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Author(s): Gloria Bird

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Towards a Decolonization of the Mind and Text 1:

Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony

by Gloria Bird

I chose to be a writer in girlhood because books rescued me. They were the places where I could bring the broken bits and pieces of myself and put them together again, the places where I could dream about alternative realities, possible futures. They let me know firsthand that if the mind was to be the site of resistance, only the imagination could make it so. To imagine, then, was a way to begin the process of transforming reality. All that we cannot imagine will never come into being.

– bell hooks, "Narratives of Struggle"

I cannot help but view the world around me as evidence that we are living with the results of our colonization: that the image of "the end of the trail" is popular back home on the reservation reminds me every time I see that image on a beaded bag, on scarves, or when that image is given a prominent place on a wall that we as a people buy into the notion of ourselves as "vanishing." That image of ourselves as "dying" pervades not only the ways we have all been taught to view ourselves as Othered and vanishing from the outside in, but can also be viewed as the successful colonization of our minds. What I am attempting, in both my own creative work and as an educator, is to find ways of undoing this process, a way of decolonizing the mind.

This is no easy task. In what may appear to be a contradiction, I catch myself thinking in my mother's colonized version of reality: that once the old people are gone, the songs, the stories, the knowledge will be lost. But, in fact, is this necessarily true? I keep an old Kutenai stickgame song lodged in the recesses of my mind to recall that it was taught to me by mother, though not directly, but in the repetitious hearing of the song on long roadtrips, a song I know that is not "mine" to sing. I know that the man to whom this particular song belonged had died previous to my learning. And I do not know how to play stickgame, the game of "bones", though I grew up with its sounds that carry great distances, like memory: the excited voices of people singing in a group, the piercing beating on the stickgame poles. No one walks between those poles. I find myself in a cultural double-bind, unable to vocalize the song that is lodged in memory as a part of my heritage but is not mine to sing. And I have never walked the road leading through the heart of the gambling spirit.

I must recognize that I am also the product of colonization in that I speak only English though my mother is multilingual. In my childhood memories, I have always tread softly around the world of my people, reverently illiterate, though this has not been a conscious choice. Recently my mother confided to me that in school she was made to learn Latin. Among the dialects of the Salishan languages she speaks, she knows words that are so old that there is no one alive to tell any longer of their meanings. And she speaks Spanish. Internalizing the colonizer's terms regarding the axiom of our Otherness and obvious difference, she spoke Indian around me only when she wanted to exclude me. I acknowledge how I am the product of my mother's colonization and have spent my life trying to ease the guilt of stolen tongues – or so I have thought. It seems I have lived under the weight of meaninglessness, the nadir of making meaning, of finding a way in the only language I know to reconnect something, as if to somehow jar the language out of the illusion of its impotence.

In Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony², there is a moment in which the main character Tayo is confronted by the "older language" of his people when the medicine man Ku'oosh comes to see him. Tayo,

had to strain to catch the meaning, dense with place names he had never heard. His language was childish, interspersed with English words, and he could feel shame tightening his throat. (Ceremony 34)

Tayo's knowledge of and relationship to the older language is taxed in that he can only speak in broken Indian, a fact which creates in him an extreme self-consciousness. I read this as a moment of liberating recognition. Only in the moments when we are able to name the source of our deepest pain can we truly be said to be free of the burdens they represent.

As I read this passage, I am reminded of gatherings at my grandparent's house. As one of their favorite pastimes, my aunts and uncles, my mother, and my grandfather who spoke an older language, would argue endlessly on the meanings of words, their origination, or the context in which certain words were spoken. Tayo, at least, had some knowledge of his language. I, on the other hand, hovered on the periphery of my native world while my relatives spoke to one another in our language creating a world that somehow did not include me. I would strain to hear through the nonsensical guttural vocalizations that I have always been positive my own tongue could not imitate. And I have drawn comfort from the cadence and rhythms of the language that frequently to my ears sound as though words are thrown from the back of the throat like phlegm. While I have not inherited my family's system of making meaning through our native language, I did at a young age inadvertently receive an appreciation for language.

