nanapush’s retellings ask readers to understand the authority of speaking not only as an individual act but as a communal one as well (103, 107).²⁸ While Hughes’s is a well-argued interpretation, it shifts the focus of the discussion away from Fleur: it privileges instead a discussion of Nanapush’s positive role in *Tracks* as a transmitter of cultural traditions, a bridger of cultures and a re-educator of Euro-American (non-tribal) audiences. Indeed, Nanapush’s portrayal compellingly establishes the idea that the Anishinabe people survive and continue culturally and politically. This, however, does not resolve all problems that surround Fleur’s depiction.

Gloria Bird has put forward one of the most critical interpretations of Fleur’s depiction and voicelessness in *Tracks*. Because Fleur is the most traditional and, at the same time, “hers is the only consciousness that remains inaccessible,” asserts Bird,

“the ‘Indian’ is known only from a colonialist position” (45). The readers’ knowledge of Fleur “is shaped solely through second-hand means analogous to the way in which the construct of savagism has been informed” (ibid). Like Bird, I am bothered by the fact that Fleur – the most “Indian” of all characters – is never allowed the power of self-representation and voice. From a political point of view, Fleur’s silence remains problematic because she is not given the chance to speak directly on such important political issues at the time as the Allotment Act. Even when the two narrators convey Fleur’s speech directly, hers are curt and laconic sentences. Most commonly, the reader learns about Fleur’s thoughts, words and actions indirectly, through the narrators’ renditions. Because Fleur says very little and is presented as “living in the old days” (*T* 174), her portrayal creates the impression that tribal elders (or the most traditional among the Anishinabe) are both unwilling and unprepared to participate in contemporary political realities. The emphatic presence of Fleur in the novel and yet the lack of her voice in it, also evoke colonial representations of American Indian women where they function as plot and rhetorical “devises” rather than as persons of political and historical significance.²⁹ Finally, what makes Fleur’s voicelessness most problematic, is its pairing with the iconography of the “vanishing Indian” in Fleur’s portrayal, especially at the end of *Tracks*.

Tracks recurrently asserts that Fleur is the “last” traditional Indian: the first description of Fleur that Erdrich provides through the voice of Nanapush is of Fleur as “the last Pillager” (*T* 2); towards the end of his narrative Nanapush still refers to Fleur as “the lone survivor of the Pillagers” (*T* 178). This rhetorical description of Fleur as “the last of” is particularly emphatic because it dispenses with the “fact” of the “existence” of Moses, who is of the Pillager clan as well (*T* 7). In a similar fashion, colonial representations have asserted and lamented the “disappearance” of “the

Indian” despite the fact of “his” survival. Furthermore, the final image of Fleur that the novel sustains is of her “gone” from the reservation with “no telling when and if she would ever return” (*T* 225). Fleur’s walking away from her stolen land is a variation on the “vanishing Indian” theme in that it pictures Fleur not only as “gone” but also as the powerless primitive victim of the inexorable modern forces of colonialism and industrialism. Fleur, unable to pay the fees for her land, undertakes a last and despondent deed of defiance. She herself razes the trees around lake Matchimanito and uses her powers to send a wind that blows the trees down so that they scatter the loggers and damage their equipment (*T* 222-23). This last scene of Fleur’s “presence” in the novel is built around the contrast between Fleur’s “raw powers” and the powers of contemporary colonialism, in the forms of modern technology, demands for natural resources and the colonial legislative system. The futility of Fleur’s defiance inscribes her as simultaneously a despondent and noble victim of colonial forces. The same feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness and smug dignity emanate from Fleur’s decision to send Lulu away to the boarding school: the colonial institution known to crush tribal youth. Nanapush does try to excuse Fleur’s decision by telling Lulu that Fleur “saved [her] from worse” (*T* 210). He, however, does not provide any further explanation and these words only add to Fleur’s image as a noble yet incomprehensible and pitiable character.

The end of *Tracks*, in short, seems to me to (inadvertently) invite readers to acknowledge the dignity of Fleur’s final choice, while feeling sorry for her. The narrative constructs Fleur’s acts and “fate” as sad, yet inevitable: a consequence of modernity, progress and unavoidable pressures to either transform and hybridise one’s identity and practices, or to perish. I make this argument despite my awareness of and appreciation for the emotional richness and appeal with which Erdrich infuses Fleur’s

portrayal. I recognise the fact that Erdrich's Fleur is far from resembling the wooden and one-dimensional "doomed" Indians that inhabit Euro-American Cooper-esque imagination and representations. Erdrich is successful in communicating the idea that Fleur is a complex human being and her actions reflect that complexity. Fleur's despondency and subsequent "disappearance" at the end of the novel, for instance, may be influenced by her grieving for her second child that she lost at birth, as Nanapush explains (*T* 176-78, 187). Fleur is also crushed by the betrayal of her closest people: Margaret Kashpaw, as readers remember, uses the money made collectively to pay only for her lands, and thus dissipates the only hope that Fleur has clung to after the death of her newly-born. That is, I acknowledge that Erdrich is a very skilful contemporary novelist (unlike, say Cooper) and that she crafts a memorable portrayal of Fleur as a vibrant and complex character, affected by all-embracing historical forces.

Nonetheless, the aspect of Fleur's portrayal that I am critical of concerns the larger socio-political and cultural function that Fleur adopts in the novel. The major problem, to stress again, comes from the fact that Fleur is not only a complex human being in the novel but is clearly given the symbolic function of "representing" the most traditional and non-hybrid Anishinabe. Emphatically charged with this function and vanishing at the end of *Tracks* under the circumstances I described – and with "no telling when and if she would ever return," as Nanapush himself offers (*T* 225) – Fleur calls to mind the colonial iconography of the vanishing Indian and its romanticised, ahistorical and apolitical appeal (Bird 43). It is true that at the end of *Tracks* Fleur does not kill herself as the "the last of the Mohicans," imagined by James Fenimore Cooper in 1826, did. Nevertheless, Fleur's "fate" is not dissimilar

from that of the “last” and “doomed” Indian in one of the most distinctive and popular colonialist novels from the 19th century.³⁰

The depiction of Moses – the other “last survivor” of the Pillagers, living on traditional lands and guarded by the “water man” (*T* 36) – reinforces this impression. Moses lives by himself deep in the untamed lands around Matchimanito. He does not seem to be meaningfully attached to anybody and makes only a rare appearance “covered with dirt and leaves” (*T* 36). His representation also maintains the colonial prototype of the speechless Indian: the novel does not render any of his words and creates the impression that he rarely ever speaks, thinks or matters. He remains untouched and unaffected by the history that unfolds in the novel: there is no indication of whether and how he responds to the politically significant events affecting the whole community. Moses, in this sense, is a timelessly pure and “vanishing” entity. As crucial changes happen in the community at the end of the novel, there is no mention of Moses. He, as Bird accurately points out, virtually “disappears from the text” (*T* 46). Erdrich, in other words, is not fully successful in avoiding or contesting the depoliticised and tragic approach to American Indian peoples that characterises American colonial imagining and representation of “the Indian.”

I think that this problem results from the tendency in contemporary cultural and critical discourse to establish a hierarchical relationship between hybrid and non-hybrid identities and cultural practices: we celebrate hybridity as a necessary condition of contemporary existence and political empowerment, and repudiate non-hybrid practices and forms of identification as backward and “doomed.” As I discussed in the context of *Ceremony*, this hierarchical opposition re-creates essentialism, in a manner directly comparable, as the discussion of *Tracks* here

suggests, to the old “savagism versus civilisation” essentialist and colonial paradigm. Erdrich has to “sacrifice” Fleur and Moses in order to affirm “hybridity” as the superior and surviving model of tribal identities and cultural practices. Tribal-centred critics justifiably worry that the construction of such hybridity hierarchies undermines the status of tribal experiences, practices and models of identification that are central to tribal claims to sovereign status and rights.

It seems, at the same time, that Erdrich has reconsidered the “disappearance” of Fleur and Moses in *Tracks*: the characters “return” in other novels of the sequel, which reflect more recent historical times.³¹ In *Love Medicine*, for instance, Moses becomes Lulu’s lover and one of their kids, Gary Nanapush, grows up to become an Ojibwa political hero, associated with the American Indian Movement in the 1960s. Still, the continuation of Moses’ “life” throughout the sequel does little to alter readers’ perception of him as a “Vanishing Indian”: he never becomes a full-fledged character and remains disconnected from historical and political events that affect the rest of the community.³² Fleur, on the other hand, lives in the stories and references of other characters in *Love Medicine*, and in *The Beet Queen* she physically appears and acts as a medicine woman, helping both non-Indian and Indian characters (Karl and Russell). *The Bingo Palace*, in my view, is the novel that remedies most meaningfully the politically weak and essentialist representation of Fleur in *Tracks*. *The Bingo Palace* tells readers that around 1930 Fleur has recovered her Matchimanito land and comes back to live on the reservation. Yet, there is the threat that she may lose that land again, not to the lumber company this time, but to another money making capitalist venture: the bingo industry run by Lyman, one of the richest and most influential Indians on the reservation. The connection between *Tracks* and *The Bingo Palace* is reinforced in the final scenes of the novels: at the end of *The Bingo Palace*

Fleur walks across the frozen Matchimanito lake to meet her dead relatives and “disappears” leaving tracks in the snow. As she embarks on her final journey, the tribal authorities, manipulated by Lyman, come to take her land and arrange for its use for a future “bingo palace.” This time, however, Fleur is not a helpless victim, doomed because of her inability or unwillingness to embrace hybridity. As she leaves her land to the bingo industry at the end of *The Bingo Palace*, Fleur laughs with “fierce pleasure” (BP 132) because she believes that the tribal bingo venture will eventually turn against Lyman’s interests and will work for the collective decolonising interests of the Anishinabe tribe.

Fleur’s voice, as Nancy Peterson notices perceptively (“Righting” 42), resonates through the end of *The Bingo Palace*, as Fleur advises how “land is the only thing that lasts life to life. Money burns like tinder, flows like water, and as for the government’s promises the wind is steadier” (BP 148). She continues, “put your winnings and earnings in a land-acquiring account. Take the quick new money. Use it to purchase the fast old ground” (BP 148-49). Peterson correctly points out how Fleur’s final words in the novel do not provide clear-cut answers and reassuring resolutions of the tribal issues reflected in the novel but are important because they engage Fleur’s “fate” with the controversial and complex realities that American Indian tribes face today (“Righting” 49). Yet, I want to emphasise that Fleur’s words are very significant from a political perspective because they evoke the US-Indian treaty discourse, re-affirm its contemporary validity and announce its unflagging importance in contemporary tribal politics and activism.

From her contemporary position, Fleur brings up the issue of the unreliable and shifting government’s Indian “promises” and thus blames the US government for its manipulation and infringement of legal treaty guarantees. She reminds readers that

the treaties are not forgotten and invalid entities of the past, but continue to hold authority and to testify to the US government's legal and moral crimes against American Indian peoples. Fleur's advice that the Anishinabe should "take the quick new [bingo] money" and "use it to purchase the fast old ground" (*BP* 148-49) reaffirms Indian tribes' ongoing claims to sovereignty and their continuing struggles to reclaim tribal stolen lands. In *The Bingo Palace* Fleur expresses the real possibility of reaffirming and reclaiming tribal sovereignty by buying back tribal lands, stolen through manipulations in US Indian law. Currently, this is the "casino" policy that many American Indian tribes seek to employ. As Angela Mullis and David Kamper illustrate in *Indian Gaming: Who Wins?* (2000), Indian tribes establish the practice of using communally the money generated by the casino industry to purchase reservation lands, to develop tribal colleges, to improve economic conditions on the reservations, and to strengthen tribal cultural and political identity.