For me, the way has been fraught with contradictions all of which can be traced back to issues of colonization. As a writer, I find much use in self-examination believing as hooks has written that, "All that we cannot imagine will never come into being." Self-examination has permeated every facet of my life, including the way in which I am "reading" Native American "texts." I have found it useful, for my purposes, to read Ceremony in context of the process of colonization and have come to the conclusion that more than any other novel written by a native author that Ceremony not only addresses issues of our colonization, but identifies those instances where we have taken over that process of colonization interiorizing both the stereotypes and oppression. Most importantly, Ceremony is able to take us through the issues of colonization to identify, here and now, both the instances of continued colonization of the mind and simultaneously secure our liberation from the colonizers' mental bondage.

In dealing with Native American literatures as a process of self-evaluation³, at least in this country, there are no models that discuss the effects of colonization upon the literature in terms of internalization of stereotypes and oppression as a subject of critical discourse. My questions are, how has colonization impacted upon the psyche of the people and how has that manifested itself in the literature? What part do we play in perpetuating the old used up paradigms? At what point do we internalize the reify the damaging representations of ourselves that have been imposed upon us? What is invested in the romanticism of the past and who does it serve? And I am in the process of searching for answers to these and numerous other questions. What I have found in reading the essays of bell hooks and other African-American critics and writers⁴ whose works will enter into my discussion here is a similarity of purpose.

In bell hook's essay "Narratives of Struggle⁵," for instance, she discusses the potential for the creation of what she terms "critical fictions." She tells us that critical fictions are those that, "emerge when the imagination is free to wander, explore, question, transgress" (CF 55). She speaks of the imagination's capacity for subversive methods, opening the territory to a potential cross-cultural understanding. Critical fictions operate, she tells us, on many levels to engage readers:

Many new critical fictions disrupt conventional ways of thinking about the imagination and imaginative work, offering fictions that demand careful scrutiny, that resist passive readership. Consciously opposing the notion of literature as escapist entertainment, these fictions confront and challenge. Often language is the central field of contestation. The way writers use language often determines whether or not oppositional critical approaches in fiction or theory subvert, decenter, or challenge existing hegemonic discourses. Styles of language pointedly identify specific audiences both as subjects of the text and as that audience one addresses more intimately ... Yet to address more intimately is not to exclude; rather, it alters the terms of inclusion. (CF 56)

By hook's definition it is possible for me to envision another alternative for the discussion of contemporary Native American literatures. I find the potential for "altering the terms of inclusion" particularly compelling in that literary strategies that have formerly been thought of as exclusive are given positive reinforcement. Speaking of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* hooks makes the observation that, "Readers must learn to 'see' the world differently if they want to understand this work. This is the fundamental challenge of critical fictions" (CF 57). She might have been speaking as well of *Ceremony*.

Issues of language – its purpose and usefulness not only to communicate but its potential to create – are areas that are confronted by Silko in *Ceremony*. I would like to turn to a discussion of some of the strategies employed by Silko to further discussion of the novel as a work of critical fiction and of the ways in which Silko simultaneously both challenges "existing hegemonic discourse" and "alters the terms of inclusion." Perhaps what I attempt here is to metaphorically walk that road leading through the heart of the oldest gambling spirit betting on pieces of my life in the hopes of coming out whole on the other side?

The ideological function of colonialist discourse serves to continue the paradigm of the native as Other by imbibing that Otherness within the tropes of moral and metaphysical differences. Thus the institutionalization of natives as "wild" equated with both "savage" and "evil" are fixed representations whose underlying purpose serves to bolster the political aims of the colonialists.

In the process of colonization, we are in what is termed, "the hegemonic phase." In the words of Abdul Jan Mohammed6, "in the hegemonic phase (or neocolonialism) the natives accept a version of the colonizers' entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions and more important, "mode of production" [Italics mine] (81). It is this last that I am most interested in as far as what I have termed self-evaluation as a way of reading: in citing instances of the internalization and reification of representations of ourselves in colonialist terms (of which we may not even be aware; or converseley, how in becoming aware, the door is then opened to employment of subversive strategies to undermine and challenge accepted paradigms.

The potential for the strategy of decentering the story is to challenge the reader to view reality through the perceptions of the native Other. The motivation behind the employment of this strategy is to challenge the site of privilege of hegemonic discourse, though, of course the employment of this narrative strategy does not presuppose a work of critical fiction7. As native writers we are, after all, walking the tightrope between the processes of colonization, and the simultaneous processes of our own decolonization.

The novel *Ceremony* employs the narrative strategy of decentering the story by collapsing the element of time in the novel. The strategy of decentering the story occurs in Silko's providing of two parallel storylines that, by the end of the novel, come together. A distinctive feature of the novel is that Tayo's story is set against a mythic mirror that provides the connection between the worlds that are being ongoingly constructed in the novel as well as providing for the construction of the novel itself. Thus, Tayo is able to maintain that "Everywhere he looked, he saw a world made of stories ... It was a world alive, always changing and moving; and if you knew where to look, you could see it" (*Ceremony* 95). But it is Tayo's part and connection to this world that provides the focus of the novel as he moves out of his war sickness towards a completion of the ceremony.

The affinity of human-to-human and human-to-land are the axiomatically constructed patterns that dominate the textual landscape of *Ceremony*. That these patterns in turn inform one's sense of both time and space suggests what I would characterize as a mythic edge, that is, a textual terrain with the capacity of encompassing time and space in a simultaneous present, past and future that is played out in the relationships of the human-to-human and human-to-land dynamic with all of the possibilities inherent in native mythologies. Tayo moves back and forth in time that is not only a human sense of time, but includes mythic time as well, "Years and months had become weak, and people could push against them and wander back and forth in time. Maybe it had always been this way and he was only seeing it for the first time" (18). This narrative strategy coupled with Silko's tendency to write in fragments underscores the connectedness of all things, how each depends upon something else.

Early in the novel, as Tayo makes a distinction between types of rain, he compares the jungle rain to the rain he is most familiar with. He tells us that the jungle rain "was not the rain he and Josiah had prayed for, this was not the green foliage they sought out in sandy canyons as a sign of a spring" (*Ceremony* 11). As he does so, he recalls what Josiah had taught him about rain, "Nothing was all good or all bad either; it all depended" [Italics, mine.] (*Ceremony* 11). The subordinate clause is dependent on the sentence in the same way that meaning is also dependent on the story that is to follow. The drought begins even before Tayo's return from the war, but he believes it is the result of his curse of the rain (*Ceremony* 195). The dependency of the people on the rain becomes Tayo's dilemma as he searches for the countermovement to first, the curse, and then to the witchery itself once he discovers it to be the real cause of the drought.

It is Silko's use of language in the text that exemplifies the way in which language is used to maintain all of the relationships in the novel. It is a finely tuned mechanism by which Silko employs the major trope of Native American literature, that is, the interconnectedness of all things – of people to land, of stories to people, of people to people – within the deep structure of *Ceremony*. The interdependence of parts to the whole is one of the pivotal characteristics of the plot upon which Tayo's ultimate dilemma, hinges.

Silko frequently relies upon the construction of spoken speech, writing in fragments that reinforce the dependency of parts to the whole, such as when Ku'oosh tells Tayo, "You don't understand, do you? It is important to all of us. Not only for your sake, but for this fragile world" (*Ceremony* 36). This structure is not, however, reserved only for spoken speech in which the fragments might often occur naturally. Sentences often begin with conjunctions: "But the old man would not have believed white warfare" (*Ceremony* 36); "But the cave was deeper than the sound" (*Ceremony* 35); "And always they had been fooling themselves, and they knew it" (*Ceremony* 191); and, "But the last time he remembered the white walls and the rows of cribs" (*Ceremony* 110). *Everything* depends upon something else. Our ability as readers to enter as participants of the story ultimately relies upon our ability to make those connections, to forego on an intuitive level the constricting notions we have of language and its use. We must also be willing to attempt to "see the world differently."

Language and its use is addressed when Ku'oosh, the medicine man, comes to see Tayo.

[Ku'oosh] spoke softly, using the old dialect full of sentences that were involuted with explanations of their own origins, as if nothing the old man said were his own but all had been said before and he was only there to repeat it ... [He tells Tayo,] "but you know the world is fragile." The word he chose to express 'fragile' was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way (*Ceremony* 34-5).