Erdrich's implied idea is that if Indian tribes successfully reclaim their sovereign powers of self-determination, they will be able to successfully oppose moneymaking, US-controlled ventures, like the lumber industry in *Tracks* and Lyman's greed-driven casino project in *The Bingo Palace*. Comparably to Silko in *Ceremony*, Erdrich suggests, through Fleur's final words in *The Bingo Palace*, that Indian tribes' struggles for sovereignty involve opposition not only to US colonisation but also to US models of industrial and capitalist developments. Tribal sovereignty struggles thus emerge as struggles not only of local, tribal importance but also as struggles that have a fundamental significance for humanity and for societal models of cotemporary development worldwide. Both Silko and Erdrich thus compellingly illustrate how a commitment to tribal sovereignty does not lack global and cross-cultural dimensions. Both in *Ceremony* and in *Tracks* the hierarchical and essentialist

affirmation of hybridity in (inadvertent) opposition to tribal-centred practices and models of identification occasionally contradicts this argument. Yet, both Silko and Erdrich simultaneously return to and uphold the continuing authority and viability of tribal sovereignty discourse, which draws on and validates strong local/tribal-centred identities and practices. These tensions and contradictions in the novels are perhaps the most convincing illustration of the complex cultural-political discourses that are at play in contemporary American Indian writing. I have sought to demonstrate in my re-reading of the novels how the joint deployment of cross-cultural and tribal-centred methods of interpretation assists our understanding of those complexities.

NOTES

¹The revised, 1993 edition of *Love Medicine* – published nine years after the first publication of the novel in 1984 – similarly reflects a more intense political agenda in comparison with the original version. In a 1999 article, Allan Chavkin compellingly suggests that Erdrich’s revisions seek to enhance the novel’s political force. The revised *Love Medicine*, as Chavkin points out, develops a clearer rejection of long-existing negative stereotyping of Indians. The five major chapter additions in the new and expanded version engage in a more direct and politically aware manner with the history of colonisation; there Erdrich unambiguously connects the origins of reservation problems – such as alcoholism, poverty and dissipation of familial and moral codes – to the experience of colonisation. Most significantly, the revisions in *Love Medicine*, as Chavkin indicates, contain a clearer and more determinate expression of tribal cultural and political discourses. The “new” *Love Medicine* underscores tribal cultural and political resistance to assimilation, and strengthens the assertion that traditional tribal knowledge has a crucial and viable role in responding to political, cultural and personal problems ensuing from colonisation.

²An article and a photo in *The Circle* from June 1979 (vol. 3, no 6) introduce Erdrich as the new editor of the newspaper (Hayes 2).

³Erdrich also relates that many of the stories written in Boston at the time became part of *Love Medicine* (Chavkin and Chavkin 235).

⁴In his account of the American Indian Movement after Wounded Knee and the continuing (yet smaller-scale) Indian struggles on the Pine Ridge reservation throughout the 1980s, Peter Matthiessen observes: “By the end of Reagan’s first year in office, the cutbacks in social services and assistance programs – very serious for all

poor people in America – were estimated to be ten times as severe in Indian country as they were elsewhere, with worse to come” (535).

⁵ I reference future citation from *Tracks* as *T*.

⁶The Anishinabe people are commonly referred today by the names of Ojibwa and Chippewa as well. As Vizenor among others points out, “Anishinabe” is the people’s name in the old language and is the oldest term used (*People* 14-36). It evokes an ancient shared tradition and past for the several groups of present day Ojibwa (or Ojibway) living on the territory of the US and Canada. “Ojibwa” is a more recent and commonly used name for modern times Anishinabe and language (the exact meaning and origin of the name are uncertain; some believe that it relates to the particular “puckered” moccasins made by the Ojibwa). “Chippewa” is a relatively modern, English and government-given name for the Anishinabe/Ojibwa people. The name Chippewa was used in the treaties and in government legal documents. Lee Sultzman further clarifies that the Ojibwa and Chippewa are “the same word pronounced a little differently due to accent. If an ‘o’ is placed in front of Chippewa, O’chippewa, the relationship becomes apparent (Sec. “Names”). In my discussion I use the three names interchangeably, depending on context.

⁷Commenting on Fleur’s desertion of Lulu, Erdrich affirms: “Fleur makes a mistake, a desperate mistake, and she pays for it the rest of her life, as does Lulu” (Chavkin and Chavkin 225).

⁸Kari Winter (2000) discusses in greater detail the changing symbolism of the Argus butcher store in Erdrich’s novels. She points out that in *The Beet Queen* the store is a comfortable, family-centred, “woman-dominated” place in the 1940s through 1970s (50). Winter argues that the politics of this representation are

progressive and anti-capitalist as Erdrich suggests that the family based meat business is still “less atomized, alienated, and anesthetized than the supermarket culture that will replace it in the 1960s and 1970s (51). This is a perceptive interpretation and very apt for the social setting of *The Beet Queen*. In *Tracks*, however, the symbolism of the butcher store is quite different, as the counterparts in the comparison are Anishinabe familial structures and social-ecological attitudes.

⁹Some commentators suggest that Pauline has perhaps exorcised her sense of guilt for her silent witnessing of Fleur’s rape by subsequently locking the rapists in the freezer. I did not find conclusive evidence in the text for such interpretations. Pauline’s first account of the event emphasises how “it was Russell, I am sure, who first put his arms on the bar” and locked the freezer with the three men inside (*T* 27). A moment later Pauline hesitates: “Sometimes, thinking back, I see my arms lift, my hands grasp, see myself dropping the beam into the mental grip.” Yet again she asserts: “But always I see Russell’s face the moment after ...a peaceful look of complicit satisfaction” (*T* 27-28). Pauline’s account here may suggest that she couldn’t achieve (Russell’s) peace after Argus namely because she has remained inactive, both during and after Fleur’s rape. Besides, Pauline narrates how Fleur herself has redressed the wrong done to her by causing the tornado in Argus and thus delaying the opening of the locker. Once on the reservation, however, Pauline develops an opposite sense of guilt and her story changes: “it was my will that bore the weight [of the beam locking the freezer], let it drop into place – not Russell’s and not Fleur’s” (*T* 66). I believe Pauline’s shifting stories and senses of guilt represent the dichotomised mind of the colonised subject and her growing psychological

confusions and obsessions. I shall return in a moment to Pauline's perception of her role in the Argus events.

¹⁰My interpretation of Pauline's attitude to Fleur and its symbolism differs from the understanding that Jeanne Armstrong proposes in her discussion of the connections between the two women. Armstrong suggests that Pauline revenges for Fleur's death by locking the three Argus men in the freezer. She proposes: "Fleur and Pauline are alike in the sense that each tries separately and individually to save their Anishinaabeg people, although Pauline thinks they can be saved by accepting Christianity and white culture, while Fleur tries to preserve the land and traditional culture" (17). Pauline, as I have just suggested, wants to destroy Fleur and the tribal culture she stands for. Likewise, Pauline is interested in Anishinabe people's death rather than in their "saving." Furthermore, once Pauline becomes a nun, she radically disaffiliates from the Anishinabe as "her people."

¹¹The scene contrasts Nanapush's use of tribal knowledge and stories to pull Lulu back to life (when her feet were frozen) through the "rope" of words.

¹²Robert A. Morace observes that Pauline's original and adopted names "suggest her perverted nature, the one a reminder of a misogynist saint (his loathing for women transformed into her self-loathing), the other ... an echo of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and index of her masochistic (and later sadistic) personality" (51).

¹³The name "Leopolda," as Sheila Hassell Hughes argues, also evokes the name of her lover Napoleon and the father of Marie (her child that she attempts to kill before and during birth). Hughes posits that Pauline has "[pinned] her own femininity, sexuality, and mortality [on Napoleon] before killing him as a scapegoat." In the course of this process "Napoleon is feminized [...], serving as a sacrificial symbol for

the Native/feminine body/space.” Hughes continues: “by taking on a similar name, Pauline appears to complete the identity transfer. The Native and feminine collapse onto the other, and the masculine and white are claimed for the self.” Thus, the development of Pauline/Leopolda in the novel is toward “extricating, purifying, whitening, and masculinizing of the self” (100). Pauline’s name change and vision at the end of *Tracks* seeks to impose similar colonising transformation onto the whole community.

¹⁴The use of smallpox as a deliberate means of biological warfare against the Indians started in the 1760s and, as often quoted, through smallpox-infected blankets given to Indians as gifts. In 1763 Lord Jeffrey Amherst, the British commander-in-chief for America, proposed the distribution of such blankets among (Ottawa) Indians as part of a plan that aimed “to try Every other method that can serve to Extirpate this Execrable Race” (Peter d’Errico). That historical episode happened earlier than the times Nanapush chronicles but it is still a relevant account of the devastating effects of colonisation upon American Indian tribes. (Besides, the Ottawa people were one of the three clans that constituted the old Anishinabe tribe, together with the Potawatomi and Ojibwa people.)

¹⁵The topic of the colonial devastation of Anishinabe people by the deliberate spread of disease is a continuous theme in Erdrich’s oeuvre. For instance, her children’s novel *The Birchbark House* published in 1999, brings up the topic of colonial devastation brought by smallpox. Her 2001 “sequel” novel, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, adds poignancy to the narrative of Anishinabe loss caused by the influenza that “came down the whiteman’s road” (119).

¹⁶See also Victoria Walker, who argues that Nanapush's affable personality encourages readers to adopt his narrative perspective.

¹⁷In Friedman's words, Pauline's retreat from Anishinabe traditionalism is "elevated" in that Pauline's portrayal evokes "early Christian martyrs and medieval Catholic saints" (120). Friedman continues: "For medieval mystics, establishing legitimacy in the eyes of the Church was often arduous. Their vision of God and Christ signified direct access to the divine, thus requiring none of the ordinary mediation by priests or the institutional church" (120-21). By mortifying their flesh in order to achieve visions (a practice that Pauline repeats), medieval women-mystics sought to establish the legitimacy of those visions "over the words of male authority" (119). Both Friedman and Dennis Walsh (who draws on Friedman's ideas) further discuss how Pauline's characterisation in *Tracks* also reflects Erdrich's complex and ambivalent attitudes toward Catholicism.

¹⁸McCafferty points out that the physical description of Pauline associates her with Wa'bano shamanic practices. Pauline "bears an uncanny likeness to KoKoKo the Owl, guardian of the Wa'bano and harbinger of death" (743).

¹⁹As Nancy Peterson ("History" 181) and Gregory Camp (29) clarify, the taxing and selling of allotted lands began even earlier, under provisions set forth in the Burke Act in 1906.

²⁰In the Ojibwa spiritual system, manitous (also manitouk) regulate human behaviour and are responsible for balancing and unbalancing the world. The fear and awe that the Underwater Manito Misshepeshu inspires "inculcate[s] respect for the water, a necessary attitude for a people who traveled on dangerous lakes on birch canoes which were extremely unsteady and liable to swamp in even a moderate sea"

(Brehm 686). Christopher Vecsey's *Traditional Ojibwa Religion and Its Historical Changes* (1983) offers a concise description of the manitous and of traditional Ojibwa religion.

²¹Eric Cheyfitz points out that the issue of American Indian citizenship "is made particularly visible from the moment when the Cherokees went to the Supreme Court in 1831 to ask the Court to recognise them as a sovereign, that is a *foreign*, nation" (408). The Cherokees wanted a legal recognition as an independent nation "so that they could bring suit in the Court for an injunction against the state of Georgia, to stop the state from violating treaties that the Cherokees has signed with the United States but the President Andrew Jackson refused to enforce" (ibid). US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall refused to recognise the Cherokees (and tribal nations, in general) as sovereign or as having the right to sue US states. The legislation recognised native people as aliens, while defining that tribes were "domestic dependent" not "foreign"(independent) nations. As Cheyfitz argues, the language of US Indian legislation indicates that its "primary agenda" has been the limitation of tribal sovereignty (409).

²²Tuscagora Chief Clinton Rickard explains tribal resistance to the Citizenship Act in the following way: "How can a citizen have a treaty with his own government? To us, it seemed that the United States was just trying to get rid of its treaty obligations and make us into taxpaying citizens who could sell their homelands ... We had a great attachment to our style of government. We wished to remain treaty Indians and preserve our ancient rights" (qtd. in Hauptman 6-7).

²³Van Dyke's article explores connections between Ojibwa spiritual figures and women characters in both *Tracks* and *Love Medicine*. Van Dyke also highlights

the opposing interpretations of Fleur's connections to Misshepesu that Pauline and Nanapush present in *Tracks*. Since Pauline detests and fears Ojibwa spirituality and actively pulls away from it, she also sees Fleur as someone who uses her spiritual powers (her connection to Misshepesu) to do evil (Van Dyke 18). The "traditionalist" Nanapush on the other side, asserts that Fleur uses her spiritual powers to effect good and particularly to defend Ojibwa lands from land grabbers (Van Dyke 19). Victoria Brehm develops a related and very informative argument about the functions of Misshepesu (Micipijiu) in Erdrich's fiction.

²⁴Fleur's strong connections to the Ojibwa spiritual world and her shamanic powers account for her near estrangement from the rest of the community (estrangement that would otherwise can be seen as contradictory and untraditional). Ruth Landes explains in this relation that, as a rule, the Anishinabe who sought traditional medicine and exercised spiritual power "turned away from simple warm relations with their kind, partly because of the new manitou intimacy, partly because the visions had to be kept secret" or else "the manitou will leave you" (qtd. in McCafferty 732).

²⁵As someone who continues the Anishinabe tradition in more adaptive forms, Nanapush also engages in this practice but without employing Fleur's "raw powers": he performs the tent-shaking ceremony in an attempt to cure Fleur when the loss of her land and of her second child drain her elemental vitality and force (*T* 188).

²⁶While Fleur has lived in Argus, her return on the reservation is a return to deeply traditional spiritual and cultural practices.

²⁷Many aspects of the early Anishinabe-French relations strengthened the tribe by creating "profitable alliances" (*Turtle Mountain* 9) and by assisting people's

adoption of more efficient household and hunting items (ibid 8). Yet, the subsequent growth of the fur trade and the influx of more Europeans on Indian lands, had harmful results: they made Indian tribes dependent on whites for trade, brought and encouraged alcohol abuse by Indians, and also caused the depletion of game and the starvation that *Tracks* recounts. As historians have pointed out, the worst times for the Anishinabe came after the Americans joined the trade and the US government established its colonial control over Indian affairs. The Anishinabe-French connection is particularly prominent in the history of the Turtle Mountain Band and reservation that, as critics have discussed, resonates in *Tracks* (Peterson, “History” 189, Beidler and Barton 10-13). The Turtle Mountain Band of the Chippewa migrated from upper Michigan and Ontario to today’s North Dakota around the late 18th –early 19th century. Importantly, in the process of their migration they mixed with the Metis (also called Michif): “that vital 19th century melange of Algonquians (Cree, Chippewa, Ojibwa), Scots, and French who developed a language, which blended French nouns and Algonquian sentence structure into Michif, the language of the Metis ” (Willard 49).²⁷ Fleur’s name thus reflects the specific history and culture of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa band and the incorporation of French influences within the traditional culture.

²⁸Hughes’s argument here compares to Catherine Rainwater’s reading of Erdrich’s work as aiming to re-educate the non-Native reader through the deployment of “conflicting codes” (“Reading Between Worlds”).

²⁹My interpretation resonates with Nancy Peterson’s, who suggests that “the absence of Fleur” – which is in a way repeated by the absence and disappearance of June in *Love Medicine* and Adelaide in *The Beet Queen* – “is analogous to the

omission of women from history” (“History” 190, EN 17). I did not get a sense, however, of whether Peterson is supportive or critical of Fleur’s representation in *Tracks* (see “History” 183).

³⁰Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* – the collective reference to his popular 19th-century novels *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841) – have had a great influence in popularising the “vanishing Indian” theme in American national literature and consciousness.

³¹Even *Tracks* suggests that Fleur is not entirely gone: on one occasion Nanapush scolds Lulu for “not even call[ing] Fleur mother.” He urges Lulu to “take off [her] pointy shoes, walk through the tough bush, and visit her” (*T* 210). Yet, this reference does not give Fleur much vitality or involvement in the important history reflected in the novel.

³²In *The Bingo Palace* Moses is said to have “died of desire” on his island (155), after he has refused to leave the island and join Lulu in her life of contemporary pursuits, problems and struggles.

Conclusion

In one of the early, comprehensive and influential academic arguments about the cultural-political significance of American Indian literature – *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* in 1989 – Arnold Krupat identifies the “dialogic,” cross-cultural nature of Native American literature as its most powerful counter-colonial and political feature. The political power of hybridity in American Indian writing, Krupat elaborates in subsequent studies, parallels that of postcolonial writing: while it seemingly imitates and adopts Euro-American literary forms and discourses, it overlays those with the forms and discourses “indigenous to America” and functions as “anti-imperial translation” (*Turn* 36). The argument that the anticolonial politics of American Indian literature are encoded most meaningfully in its cross-cultural nature and counter-discursive potential is also integral to the critical perspectives of two other influential Native American scholars and writers: Louis Owens and Gerald Vizenor. American Indian literature, maintains Owens, tells “a thoroughly ‘Indian’ story and discourse” (*Other* 69), while “appropriating the master [Euro-American] discourse [and] abrogating its authority” (*Mixedblood* 4). In the process, Vizenor adds, the “coercive [English] language of boarding language schools” is turned into a language of “liberation,” telling “some of the best stories of endurance” and “tribal survivance” (“Ruins” 13). I have discussed Krupat’s, Owens’s and Vizenor’s theoretical and interpretative perspectives as representing an established and widely adopted “cross-cultural” position in American Indian studies. Cross-cultural perspectives are strongly informed by postcolonial – and in Vizenor’s work by postmodern – theories, and communicate the understanding that the most

significant socio-political power of American Indian literature and the accompanying scholarship rests on their ability to intervene in – to unsettle, “Indianise” and reverse – colonial discourses. Within this theoretical framework, as I have discussed, the deployment of discursive “hybridity,” the assertion of a cross-cultural and “mixedblood” identity, and the celebration of “the contact zone” hold a vital political meaning because these categories work to destabilise and oppose “fixed,” “pure,” hierarchical and unbridgeable divisions between “self” and “other,” coloniser and colonised, “civilisation” and “savagery” that characterise colonial, racist and other oppressive discourses. Cross-cultural theoretical and interpretative frameworks in American Indian literary studies, as Krupat points out, not only illuminate the counter-colonial political work that American Indian texts are doing, but also encourage conjunctions and comparisons between different cultural, literary and theoretical practices: in particular, they bring American Indian literature, scholarship and experience in relationship to other postcolonial and “multicultural” writings and struggles in the world (*Red Matters* 22-23).

At the same time, scholars like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Craig Womack represent the emergent – and still forming and unpopular – “tribal-centred” critical position in the field. Tribal-centred criticism, as Cook-Lynn explains in her seminal article “Who Stole Native American Studies?” in 1997, is interested in establishing critical and interpretative perspectives that promote the discussion, understanding and support of “Native-nation status and independence” (14). The latter goals, stresses Cook-Lynn, have been conceptualised as central to Native American studies since one of the founding events for the academic discipline: the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars in 1970 (9-11). From a tribal-centred point of view, current theories of discursive subversion and hybridisation have betrayed (or “stolen”) central

cultural-political goals of American Indian studies because they do not provide models for conceptualising the significance of nationalist and sovereignty discourse in American Indian experience and anticolonial struggles. Consequently, as Womack summarises, tribal-centred scholars want to re-direct the study of American Indian writing (back) to “Indian country” and politics, so that the political-social valence of American Indian writing and criticism is judged not against the question of how they may subvert colonial discourses, but rather against the question of how they may re-assert various discourses of American Indian sovereignty and nationalism (*Red on Red* 11-12). The latter direction of scholarly inquiry involves the understanding of US-Indian treaty discourse and, in Cook-Lynn’s words, of “the myths and metaphors of sovereign nationalism” (“American Indian Fiction” 30); tribal-centred scholarship, accordingly, seeks to examine the redeployment of such elements in contemporary American Indian writing. In addition, tribal-centred scholars feel that the celebration of American Indian hybrid, “mixedblood” and “transnational” experience and identity sidelines – and, in fact, disallows – the understanding and the reality of (tribal/Indian) identity building through participation in and identification with “rooted” and “local” tribal (or reservation) experiences, worldviews and moral norms. Many American Indian people, as tribal-centred-scholars emphasise, build a sense of identity not through the embrace of hybrid and transnational categories and lifestyles but, on the contrary, through the re-assertion, re-validation and re-experience of stable and grounded tribal knowledges and practices. Tribal-centred scholars are, therefore, interested in studying and providing an account for the significance of the latter, tribal-centred, categories of Indian identity building. On the basis of their intense disagreements with established cross-cultural criticism in American Indian studies,

tribal-centred scholars also assert their “intellectual sovereignty” and argue for an “autonomous” discursive and institutional status for the discipline.

My study of the cross-cultural and tribal-centred positions in American Indian criticism has indicated that the two schools of criticism propose two different, antagonistic and currently misunderstood models for the interpretation of the political and anticolonial work that American Indian writing may be doing. Cross-cultural models (in combination with postcolonial and postmodern approaches) read the counter-colonial politics of American Indian writing as manifested in the texts’ intervention in and unsettling of colonial discourses through a deployment of “hybrid” discursive strategies and themes. From a tribal-centred perspective, on the other side, American Indian literary politics of anticolonial resistance manifest themselves in the re-assertion of the stability and validity of tribal and colonial discourses, such as tribal myths and narratives of indigenous and nation status, the (colonial) discourse of US-Indian treaties, and the stable and locally produced discourses and practices of tribal identity formation. These different critical perspectives and cultural-political tenets, as I have maintained, are not incompatible. My argument has been that, despite the existing intense divisions in the scholarship, cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical models could, and should, operate together. Yet, if such bridging of critical models is to be successful and reliable, it needs be based on a serious study and on a consistent, unbiased understanding of the claims and reasons that motivate the current critical split. American Indian critical discourse, in my view, has not yet demonstrated a sustained effort and ability to do so.

Hence, the study of the underlying differences and similarities in the two antagonistic critical positions that structure American Indian literary scholarship has become a central purpose of my research. The synopsis and analysis of the cross-

cultural and tribal-centred critical positions that I have developed are important and contribute to American Indian literary-critical discourse because, at the moment, there is little comprehensive discussion and objective understanding of the nature of this significant critical split in the field, and of its implications for the interpretations of “the political” in American Indian literary studies. Accordingly, my study of the cross-cultural and tribal-centred perspectives makes three major interventions in the current discussions and arguments about these perspectives: 1) the research has advanced an argument for a constructive, fair and consistent understanding of the tribal-centred position, which remains largely unpopular or misrepresented in the academic discourse; 2) the research has offered an in-depth analysis and clarification of the underlying arguments that shape either critical position, and an even-handed critique of their contributions and weaknesses; 3) ultimately, the research has argued for a mediation of the current critical split, and has proposed reasons and models for such mediation. My re-reading of two academically popular novels, Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* and Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*, has served to support the research argument about the feasible and necessary mediation of cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical approaches. The interpretations of the novels that the research develops are innovative in that they suggest “model” discussions, which illustrate how the two critical discourses could be brought together and played off against each other to produce a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the competing cultural-political discourses that are at play in the texts.

My critical interventions in American Indian scholarship, as I want to reaffirm here, both engage with and depart from existing studies of critical-political debates in the field. Indeed, since 1999 when I started the research, there have been some timely publications that take up the similar task of discussing critical positions in American

Indian literary studies. Commonly, those publications reflect a cross-cultural perspective, since critics who adopt that perspective have generally shown a greater commitment to responding to tribal-centred arguments. Prominent among recent discussions of critical divisions in American Indian literary scholarship are Krupat's chapter "Nationalism, Indigenism, Cosmopolitanism: Three Perspectives on Native American Literatures" in *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (2002)¹ and Elvira Pulitano's study *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003). A new collection of essays, furthermore – *Louis Owens: Literary Reflections of His Life and Work* (2004), edited by Jacquelyn Kilpatrick – indicates that Owens also intended to work on a book that would have addressed tensions between cross-cultural and tribal-centred scholarship (20). Stopped by untimely death, Owens left only an earlier and partial discussion on these issues in the chapter "Blood Trails" of his *Mixedblood Messages* (1998): in it he focuses just on his own discord with Cook-Lynn. I have learned from those discussions, and I appreciate their timeliness. Yet, as I shall recapitulate below, my own research has developed and supported different ideas. In particular, the research communicates major critical disagreements with the discussions' biased and incomplete representation of the tribal-centred critical stand.