This passage, perhaps more than any other written in a Native American novel, expresses differing value systems regarding language and the responsibility required in its use. Not even the single word stands alone, as Silko has said, "[W]ords are always with other words, and the other words are almost always in a story of some sort." Implicit in a word's meaning is a view of the world in which language exists less as simply a vehicle for communication but more as a bridge linking human-to-story. In an act of faith as we suspend our disbelief to enter into the textual landscape of *Ceremony* we are transformed. The way we perceive of our world and language's capacity for re-creating reality as antagonistic desires is countered.

The world of *Ceremony* is socially constructed in Tayo's relationship to the older spoken Indian language, and also in the intricate explanation by Ku'oosh of a single word. The ongoing process that maintains the socially constructed world is reinforced, and herein Silko moves us out of the realm of hegemonic discourse. The value system that prefers the native language over English is validated. Interestingly, this does not serve to simply invert the paradigm; it also "alters the terms of inclusion." This is not, after all, a native language text accessible to only those who speak in a particular native language, but is given novelistic form in a work that is written in the English language and is available to all, native and non-native alike, who speak in this language.

I would like to return, again, to the ideas of examining Native American texts in context of the process of colonization, and how this process has impacted upon our lives. In *Ceremony*, Silko employs the strategy of representing her characters in confrontation with the world of the colonialist. The tension created between the characters of Tayo and Auntie in *Ceremony* provide the impetus for the confrontation aspects of colonization in the novel.

The way in which Silko addresses the collision of native beliefs with Catholicism, for instance, is direct. Taking on Christianity, Silko tells us what the problem is,

Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul; Jesus Christ was not like the Mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family. (*Ceremony* 68)

Auntie in *Ceremony* is a pathetic character caught in that conflict between Catholicism and her social reality. Tayo tells us that Auntie, "had gone to church alone, for as long as [he] could remember (*Ceremony* 77). That she is

confused by a religion that runs counter to her beliefs in the communal does not escape his attention, however, and leads him to speculate, "[he] wondered if she liked it that way, going 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. When it came to saving her own soul, she wanted to be careful that there were no mistakes" (*Ceremony* 77). In a community that relies on participation, the individual operating for individual purposes can only lead to conflict.

In spite of Auntie's Christianity, she has little compassion for Tayo. The fact that he is half white produces the tension between Tayo and his acceptance by Auntie. She reluctantly takes him into her household, and proceeds to try to keep him away from her own son Rocky. Tayo tells us that she "had always been careful that Rocky didn't call Tayo "brother," and when other people mistakenly called them brothers, she was quick to correct the error ... 'that's Laura's boy. You know the one.' She had a way of saying it, a tone of voice which bitterly told the story, and the disgrace she and the family had suffered" (*Ceremony* 65). Auntie's rejection of Tayo is based on the perceived shame that Laura brought to the family. We learn through Tayo's perceptions of the ways in which Auntie reinforces her denial of his relationship to herself; she "wanted [him] close enough to feel excluded, to be aware of the distance between them" {67}. She would use Tayo's close physical proximity to reinforce to him all that he was not.

Tayo's knowledge of what motivates her mistreatment of him comes with an understanding that it is based on his half-breed status, an alterity that she creates and in turn becomes the victim of, and thus, is able to conclude that,

An old sensitivity has descended in her, surviving thousands of years from the oldest times, when the people shared a single clan name and they told each other who they were ... the people shared the same consciousness ... The sensitivity remained: the ability to feel what the others were feeling in the belly and chest; words were not necessary, but the messages the people felt were confused now. (68).

It is the older relationships that bind Auntie to the people. Silko's strategy is to present simultaneously both Tayo's and Auntie's biographical connection to the tribal historicity, and she tells us what those connections are,

When Little Sister had started drinking wine and riding in cars with white men and Mexicans, the people could not define their feeling about her ... they were losing her, they were losing part of themselves ... [and.] the people wanted her back ... when they failed, the humiliation fell on all of them; what happened to the girl did not happen to her alone, it happened to all of them. (*Ceremony* 68-69)

What Auntie, in fact, is unable to do is to successfully disengage herself from her relationships, so antithetical is that notion to the society she lives in. She is, therefore, "trapped" as Tayo perceives: 1) Auntie finds herself captive of the negativity of her own making; 2) She can never separate herself from her community just as she can never separate herself from either Laura or Tayo; and most importantly; 3) Auntie is still a part of that community. These are all startling and liberating revelations that aid Tayo in reclaiming himself.