Krupat's analysis of conflicting critical standpoints in contemporary American Indian literary studies in *Red Matters*, unlike mine, offers a tripartite model for mapping out the territory of Native American literary scholarship. The scholarship, in Krupat's view, currently operates from, what he calls, nationalist, indigenist and cosmopolitan critical positions. The "cross-cultural" stand I have discussed in the research overlaps with Krupat's "cosmopolitan" critical position, yet my definition of "tribal-centred" criticism encompasses both Krupat's "nationalist" and "indigenist" perspectives. According to Krupat, "nationalist" scholars, like Cook-Lynn and

Womack, base their critical perspective “upon [their] understanding of the term sovereignty” (2), while “indigenist” scholars (like Winona Stevenson) place emphasis on the unique place-specific and earth-related tribal knowledges that inform tribal traditions and politics (10-12). Krupat suggests that the nationalist and the indigenist positions “sometimes overlap” (1) but, nonetheless, I think that his conceptualisation of separate “nationalist” (sovereignty-centred) and “indigenist” (earth-centred) positions in American Indian studies obscures, what I consider, key political aspects of tribal-centred criticism. By suggesting a division (tentative as it may be) between scholars who focus on sovereignty and “the tribal nation,” and scholars who focus on “the earth” and tribal knowledges emerging from it, Krupat’s discussion fails to acknowledge how Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s “nationalist” concept of tribal sovereignty is tightly connected to the “indigenist” concept of American Indians’ unalienable and sacred connectedness to the land. The very argument for American Indian sovereign rights and national status, as I have emphasised, hinges upon the recognition of American Indians’ ancestral, indigenous relations to the land. That recognition is at the heart of both tribal oral discourses and locally produced knowledges and of colonial US-Indian treaty discourses, which Cook-Lynn’s and Womack’s “nationalist” perspectives seek to mobilise. I think, therefore, that my discussion of “nationalist” and “indigenist” critical ideas within the larger and unified “tribal-centred” category proposes a more accurate charting and representation of those ideas than Krupat’s.

Furthermore, Krupat’s discussion implies that the major tensions between tribal-centred (nationalist and indigenist) and cross-cultural (cosmopolitan) critical positions result, primarily, from differing arguments about the discursive and institutional locations of American Indian literature and the accompanying criticism.

Krupat's implication is that the shared and most pertinent feature characterising nationalist and indigenist critical perspectives is their pursuit of cultural-critical autonomy for American Indian critical and literary discourses and their separatism from other discourses and literatures (*Red Matters* 5-11). This premise allows Krupat to explain the tribal-centred critical position away as a counterproductive and impracticable affirmation of cultural-discursive autonomy. "Separatism for literary studies as for all else," asserts Krupat in his rebuttal of Cook-Lynn's and Womack's nationalist position, "is hardly possible in the world today; were it possible, moreover, it would deprive itself of important opportunities" (7). Krupat's ultimate argument is that the cosmopolitan position – adopted by scholars like Owens, Vizenor and himself – represents the most logical and beneficial position in Native American studies. Cosmopolitan critics, Krupat proposes, could follow both nationalist and indigenist critics in "acknowledg[ing] the importance of the issue of sovereignty" and in "support[ing] indigenists place-specific [...] local knowledge[s]" (22). Yet, in addition, cosmopolitan critical methods also recognise the significance of cross-cultural experiences and knowledges, and of cross-cultural allegiances and global anticolonial struggles, as they affect and reflect in American Indian experiences and in American Indian political, critical and creative discourses. Thus, the adoption of a cosmopolitan critical model, in Krupat's argument, could resolve current critical disagreements in American Indian scholarship and could propose unified, comprehensive and profitable directions for the development of the academic discipline.

I applaud Krupat's pronounced efforts to mediate differences between the cross-cultural and the tribal-centred positions. My own study, as I have emphasised, pursues a similar goal. My objection, however, is that Krupat's analysis of tribal-

centred approaches engages only with their “separatist” discursive aspect, and does not acknowledge, or respond to, tribal-centred relevant critiques of “cosmopolitan” critical perspectives. Tribal-centred critical separatism, in Krupat’s representation, results primarily from the conflation of (justifiable) struggles for political sovereignty and assertion of local knowledges with (unjustifiable) struggles for cultural-discursive independence. I have argued, in contrast, that tribal-centred criticism disengages (“separates”) from cosmopolitan (cross-cultural, postcolonial and postmodern) approaches in American Indian studies on the basis of a well-grounded critique of specific ways in which those approaches have obscured, harmed or denied American Indian cultural-political categories and agendas. Krupat’s discussion does not speak to this aspect of tribal-centred criticism and does not respond to major complaints that tribal-centred scholarship has addressed at the “cosmopolitan” school of criticism. In addition, Krupat is very vague about the specific ways in which “the cosmopolitan critic” may, indeed, engage with and support American Indian sovereignty and nationalism discourse: an issue that is of central importance to tribal-centred scholars. His assertion that cosmopolitan criticism is willing and capable of supporting nationalist perspective demands a detailed explanation, especially in view of the fact that Krupat has previously illustrated and supported the suitability of cosmopolitan critical approaches by arguing that contemporary American Indian writing rejects the category of tribal “nationhood” in favour of “transnational” categories and allegiances (see *Turn* 39-69). Thus, it seems to me that Krupat circumvents a response to tribal-centred crucial disagreements with the “cosmopolitan” model in American Indian scholarship and, simultaneously, proposes that very model as a path to “mediating” critical disagreements. I think, therefore, that Krupat’s argument conceals rather than explains differences between cross-cultural and tribal-centred critical methods, and

does not provide a solid basis for the proposed mediation of the critical methods. Pulitano's and Owens's discussions show similar problems.

Pulitano's mapping of conflicting critical standpoints in contemporary American Indian studies in *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* draws on Krupat's ideas and communicates an argument comparable to his, with some variations on the scholars and critical strands discussed. The critical work of Craig Womack and Robert Allen Warrior (as well as of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, whom Pulitano refers to but does not discuss in depth) are Pulitano's primary examples of, in her terminology, "nativist" and "tribalcentric" critical methods. Louis Owens, Greg Sarris and Gerald Vizenor (and by extension Krupat, whom Pulitano references frequently) exemplify "dialogic" and "crosscultural" approaches in the field.² Like Krupat, Pulitano represents "tribalcentric" ideas primarily as examples of discursive separatism, which is untenable and undesirable, from both critical and political standpoints (61-62). Accordingly, Pulitano rejects the authority of "tribalcentric" approaches on the basis of the argument that they "overlook the complex level of hybridization and cultural translation that is already operating in any form of Native discourse" (61). Her study, in turn, affirms "crosscultural" approaches as more logical, progressive and politically viable because they account for the realities of (American Indian) "hybridised" existence, as well as for the undeniable cross-cultural dimensions of critical discourses and of anticolonial discursive and political struggles (102). Pulitano's study, like Krupat's, engages tribal-centred criticism only on its "separatist" agenda and offers no engagement with the different interpretations of the political that are the most important, underlying reason for the critical disagreements.

Owens's discussion of current critical controversies in the field, in the chapter "Blood Trails" in *Mixedblood Messages*, is less comprehensive than Krupat's and

Pulitano's but still reasserts a similar argument. Owens charts the larger split in the field between cross-cultural and tribal-centred perspectives through a discussion of critical disagreements between himself and Cook-Lynn. He reads Cook-Lynn's position as an essentialist and unsustainable attempt to deny the realities and possibilities of cross-cultural existence and discursive interaction (153). Owens's engagement with the debate – like Krupat's and Pulitano's – disallows the viability of tribal-centred criticism through the suggestion that it merely represents a naïve and retrograde struggle for uncontaminated and essentialist tribal critical discourses: “a static utterance that insists upon its own authority” (156). In addition, Owens dismisses Cook-Lynn's objection to the promotion of “mixedblood” discourse in American Indian literature and criticism as merely a racialised and “terminal creeds” argument for “pure” and “authentic” Indian identities (156-7). Ultimately, Owens restates the aptitude of cross-cultural criticism as one that accounts most logically and comprehensively for the “heteroglossic” (and postcolonial-like) conditions of American Indian contemporary life, cultural-political struggles, and discursive realities (157-66).

While Krupat's, Pulitano's and Owens's discussions of the debate between tribal-centred and cross-cultural scholarship focus a timely and needed attention on it, my research has also suggested that their engagement with the current critical split is deficient and misleading. I first want to recognise the fact that the three critics identify existent flaws in the tribal-centred critical model: they correctly criticise its separatist tendencies. I do agree that the rhetoric of “separatism” surfaces both in Cook-Lynn's and in Womack's critical stance, and that it is both unhelpful and ill-advised. Indeed, I regard the separatist rhetoric in tribal-centred scholarship as its major weakness, which conceals and spoils otherwise well-grounded arguments. Tribal-centred

scholarship has generally weakened its critical position by advertising itself as a separation from – rather than as an intervention in – existing critical discourses in American Indian scholarship. In addition, tribal-centred critique of cross-cultural approaches dismisses achievements of cross-cultural criticism and generally refuses to recognise ways in which cross-cultural interpretative frameworks have contributed to the understanding of the disruptive and counter-colonial discursive strategies employed by American Indian writers. Cook-Lynn's arguments, furthermore, may be muddied by bitterness and disdain directed personally at "cross-cultural" American Indian writers and scholars: a fact that makes the appreciation and understanding of her arguments frustrating and difficult at times. Thus, in my view, a major shortcoming of tribal-centred criticism is its tendency to position itself as antagonistic to and incommensurate with cross-cultural scholarship (and, by implication, with other critical discourses, too). Such "separatist" stance – I support here Krupat's, Pulitano's and Owens's judgement – is counterproductive: it alienates scholars, creates unhelpful divisions in the field, and blocks cross-disciplinary approaches and profitable exchanges of critical ideas.³

Yet, I object to the fact that Krupat's, Pulitano's and Owens's engagement with the current critical split in the field foregrounds weaknesses and limitations in tribal-centred perspectives, while subsuming their strengths and contributions. Such one-sided interpretations of tribal-centred criticism have allowed for a misguided disregard for all tribal-centred arguments. My assertion, in contrast to established perceptions, is that tribal-centred criticism makes a very important and much needed intervention in American Indian scholarship and, by extension, in postcolonial theories of discursive hybridity and subversion. Tribal-centred disagreement with cross-cultural perspectives derives from the realisation that current and lasting

preoccupations with hybridity, subversion and “mixedblood” identity in American Indian literary criticism – and in postcolonial theory – may obfuscate American Indian specific cultural-political situations, experiences and goals. The major and unacknowledged contribution of tribal-centred criticism, in my view, is that it indicates how American Indian peoples’ specific experiences and counter-colonial interests involve not only processes of “deligitimation” of colonial discourses and “hybridisation” of culture and identity, but also: 1) processes of “*re-legitimation*” of US-Indian treaty discourse and 2) practices of reassertion of *tribal-centred* experience and identity formation.

The “re-legitimation” of US-Indian treaty discourse is a meaningful counter-colonial strategy for American Indian peoples and for tribal-centred scholars because treaty discourse – in its original and generalised form – contains a legal and morally binding conformation of American Indian peoples’ indigenous and sovereign status and rights. For this reason, the treaties – imposed by the US government in the 18th and 19th century as colonial political mechanisms for regulating US-Indian relations – constitute for American Indians today a viable legal, political and moral legacy. As I discussed in chapter three, a common provision in the many original treaties is the recognition of American Indian tribes as peoples and nations who have title to their lands and who agree to cede large territories of those lands to the United States, in the name of a peaceful co-existence and cooperation. The US government, for its part, guarantees Indian tribes permanent rights to their remaining lands, as well as continuous protection of those rights. In addition, US-Indian treaties acknowledge and pledge “a substantial separatism” between tribal and US governments and peoples, whereby “Indian societies would be ‘perpetuated’ and ‘preserved’ as nations” (Wilkinson 16). In short, while the US-Indian treaties constitute (to a great extent) an

imposition of US colonial power, they also appeal to American Indians – in the past and today – because treaty provisions recognise and legally sanctify traditional understandings of tribal peoples’ connectedness and rights to their ancestral lands; the treaties also guarantee Indian tribes’ continuance as fairly independent and self-governing peoples. American Indians, as well as tribal-centred scholars, as I explained in chapter three, are interested in evoking and reclaiming treaty discourse because this discourse – despite its colonial nature, despite differing tribal experiences with the treaty-making process and despite numerous treaty violations – recognises American Indian peoples’ indigenous status and vested rights to their ancestral lands, as well as acknowledges and secures the partial political sovereignty of American Indian tribes (or nations). Thus, US-Indian treaty discourse today is reclaimed as a generalised historical record of the political, legal and moral relationship between the US and the Indians, as well as a confirmation of original tribal people’s understandings of themselves. Importantly, due to its legal and moral implications, treaty discourse gives Indian tribes (at least federally recognised ones) some political leverage to protect or reclaim tribal lands and resources, and political rights of self-determination.⁴ On the basis of US-Indian treaty discourse, as I have underlined, American Indian people presently claim partial sovereign rights, oppose authoritarian federal jurisdiction on American Indian reservations, argue for land rights, dispute federal and corporate appropriations of tribal lands and resources, and mobilise tribal political consciousness and anticolonial resistance.

Indeed, chapter one illustrated how the contemporary upsurge of American Indian political movements, starting in the 1950s and 1960s, mobilises treaty discourse as a powerful means of opposition to both colonisation and social injustice. The invocation and reassertion of treaty provisions in the 1950s fishing rights

activism, in the Alcatraz occupation of 1969-1971, in the Trail of Broken Treaties in 1972, in the Wounded Knee Demonstration in 1973, and in formation of the International Treaty Council in 1974, demonstrate the contemporary importance of treaty discourse and American Indians' interest in revitalising it, raising awareness about it, and reclaiming its original authority for political purposes. The political gains and the enhancement of tribal sovereignty that have resulted since the Red Power movement indicate that the reassertion of tribal treaty rights and the redeployment of treaty discourse are powerful political, legal and moral means: American Indian peoples use them to oppose US colonisation, to recover and retain land bases and resources (or to fight against their federal, corporate or military appropriations), to reassert particular land right (like hunting, fishing and water rights), and to demand rights to self-determination. As Vine Deloria has discussed at length, various contemporary US-tribal negotiations and documents since the 1970s – involving Indian land disputes, land claims, water rights, and socio-cultural legal provisions – both rest upon and re-deploy treaty ideas (*Documents* 181).⁵

Thus, in American Indian political and activist affairs – and now in American Indian literary affairs, too – the invocation of treaty discourse, and the reassertion of tribal land and sovereignty rights that characterise that discourse, have become important strategies for recovering tribal histories, for affirming American Indian political-cultural rights and aspirations, as well as for holding the US government responsible and accountable for its subsequent American Indian policies. Tribal-centred scholarship, I have argued, makes a very valuable contribution to American Indian literary studies because it proposes directions for theoretical and interpretative criticism that bring this historical and activist legacy to the interpretation of American Indian writing. Interpretations of political and anticolonial perspectives in American

Indian writing – as tribal-centred-criticism urges and instructs – need to create space for exploring the question of how literary texts may support (or fail to support) distinctive tribal sovereignty and nationhood agendas. Engaging with such a question requires the recognition, study and teaching of elements in American Indian writing that seek to reclaim and reassert US-Indian treaty discourse, and to uphold, as well as raise awareness about, unique American Indian rights to tribal lands, resources and self-determination.

Recent publications in American and postcolonial studies, like Chadwick Allen's "Postcolonial Theory and the Discourse of Treaties" (2000) and Eric Cheyfitz's "The (Post)colonial Predicament of Native American Studies" (2002), indirectly recognise tribal-centred contribution to American Indian theoretical and interpretative criticism. Both critics suggest that orthodox postcolonial theory cannot explain and support American Indian ("postcolonial") situations and goals, and cannot interpret distinctive discursive strategies in American Indian writing, without some understanding and engagement with US-Indian treaty discourse and with Indian federal law. In Chadwick Allen's argument, postcolonial theory – which is interested in explaining the disruption or dismantling of "dominant colonial narrative[s]" – cannot account for American Indian literary and activist redeployments of treaty discourse, which seek to reassert "the continuing authority of [the] original recognition of American Indian land and sovereignty rights in the US-Indian treaties (82). Comparably, Cheyfitz suggests that treaty and federal Indian law discourse provides an indispensable context for discussing the political work that American Indian literary texts may be doing. A critical and interpretative engagement with treaty and federal Indian law discourse, as Cheyfitz proposes, illuminates the specific

(post)colonial conditions of American Indian life and political and discursive anticolonial battles.

Allen's and Cheyfitz's discussions are very thoughtful, timely and valuable, but I have one tentative complaint: I wish both critics had acknowledged the validity of tribal-centred critique of cross-cultural and postcolonial methods more directly and extensively. Allen, for instance, mentions Cook-Lynn's tribal-centred criticism only superficially, in a note (EN 5, 84). Cheyfitz, similarly, does not clarify very well how Cook-Lynn's insistence on the central significance of treaty discourse in American Indian studies supports his own argument.⁶ Since Cook-Lynn makes one of the earliest arguments for the necessity of making US-Indian treaty discourse central to the development of American Indian theoretical and interpretative criticism, I think that her ideas need to be acknowledged more emphatically. Such acknowledgement could be particularly beneficial in the light of the fact that tribal-centred criticism is often misrepresented or disregarded in current academic discourse. Still, it is a significant and helpful fact that analyses like Allen's and Cheyfitz's (which are "outside" of the immediate tribal-centred critical camp) do agree with tribal-centred critiques of cross-cultural and postcolonial approaches, and support the proposal for new directions in American Indian theoretical and interpretative criticism.

My re-reading of Silko's *Ceremony* and Erdrich's *Tracks* has aimed to bring tribal sovereignty and land rights discourse to the study of individual American Indian texts and to illustrate its relevance as an interpretative approach. The interpretations have highlighted and analysed how the mobilisation of tribal land and sovereignty rights discourse constitutes a vital theme in the two novels. In *Ceremony* this theme unfolds through the representation of the uranium mine on Laguna lands as a major source of disruption in the novel. Silko uses the mine to expose and protest the fact

that Laguna lands have been abused and “stolen” from Laguna people by means of US contemporary policies of colonial (and capitalist) domination. These policies destroy Laguna lands and peoples, while allowing US military and corporate businesses to appropriate Laguna lands and their uranium resources and, consequently, to produce and use the atomic bomb. US colonial violations of Laguna lands thus pose both a local and a global threat to human life. I read the novel as a mobilisation of treaty discourse and rights because, as I have discussed, the narrative consistently demands the return of tribal control over their lands and their affairs. The novel maintains that the imminent threat of tribal and world destruction results from the fact that Laguna people have been denied true sovereignty: colonial policies have taken away Laguna peoples’ control over their tribal lands and resources, while US socio-political and cultural institutions have undermined the authority of tribal knowledges that evolve in relationship with those lands. I have argued how, despite the strong theme of cultural “hybridity” that runs throughout *Ceremony* and that interpretations often foreground, the novel promotes the ideas of tribal separatism and sovereignty that characterise treaty discourse: it stresses the necessity for the recognition and reclaiming of Laguna people’s exclusive rights to their lands and their knowledge production, as well as their rights to autonomy from US socio-political and economic institutions. *Ceremony* publicises and reasserts tribal land and sovereignty rights by indicating how the central (local and global) problems that the novel raises could be truly resolved only if these rights are honoured and strengthened.

Erdrich builds up a similar argument in *Tracks*. The novel, through Nanapush’s narration, exposes the US government’s violations of Anishinabe vested and treaty rights to their lands through a focus on the land theft and tribal devastation

that the Allotment Act of 1887 initiated. The Allotment Act is a severe violation of treaty provisions and the novel refuses to accept the suggestion that subsequent US policies and laws, particularly the American Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, have provided real empowerment and resolutions for the Anishinabe people. Nanapush ends his narrative in 1924 as, supposedly, a newly “empowered” American citizen and as a tribal chair in a US government-controlled tribal political life. From the standpoint of his new position, Nanapush bitterly admits that he has acquired only the power to bring his stepdaughter, Lulu, back home. The novel suggests that the new rights and political powers that Nanapush seemingly possesses are dominated and limited by the US government: Nanapush sees himself as a “bureaucrat,” who has become a part of the colonial machine that feeds on “the lives of Indians” (*T* 225). Contrary to established interpretations of the novel, I have argued that the political power of *Tracks* does not rest necessarily on the advocacy of the possibilities of cultural-political syncretism – which Nanapush clearly embodies – but rather on the novel’s refusal to present and accept that syncretism as the only viable resolution for the Anishinabe people’s situation. Like *Ceremony*, *Tracks* raises awareness about and supports tribal rights to lands and self-determination by insisting that only the restoration of those rights could repair the damage done by their violations.

My research has further suggested that tribal-centred critique of “mixedblood” identity discourse in American Indian literature and criticism makes another important – and currently ignored or misunderstood – contribution to American Indian theoretical and interpretative criticism. That critique has often been denounced as a racialised, essentialist and retrograde support of “tribal” cultural and genetic purity and authenticity (for example, see Owens, *Mixedblood* 153-56 and Pulitano 97). Yet, tribal-centred scholars, as I have pointed out, do not suggest that “real” tribal cultures

and identities are culturally or racially “pure.”⁷ The tribal-centred argument rather is that the valorisation of “hybrid” experience and identity, as one of the most important and politically progressive subjects in American Indian experience and writing, obscures tribal realities (particularly on reservation lands and in reservation communities) and undermines the validity of tribal-centred socio-cultural practices and configurations of identity.

I support the argument that conceptualisations and assertions of Indian identity in terms of cultural hybridity and fluidity are not necessarily as objective and politically empowering as cross-cultural criticism likes to claim. Yet, this is not to say that hybrid identity discourse cannot and does not work as a powerful critique of colonial essentialist discourses and representations of “Indianness.” It does, and this is a valuable, helpful and politically forceful aspect of cross-cultural discourse that tribal-centred criticism fails to acknowledge. I do agree with Krupat, Owens and Vizenor, among many other critics, who correctly and convincingly argue that colonial and oppressive discourses, in general, are typically founded on “invented,” “fixed,” and “uncontaminated” categories of identity and culture, which support the illusion that the divisions between “self” and “other,” coloniser and colonised are clear-cut, hierarchical, “terminal” and unbridgeable. Existing representations and stereotypes of American Indian peoples that are products of colonial discourse abound in “invented” and “doomed” Indians, who are tragically (and sometimes romantically) split between savagery and civilisation, between assimilation and extinction. Such colonial discourses have truly been sources of both psychological traumas and political disempowerment for many colonised peoples – as, for instance, Frantz Fanon’s work has shown – as well as for American Indian peoples, specifically, as studies such as Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran’s *Native American Postcolonial*

Psychology (1995) have confirmed. Hybridity discourse in American Indian studies, and in postcolonial and in American (multicultural) studies in general, does, indeed, offer a powerful critique of controlling and “purist” colonial configurations of identity and culture: in this sense, and in Owens’s words, “hybridization and heterogeneity” can truly be “sources of power and rich potential” (*Mixedblood* 35). I support this understanding: in their capacity to deconstruct and subvert colonial essentialist discourses and representations, the “post-indian” and the “mixedblood” Indian do work to “liberate” the “invented” Indian, as Vizenor and Owens maintain with particular vigour and persuasiveness. Cross-cultural approaches in American Indian studies, I have argued, have truly contributed to the development of contemporary American Indian literary criticism because they have helped to contextualise and conceptualise the political power of discursive hybridity and syncretic identity formation in American Indian counter-colonial experience. Cross-cultural theoretical and interpretative criticism has been very useful for exposing and challenging legacies of silencing, stereotyping and “invention” of American Indian peoples in US colonial discourses and representations. Cross-cultural analyses of the subversive potential of “hybridity” in American Indian experience and writing have helped to illuminate and confront essentialist binaries perpetuated in colonial discourses. These are important and necessary aspects of theoretical and cultural analysis that cross-cultural criticism had supported and developed, and that tribal-centred criticism does not undertake, and at times, seems to unjustifiably oppose.

Yet, cross-cultural discourse promotes “hybridity” not only as a critique of colonial essentialism but also as the most progressive and positive category of Indian identity. What makes hybridity discourse problematic and counterproductive – and justifies tribal-centred critics’ opposition to it – is its overwhelming prevalence,

assertion and praise as a discourse that describes the most accurate, realistic, beneficial and politically empowering identity configuration for American Indians. In various ways, as I discussed in chapter two, Vizenor's, Owens's and Krupat's critical (and creative) writing celebrates "the mixedbloods" as "the next [Indian] generation."⁸ In American Indian cross-cultural criticism, discussions about American Indian identities and cultures happen exclusively on and pay tribute to the "border," the "contact-zone," the "trickster-zone," and the "diaspora." In this respect, American Indian cross-cultural criticism has evidently followed current theoretical-interpretative tendencies in multicultural, postcolonial and cultural identity studies, which commonly discuss and celebrate the formation of contemporary cultures and identities – especially "ethnic" and "postcolonial" ones – in terms of hybridisation and resistance to oppressive, divisive and fixed definitions of self and other. (Owens's arguments in *Mixedblood Messages* (15, 176) and in *I Hear the Train* (208), for instance, clearly draw on Stuart Hall's concepts of "diasporic" identity and on Gloria Anzaldúa's mestiza discourse.) The currently prevalent attitude that cross-cultural academic discourse in American Indian studies (and elsewhere) supports is that "hybrid" identity configurations are positive, empowering and anticolonial. Attachments to "fixed" categories of identity are seen, accordingly, as dangerously retrograde, authoritarian, racist, and colonising (Owens, *Mixedblood* 153-56 and Pulitano 97). Critics like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Craig Womack and Sean Teuton strongly object to this prioritising of hybridity discourse, and I support their objection.

One of the problems with mixedblood discourse, as Cook-Lynn points out, is that it is "characterized by excess of individualism" and identifies with "urban" and "emancipated" American Indians, who have cut most of their relationships to tribal land bases, tribal communities, and tribal cultural practices ("American Indian

Intellectualism” 127-31).⁹ Consequently, as Teuton elaborates, valorisation of mixedblood discourse works to “inadvertently delegitimize the status of [tribal] experience” and knowledge (630-31). Drawing on realist theory, supported by critics like Satya Mohanty and Paula Moya, Teuton convincingly argues that conceptualisations of American Indian identity as “hybridised” and “fluid” cannot account for processes and forms of social, cultural and political identification that are based on tribal-centred and “rooted” categories and objective experiences: “hybrid” theories of Indian identity, as Teuton puts it, “are unable to offer an account of how [tribal] culture can be recovered, how Native people can grow and develop through [tribal-centred] cultural practice” (631). Many American Indians, as both Cook-Lynn’s and Teuton’s arguments suggest, develop a sense of identity through participation in tribal community life and cultural practices, which – while not culturally pure – rely on, reassert and celebrate the recovery of ancestral, “rooted,” stable and locally-validated knowledges, core spiritual and moral beliefs, and other tribal discourses of personal and communal identification. The reassertion of the authority and meaningfulness of such tribal knowledges and tribal-centred experiences and practices are not only valid sources of identity building and identification, but are also vital to the socio-cultural recovery of Indian tribes and their political claims and anticolonial interests. In fact, the reassertion of the rooted-ness, specificity, and stability of tribal experiences, practices and knowledges – in relation to tribal lands, tribal socio-economic practices and sense of tribal community or “peoplehood” – are the basis for tribal land and sovereignty rights claims.

Hence, I have argued that tribal-centred scholarship makes a meaningful contribution to the interpretative criticism of American Indian literature because it pursues the currently neglected inquiry of how core tribal knowledges, perceptions

and practices assist the growth of American Indians as responsible tribal community members *within* local and tribally-specific frames of identity and identification. Tribal-centred interest in returning the discussion of Indian identities and cultures to “Indian country” and in reclaiming the “border” as a symbol of stability and rootedness – rather than as a symbol of hybridity and fluidity – is not an expression of ahistorical nostalgia or essentialism (as Owens and Pulitano suggest), but a call for critical perspectives that can account more adequately and objectively for the variety of experiences and practices that shape current Indian/tribal identities and political discourses. Tribal-centred scholars’ key objection to hybridity discourse is that it has marginalised and undermined the study of American Indian writing in relation to tribal-centred categories of identification: to paraphrase Womack, hybridists’ critical work and interpretations in American Indian literary studies have focused on “looking toward the outside” of “Indian country” rather than “from within” it (*Red on Red* 12). Indeed, the question of how American Indians negotiate a cross-cultural identity and challenge the colonial perception of the static and doomed Indian has been overexploited in established cross-cultural criticism. A more serious critical inquiry into how contemporary American Indian peoples, writers and characters in American Indian writing develop, or fail to develop, a tribal cultural and political identity and/or to affirm their place as tribal members is overdue.

In *Red Matters* Krupat recognises – although rather cursory – the validity of tribal-centred critique of hybridity discourse. He points out that he agrees with Womack that “the mixed-blood Indian characters in the work of a number of authors [...] are [...] best spoken of as Indians [...] rather than as figures of hybridity” (22). Krupat elaborates on his agreement in chapter five of his study by suggesting that the adoption of a “hybrid” Indian identity – a favourite theme in cross-cultural criticism –

“has at base the deep and unmistakable roots of ‘tribal’ values” (112), so that mixedblood Indian characters in American Indian literature, for all their complex identity configurations, remain “entirely secure in their Indian identities” (113).

Krupat thus communicates a tacit agreement with tribal-centred critique of “mixedblood” discourse, although he does not necessarily unpack differences between cross-cultural and tribal-centred categories of identity configuration and critical analysis. (Krupat’s rhetorical goal, as I pointed out, is to illustrate how cosmopolitan criticism can address tribal-centred concerns, rather than to analyse those concerns.)

I have argued, however, that it may be a more meaningful critical and interpretative practice to not seek to consolidate cross-cultural and tribal-centred configurations and interpretations of Indian identity, but rather to play them off against each other and analyse their competing and contradictory political meanings. Such critical practice may be particularly useful in the interpretation of contemporary American Indian writing, whose thematic and discursive hybridity often produces contradictory socio-political meanings in relation to colonial discourse, on one side, and in relation to tribal-centred ones, on the other. A commitment to acknowledging real differences and tensions between syncretic and tribal-centred concepts of identity, between cross-cultural and tribal-centred experiences, could also help critics develop a more systematic, objective and comprehensive understanding of how American Indian writers’ own involvement with, or distancing from, the tribal communities and cultural practices may reflect in the texts’ (adequate or inadequate) uses of tribal traditions and/or in the texts’ themes and representations of Indian identity. By discussing tensions and contradictions in the identity discourses that are at play in contemporary American Indian writing we could begin to engage with the complex

and competing demands on the writing's representations of contemporary American Indian experiences and identity politics.

My analysis of cross-cultural and tribal-centred disagreements over “mixedblood” discourse in American Indian studies suggests that mixedblood Indians “in the work of a number of authors” can and, in fact, should continue to be spoken of “as figures of hybridity.” Mixedblood Indians, like Tayo and Betonie in *Ceremony* and Nanapush in *Tracks* – as I have emphasised in my re-readings of the novels – are deliberately and unmistakably created as positive and empowering figures of hybridity. As mixedbloods, who unsettle fixed and essentialist definitions of identities and societies, and who successfully negotiate a syncretic sense of self and culture, Tayo, Betonie and Nanapush are distinctive counterparts of the colonised and psychologically ravished Indian, represented by Rocky, Auntie, Emo, Helen Jean and Laura in *Ceremony* and by Pauline in *Tracks*. The latter characters have internalised the clear-cut dichotomies and hierarchies between Indianness and whiteness, tribal and Euro-American culture, and between tribal and Christian religions and moral codes that colonial and racist discourse has perpetuated. In both novels, the psychologically colonised Indians are consumed by self-hatred, sense of inferiority, violence and even insanity. It is in relationship with – in comparison and contrast to – such colonial discourses that Tayo's, Betonie's and Nanapush's hybridity acquires undeniable anticolonial significance. I have emphasised, in agreement with Krupat's Owens's and Vizenor's cross-cultural, postcolonial and postmodern arguments, that cross-cultural and mixedblood perspectives on Indian identity and culture are politically progressive in that they challenge and subvert essentialism and psychological colonisation. By supporting cross-cultural experiences and mixedblood identity configurations, Silko and Erdrich seek to illuminate and confront essentialist

binaries sustained by colonial discourses. Against the background of fixed and unbridgeable definitions of “self” and “other” that inform and perpetuate the colonial discourse, the writers’ assertion of cross-cultural discursive practices and identity configurations are politically and psychologically empowering. The novels themselves, as cross-cultural discourses, self-consciously unsettle and “Indianise” colonial discourses, and seek to reclaim tribal cultural traditions and narrative forms. Thus, as I have discussed, the narrative and linguistic strategies that *Ceremony* develops successfully reclaim Laguna stories from stultifying, “museumizing” and lifeless Euro-American representations, including those of Euro-American ethnography. Likewise, Nanapush’s speech-like narrative voice and story in *Tracks* stand in a deliberate contrast to Pauline’s novelistic and colonised account, and similarly illustrate a case of “Indianisation” and “deligitimation” of colonial discourses, and of the English language itself.

At the same time, I have also illustrated how the tendency to affirm and explain “progressive” Indian identity through mixedblood discourse – in terms of cultural syncretism – undermines and fails to account for the authority and viability of local, tribal-centred Indian identities. In both novels, the affirmation of “mixedblood” Indian identity is predicated upon the “sacrifice” of the most traditional tribal characters: the traditional Laguna medicine man, Ku’oosh, in *Ceremony*, and the epitome of the Anishinabe people’s relationships to their lands and gods, Fleur, in *Tracks*. The novels suggest that those traditionalists are out of place in a contemporary world, and their representations evoke the doomed colonial image of the “vanishing Indian.” Since both novels acknowledge the fact that culture transformation and hybridisation have always been parts of (traditional) tribal cultures – as, for instance Betonie himself points out, and as Fleur’s French name suggests –

the ultimate and inevitable “sacrifice” of traditionalism that the novels present and support cannot be seen as a logical or necessary condition for the contemporary “survivance” and “transmotion” of tribal life and cultures. The novels thus illustrate the tribal-centred claim that mixedblood discourse has itself become a normative and essentialist discourse, which undermines the continuing authority and viability of tribal-centred categories of identity and experience. Silko and Erdrich, I suggested, valorise the possibilities of mixedblood and syncretic identity from the positions of their own acculturated experiences and their distancing from ongoing tribal-centred and identity-forming cultural practices. Thus, my suggestion has been that, as critics, we need to discuss the socio-political tensions created by the affirmation of mixedblood discourse in American Indian writing rather than to celebrate the supposed “progressiveness” and “objectivity” of hybrid identity politics. By starting an inquiry about how the writers’ cross-cultural identity perspective and locations may depart from ongoing and objective tribal-centred cultural practices and identity configurations we can begin to account more fully for the role of experience and social practice in identity formation.

The overall conclusion that my theoretical discussions and interpretative readings arrive at is that cross-cultural and tribal-centred methods of critical enquiry are not mutually exclusive. They both develop valid and helpful terms for understanding socio-cultural and anticolonial political goals of American Indian peoples, and for interpreting the expression of such goals in contemporary American Indian writing. The strengths and weaknesses, the contributions and omissions of either method suggest that we need to use these methods in conjunction and in a way that does not smooth over their differences but, instead, foregrounds and uses them to examine more fully and accurately the specificities and complexities of American

Indian histories, colonial experiences, anticolonial struggles and identity politics. Accordingly, I have suggested three major trajectories of critical and interpretative developments within American Indian literary studies.

First, the research asserts that theories and interpretations of the subversive and counter-colonial potential of “Indian” hybridity and mixedblood identity remains a meaningful part of American Indian theoretical and interpretative scholarship. The work of cross-cultural critics in American Indian studies has been, and still is, indispensable for theorising the significance of experiential and analytical categories – such as hybridity, plural identity, subversive writing strategies and cross-cultural interactions – as these shape American Indian experiences, colonial legacies, creative writing and anticolonial resistance. Cross-cultural criticism remains particularly useful and irreplaceable as a critique of the fixed hierarchies and dualisms of colonial (and racist) discourses. As a theoretical and interpretative discourse, cross-cultural criticism illuminates and assists the understanding of the processes and strategies by which American Indian peoples may challenge their “othering,” “invention,” silencing and disempowerment in the US cultural and political life. In addition, cross-cultural criticism is very useful for understanding the political and psychological importance of communicating across cultural and experiential differences, of reaching broader audience and of encouraging cross-cultural allegiances.

Respectively, Native Americanists need to theorise and account for the fact that a critique of US colonising histories and discourses from a cross-cultural perspective cannot account fully and objectively for American Indian peoples’ specific histories and anticolonial goals. In particular, the theorisation of the practices of subversion and hybridisation of colonial discourses as one of the most powerful strategies of resistance that American Indian writing and/or political struggles could

adopt curbs the understanding of tribal sovereignty discourse and anticolonial nationalism. American Indian political and anticolonial interests, as Cook-Lynn has asserted, lie not only in the processes and practices of subversion and hybridisation of colonial discourses, but also in the reassertion of the validity of treaty discourse, and of other “myths and metaphors of sovereign nationalism” (“American Indian Fiction” 30). The discussion of how American Indian “hybrid” writing and contemporary politics may re-legitimate, or depart from, US-Indian treaty discourse and tribal notions of indigenusness and sovereignty is an area of study that has largely been ignored. While hybridity discourse assists our understanding of important cultural and psychological aspects of American Indian peoples’ anticolonial struggles, the engagement with Indian sovereignty and treaty discourse allows us to study and raise awareness about unique and defensible American Indian rights to tribal lands, resources and self-determination. Such study merits specific attention because of its real political importance for American Indian peoples, because of its grounding in important, ignored and misunderstood history, and because of its capacity to account theoretically for the distinctive place that American Indian literary studies may occupy within postcolonial theory. By engaging with tribal sovereignty and treaty discourse – and its US violations and tribal reassertions – Native American literary studies (and American and postcolonial studies) could develop a critique not only of US colonial discourses but also of US capitalist developments that have been predicated upon the appropriation of tribal lands and resources. The inclusion of treaty discourse as an aspect of Native American theoretical and interpretative criticism will allow us to conceptualise Native American peoples’ contemporary anticolonial struggle more fully and objectively: as a struggle not only against

colonial discourses of oppression and disempowerment but also against US (capitalist) practices of exploitation of tribal lands and resources.¹⁰

Finally, I have argued that we need to re-examine the promotion of “mixedblood” identity politics in American Indian studies. The assertion of “border” experiences and of “mixedblood” identities works, indeed, as a challenge to essentialist, psychologically oppressive and politically disempowering hierarchies and dichotomies propagated by colonial discourses. Nonetheless, tribal-centred criticism correctly urges us to confront the established tendency in contemporary critical discourse to interpret and promote the “hybridity” and the “heterogeneity” of cultures and identities as the most progressive, effective and realistic forms of cultural and identity politics. Important realities and goals of (tribal) cultures and peoples, as tribal-centred critics suggest, involve not the transcendence of local, rooted and communal tribal references and socio-cultural practices but rather their strengthening and re-assertion. Only by bringing together both cross-cultural and tribal-centred perspectives on “hybridity” discourse in American Indian studies, could we begin to understand the competing and contradictory meanings of that discourse in relation to both colonial and tribal-centred discourses. Those tensions have, thus far, rarely been acknowledged and studied, but a joint use of cross-cultural and tribal-centred approaches prompts and assists an inquiry in this direction. The fundamental issues around identity politics that we need to explore in the future may revolve not necessarily around the question of how cultures and identities collide, mix and become heterogeneous and (possibly) anticolonial, but rather around the exploration of how different material experiences and realities may produce different forms of social and personal identification, and may offer sustainable and tangible alternatives to “transnational”(and maybe “industrial”) identities.

Having argued that it is logical and beneficial for cross-cultural and tribal-centred perspectives to operate together, I want to return to the “separatist” stance of tribal-centred criticism. I confirm my earlier argument that the tribal-centred vocabulary of intellectual separatism and autonomy is unhelpful and is probably responsible for much of the current misunderstanding and dismissal of tribal-centred approaches. On the other hand, tribal-centred scholars do not seem to categorically or genuinely propose that American Indian literary criticism could or should develop in isolation from or in denial of other critical perspectives. Cook-Lynn herself, despite her pronounced disregard for cross-cultural, postcolonial and postmodern theories, also stresses how the tribal-centred critical position is not “a call for separatist identity and conflict and [for] monopolization of intellectual thought and scholarly inquiry” (“Literary and Political” 51). “No thoughtful Native scholar,” she confirms elsewhere, “suggests that the primacy of the Native voice should exclude any other” (“Who Stole” 21). Womack similarly points out that his intention in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* – a study that readily announces its “separatist” rhetoric – is not one that “preempts or cancels out” other approaches to American Indian literature (2). As Womack acknowledges, his critical models are “a point on [the] spectrum [of American Indian literary criticism], not the spectrum itself” (2). While Womack stresses the merits of tribal-centred (“red stick”) criticism in the study of Creek literature, he also makes clear that his is not “the only way to understand Creek writing” (4). Such quotations indicate that tribal-centred criticism is not categorically opposed, at least hypothetically, to the idea of participating in critical exchange and in multidisciplinary work, or to the idea of taking part in the larger (cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary and transnational) dialogues about literature, politics, and resistance.

Still, tribal-centred scholarship has made little effort to offer a vision of how American Indian literature and scholarship may be meaningful in relation to the larger fields of American and world literature, to other critical approaches, and/or to other – global and local – struggles against oppression, colonisation and/or against US destructive uses of (other peoples’) lands and resources. As a rule, tribal-centred criticism seeks to stress differences between American Indian peoples’ experiences and situations, and those of other ethnic communities in the United States, or other “postcolonial” peoples in the world. Tribal-centred criticism has simply shown no interest, thus far, in cultural, socio-political or theoretical comparativism. In addition, tribal-centred criticism says little about the fact that the successful advocacy and accomplishment of tribal-centred political goals depends significantly on the capacity of Native American studies to create visibility, to raise awareness, and to build allegiances outside of Indian tribes, which Cook-Lynn correctly defines as the discipline’s immediate constituencies and beneficiaries (“Who Stole” 10). There is some indication that tribal-centred scholarship is willing to explore connections between American Indian experiences and writing and those of other colonised indigenous peoples: Cook-Lynn, for instance, discusses parallels between American Indian and Guatemalan political and literary situations (“How Scholarship”) and Jack Forbes is known for his support of the first Indian-Chicano University in the US (D-Q University). Yet, these are still tentative and sporadic examples. Tribal-centred scholarship, it seems to me, needs to develop further in directions that address fully and consistently the question of how tribal-centred critical methodologies and cultural-political goals could relate to and assist global indigenous and anticolonial movements and solidarity, and/or could build national and international support for American Indian and other indigenous or anticolonial efforts.

In contrast, cross-cultural criticism, and particularly Arnold Krupat's contributions to it, stresses the importance of critical comparativism, and of cross-cultural interactions and allegiances in the development of Native American studies. Since his first major publication in the field, *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*, Krupat has explained and justified the political and cultural importance of conceptualising Native American literary studies in relationship to American Studies: as he asserts, Native American literatures and scholarship could, and do, offer a powerful critique of US history and concepts of "American" nationhood and experience. Cross-cultural criticism, furthermore, encourages the exploration of meaningful similarities and differences between American Indian histories, realities, anticolonial goals and writing and those of other peoples in the US and around the globe. Krupat correctly argues that a commitment to highlighting and exploring connections in the anticolonial and anti-oppression struggles "at home" and "abroad" allows us to conceptualise both oppression and resistance not just as isolated, locally-contained events, but as practices that happen transnationally and have a global significance. Awareness about how oppression and resistance function globally, and a comparative inquiry into these processes allow intellectuals and activists to challenge "'the entire system' of colonial knowledge" more effectively and to build networks of solidarity (*Red Matters* 22). I share and support the view that it is advantageous, and even crucial, for American Indian studies – specifically for the reading and teaching of American Indian literature – to explore and develop connections with other fields of critical discourse and study, and with other (inter)national, ethnic or resistance experiences, writings or struggles. By studying why and how cross-cultural and tribal-centred approaches could work

together, I have demonstrated my support for critically and politically informed comparativism.

This discussion finally leads me to the issue of the institutional locations of Native American studies, which is also an aspect of the current split between cross-cultural and tribal-centred perspectives. I do not think that there is a single, “one fits all,” response to the question of whether Native American studies could or should have an “autonomous” institutional status or whether it should be integrated into larger (existing or newly formed) departments or programs. I see much value and logic in tribal-centred scholars’ assertion that Native American studies deserve and require an academic space of “their own,” as well as in their pursuit of principles for clustering and studying American Indian writing and cultural-political issues around specific tribes and regions. Given the growth and the continuing creation of diverse literary and non-literary American Indian writing from a variety of tribal, pan-Indian and cross-cultural perspectives, as well as the accumulation of “critical mass” in the field, the formation of specific Native American programs, departments or other academic organisations is justifiable and can foster the exploration of a larger variety of tribal/pan-Indian issues in a greater depth, detail and specificity. An autonomous institutional status of Native American studies can also assist the development of theoretical and instructional methodologies, specific to the field and, possibly, to the specific body of students. An autonomous departmental status for Native American studies also seems to me as a logical and beneficial direction of development in situations and conditions where Native American studies could have a strong activist agenda and could interact directly with local tribal communities, as Cook-Lynn envisions. In short, I think that Native American studies can successfully develop as a discipline of independent institutional status where there are right conditions for such

a development: a sufficient number of knowledgeable staff, with a range of expertise in American Indian matters, an adequate number of interested students, ample resources, opportunities for professional realisation or community involvement, and so on. This type of development may be more feasible and preferable in the United States and Canada, as the large number of independent American Indian programs and departments there currently indicates (see Nelson, “Guide”).

The further development of Native American studies as a discipline integrated into traditional institutional locations and into larger, multidisciplinary programs is also a valid and profitable option; I expect that this will remain the prevalent model of development in European academic environments, mostly due to the practical reasons I mentioned above. An “integrated” model of development for American Indian studies will be better situated – intellectually and institutionally – to encourage comparative and multidisciplinary approaches in the study of American Indian literature and issues, to promote sharing of experience, knowledge, competence and methodologies across different subjects and programs.

Both models of development have potential strengths and weaknesses, which are comparable to the strengths and weaknesses I have observed in tribal-centred and cross-cultural criticism. On one hand, there are the potential pitfalls of counterproductive separatist rhetoric, of antagonisms between scholars, of failures to share and unite knowledges, skills, experience and support. On the other side, there are the possible drawbacks of over-generalising American Indian situations, of presenting American Indians as just one of many ethnic and colonised peoples, of losing sight of the specificities of American Indian experience and goals. My hope is that the observations and arguments I have developed in the research propose valid and useful approaches that could help us avoid such pitfalls.

NOTES

¹Krupat points out that chapter one in *Red Matters* has appeared in a “very brief and much earlier version [...] in *Centennial Review*” (*Red Matters* xiii), in the fall of 1998. I first became aware of Krupat’s ideas about critical positions in American Indian during Krupat’s presentation at the conference “Reconfiguring Ethnic America” at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, in the summer of 1999. Looking back at my research motivation and process, I think that presentation sparked my initial interest in studying the debate.

²In a separate chapter, Pulitano also discusses the critical work of Paula Gunn Allen (19-58). Pulitano’s discussion suggests parallels between Allen’s “woman-centred,” “gynosophical” perspective and “the nationalist approach” of Warrior, Womack, and Cook-Lynn: both positions, despite their pronounced separatism, demonstrate (“self-consciously or not”) cross-cultural discursive practices and engagement with “Eurocentric theory” (189). That comparison, illustrates once more, how, for Pulitano, “the nationalist approach” represents merely a self-motivated and self-defeating assertion of discursive autonomy. Pulitano’s study fails to recognise the innovative methods for the interpretation of the political in American Indian experience and writing that Womack’s and Cook-Lynn’s tribal-centred perspectives propose. Pulitano does not even mention the mobilisation of treaty discourse and of tribal nationalist narratives, which is one of the most important aspects of tribal-centred criticism. That aspect, so central to Womack and Cook-Lynn’s “nationalist” approach, is absolutely missing from Paula Gunn Allen’s critical perspective, which remains exclusively culturalist, and at times, even mystifying and ahistorical. While Allen’s critical approach may show traits of self-contradiction and essentialism, as

Pulitano correctly points out, Womack's and Cook-Lynn's arguments are well-grounded in the re-assertion of specific historical and cultural discourses of sovereignty, rather than in affirmations of tribal cultural and discursive specificity. (See also my note 7 in chapter two, 106-7).

³Cross-cultural criticism of tribal-centred "separatism" resembles Kwame Anthony Appiah's critique of African literary nationalism in his *My Father's House* (1992) and both Krupat (*Red Matters* 17-18) and Pulitano (86-89) refer to Appia's work to support their critique of the tribal-centred critical position. In a nutshell, the argument goes like this: American Indian tribal-centred (or African nationalist) critics assert "separate" and "autonomous" categories of analysis that derive from within tribal cultural and political traditions (or from within African oral traditions). Consequently, American Indian tribal-centred (or African nationalist) criticism ignores the influences of Euro-American socio-cultural and political discourses that do shape writers' consciousness and the forms and contents of American Indian (or African) writing. Once again, I agree that this is a fair criticism of American Indian (and African) literary nationalism. Yet, cross-cultural scholarship could be accused of one-sidedness in the opposite direction, and this is exactly the accusation that tribal-centred critics make. Instead of acknowledging its own one-sidedness and the ways in which "nationalist" criticism may contribute to repair it, cross-cultural scholarship stops at the point of merely denouncing "the separatism" of nationalist criticism.

⁴I pointed out that Indian tribes experienced and participated in the treaty making process differently, and that some Indian tribes did not sign treaties with the US. Indian tribes in New Mexico, to give an example, came under the jurisdiction of the US only at the end of the Mexican-American war in 1848 and did not participate

in the treaty-making process. Nevertheless, the treaties, as well as later Indian federal law and provisions, share similar features that allow for generalisations. The US government has also often dealt with American Indian peoples as a group and have encouraged generalisations of US-Indian relationships and rights.

⁵Indian tribes continue to assert, stronger than ever, their partial sovereign powers and rights. On 9 March 2005, to give a personal example, I witnessed the first ever “State of the Tribes” address, which was delivered in the Capitol Building in Madison, Wisconsin. In the address, representing the eleven tribes on the territory of Wisconsin, the chair of Red Cliff Chippewa tribe, Ray DePerry, spoke, among other things, about the specificities and the importance of the tribes’ status as nations, and of their unique relationships with the US federal and state authorities. The address also communicated the idea that American Indian tribes did not seek to separate themselves from other peoples and from humanity. DePerry concluded his speech with the following words: “What we all cannot lose sight of — whether we are black, white, brown or yellow — is that we all belong to the state of humanity. And that is what this day is truly about” (qtd. in Paskova, *The Badger Herald*). The “State of the Tribes” address illustrates once more how the discourse of American Indian tribes’ sovereign status and rights is something very different from essentialist, racial or fundamentalist discourses.

⁶In developing his proposal for engagement with treaty discourse as an important interpretative context for understanding (post)colonial politics in American Indian writing, Cheyfitz originally acknowledges the contribution of Cook-Lynn’s argument for the central and ignored importance of treaty and federal Indian law discourse in American Indian studies (407). It seems to me, though, that in the course

of his article Cheyfitz glosses over that contribution of tribal-centred critics and stresses their intellectual separatism instead (see N 2, 407 and N 12-14, 414-19). Cheyfitz tends to represent Krupat's cosmopolitan position more favourably than Cook-Lynn's, and I find this tendency somewhat confusing since Cheyfitz's central argument comes closer to Cook-Lynn's than to Krupat's. Like Cook-Lynn, Cheyfitz insists that American Indian and postcolonial criticism cannot engage responsibly and adequately with American Indian historical experiences and with American Indian peoples' current socio-political situations and goals without engagement with treaty and Indian federal law discourse. It seems to me that, by the end of his article, Cheyfitz has diminished this parallel between Cook-Lynn's and his argument, and has somewhat obscured tribal-centred contributions to American Indian theoretical and interpretative discourse.

⁷In fact, tribal-centred critics are less concerned with "blood quantum" than cross-cultural critics are. Owens, for instance, commonly explores question of American Indian writers' cultural and biological ancestry (his own included).

⁸Krupat makes the point that one of Owens's dedications in *Other Destinies* is the phrase "for mixedbloods, the next generation," which is borrowed from Vizenor's autobiographical work "Crows Written on the Poplars" (*Red Matters* 77). Owens's dedications in his first study provide a very suitable context to restate my argument about mixedblood discourse in American Indian studies. I argue that Owens's dedication, "for mixedbloods, the next generation," has a progressive political meaning only in relationship to his other dedication in *Other Destinies*: that of *Cogewea*'s tragic view on "the half-blood." Mixedblood discourse, in other words, is

valuable as a critique of colonial (and racial) essentialism and dualism, but not as an overarching, normative discourse on Indian identity.

⁹Cook-Lynn points out that American Indian intellectuals who promote mixedblood discourse “admit that they have been removed from [tribal] cultural influence through urbanization and academic professionalization or even, they suggest, through biology and intermarriage” (“American Indian Intellectualism” 129). Indeed, in “As If an Indian Were Really and Indian,” Owens – a key proponent of Indian “mixedblood” identity discourse – points out how his own mixedblood heritage makes his perspective unique and claims how “[his] observations and conclusions are valid for only [himself]” (170). Owens’s last book, *I Hear the Train*, discusses at length his own mixed cultural heritage and locations, and meditates on their reflection on his critical and creative perspectives. Krupat similarly connects his own hybrid heritage and cross-cultural and transnational experiences to the formation of his identity as a person and critic (*Turn* 88-130). It seems to me that both Krupat and Owens support the observation that identity formation and discourse are very much a matter of experience and socio-cultural “location.” It is very logical then to extend this observation – a critical gesture that neither Krupat nor Owens makes – and say that reservation Indians, for instance, who have very different experiences and locations, will support a different view on what may constitute a desirable (tribal) identity configuration and discourse.

¹⁰Cook-Lynn speaks about such a progressive role that “Native American studies as an academic discipline” may assume: the discipline, should seek to “[reject] the idea that a national economy based on the theft of Native lands and exploitation of national resources for profit can be sustained in the long range” (“Who Stole” 25).

One of the goals of American Indian studies, as Cook-Lynn continues, is to “[confront] head on the ideals and hopes of one of the most materialistic and technological nations on earth by insisting that a society based on capitalistic democracy and on the exploitation of natural resources *for profit* is immoral” [italics in original] (ibid).

Appendix

American Indian Literary Studies at British and Bulgarian Universities: An Informal Survey

During the academic year 2002-2003 I conducted an informal survey to get a general sense of the structure of American Indian literary studies at Bulgarian and British Universities and to identify American Indian authors and texts that are commonly studied there. I used three joint research methods to collect the information: personal correspondence, informal surveys and web searches.

In Bulgaria, the number of academic departments and programs that offer some study of contemporary American Indian literature is relatively small. Since the late 1990s, American Indian texts have been taught at all the four major universities in Bulgaria that specialise in the study of the arts and humanities in Sofia, Veliko Turnovo, Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad. The American studies departments at Sofia and Veliko Turnovo Universities offer the most comprehensive American studies programs, in which contemporary American Indian novels have become established texts in the last five years or so. Contemporary American Indian novels are commonly studied within general surveys of American literature or within courses that focus on themes of “race,” “ethnicity” and “identity.” The most commonly taught American Indian contemporary authors, according to the professors’ responses, are Scott Momaday (*House Made of Dawn*), Leslie Marmon Silko (*Ceremony*), Louise Erdrich (*Love Medicine*) and Linda Hogan (*Mean Spirit* and *Power*). Other favourite teaching choices include Sherman Alexie’s *Reservation Blues* and *Smoke Signals* (the film production) and Susan Power’s *The Grass Dancer*.

Due to the large number of British universities and the diversity of American studies programs and modules they offer, a systematic research of the academic study of American Indian literature there is a challenging task, and my informal survey did not seek to be comprehensive but just to provide me with a general notion of the situation. The starting point for my research was the Internet guide to American studies programs in the UK, provided by the Eccles Center at the British Library. I used the Eccles Centre online guide in the period August 2002-April 2003. As the site claimed at the time, the information it provided was last updated in December 2001 and its purpose was to present a broad overview of American studies degree programs in UK universities. I researched the prospectuses and the web sites of the British universities on the Eccles list and emailed survey questions to professors who taught relevant courses or modules. On the basis of the information gathered I have identified eleven British universities that have well-established American studies degree programs or modules and that include some study of American Indian literature. Those universities in alphabetical order are as follows: the University of East Anglia, the University of Essex, the University of Glasgow, the University of Hull, Keele University, King's College London, the University of Leeds, the University of Nottingham, the University of Sussex, the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, and the University of Warwick.

The authors and texts that re-occur conspicuously in almost any module that includes American Indian literature are N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and/or *Tracks*. Less common recurrences across different universities' courses include Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Silko's *Storyteller*, Sherman Alexie's novels and films, Gerald Vizenor's short stories, novels and criticism, Linda Hogan's

novels and poems, and James Welch's early novels. The study of contemporary American Indian writing commonly happens in a number of modules, such as "Contemporary American literature," "The Contemporary American Novel" and modules that explore themes of race, ethnicity, region or cultural memory in American literature and culture. Three universities at the time of the survey – King's College, the University of Wales and the University of Warwick – had established independent Native American literature courses.

The information I have gathered is informal and far from complete. Yet, for all its modesty, the survey has been systematic and can be used as a guide. It makes obvious the following aspects that characterise the study of contemporary American Indian literature at Bulgarian and British universities. The literature is most commonly studied through novels. The pedagogical contexts in which Native American literature appears suggest that it is discussed comparatively – in relation to other (established) American texts and with an emphasis on its cultural, ethnic, regional or historical specificities. Currently there are few independent modules on American Indian literature that explore contemporary American Indian writing in its breadth and variety. The informal survey indicates that novels by Leslie Marmon Silko and Louise Erdrich are among the contemporary American Indian texts that are most commonly chosen for classroom discussions: a situation comparable to that in the United States. Given the academic popularity of Silko's and Erdrich's writing, I believe that *Ceremony* and *Tracks* are among the novels that could be used most profitably to introduce and examine cross-cultural and tribal-centred approaches in American Indian studies.

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