Tayo is not the sole character of the novel who is mixedblood; all of the characters who aid him are mixed-bloods. The characters of Night Swan and Betonie provide Tayo with important knowledge he will need to survive the world in which he lives. Night Swan, for instance, tells him that, "Indians or Mexicans or whites – most people are afraid of change. They think that if their children have the same color of skin the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing ... They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves" (*Ceremony* 100). Silko appears to be addressing the "Othering" mechanism as it is employed by colonialist literatures to maintain the construction of the social world as well as the discourse. This scene speaks to the issue of internalizing the typifications by which Tayo knows himself – the color of his skin, his eyes. Night Swan offers him a way out of self-inflicted metaphysical alterity.

Betonie also, encourages Tayo's awareness of himself and in the healing ceremony frees Tayo from self-destructive-hate, the internalization and reification of typifications. By way of speaking to the healing ceremony that becomes the pivotal and essential motivation for the novel *Ceremony*, it might be most useful for this discussion to address the ways in which Betonie facilitates Tayo's acceptance of the parts of himself both Indian and white. When Tayo confides in Betonie, "my mother went with white men," (*Ceremony* 128), he is caught in the conflict between what he has been told about himself – what Auntie has told him of his life as long as he can, that his birth has brought shame to the family and his people – and what he needs to believe that is positive about himself in order to allow self acceptance. Betonie answers him, "nothing is that simple, ... you don't write off all the white

people, just like you don't trust all the Indians" (Ceremony 128). Here, the construct of the noble/ignoble savage is irretrievably denied; Indians become simply human with human frailties.

As if to exemplify this contradiction in Tayo, Silko immediately presents him in a conflict of value systems. Tayo is deceived by the poverty he sees in Betonie's hogan, looking for that moment through the eyes of the colonized at what has been "lost," and through the eyes of the colonizer at what he reads as a material lack, "all of it seemed suddenly so pitiful and small compared to the world he knew the white people had" (Ceremony 127.) As Betonie completes the ceremony with Tayo, Tayo offers Betonie money in payment which Betonie then rejects. In doing so, Betonie's action exemplifies an alternative value system, one in which currency has no value.

That Silko is talking about the effects of colonization seems obvious. In the same way she tells us what the problem is with Christianity, she also tells us what is wrong with colonialist teachings at school and the damage they do. Laura, she tells us might not have been lost, "if the girl had not been ashamed of herself. Shamed by what they taught her in school about the deplorable ways of the Indian people" (Ceremony 68). She points to the problems of combating the internalization of stereotypes, telling us that Laura "hated the people at home when white people talked about their peculiarities; but she always hated herself more because she still thought about them" (Ceremony 69). Ironically, it is the "educational" system that "teaches" native peoples to deny themselves. Tayo is employed to reject the internalization of negative typifications as he frees his cattle from a white man's land debating whether or not to label the man a "thief". He acknowledges that, "he had learned the lie by heart – the lie which they had wanted him to learn: only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn't steal" (Ceremony 191). Silko is at once bringing the problems to our attention and undermining them. Identifying the source of the "lie" is the first liberating gesture by which Tayo is then free from its hold over him.

Tayo begins to understand how those images damage, and he recognizes how those around him have been deceived by them. Though he "wanted to scream at Indians like Harley and Helen Jean and Emo" and all of the "people [who] had been taught to despise themselves," he comes to the realization that, "they were wrong (Ceremony 204). His rejection of colonialist indoctrination is one of the first steps towards his decolonization.

The factionalization of the community is brought on by contact with the world outside, and in Ceremony Silko consistently undermines the 'fixity' of the process of colonization naming those moments when Indian people turn upon themselves, looking beyond the specular assignments of metaphors to their original constructions. She deals with the sociological aftermath of colonization and is able to then move beyond the psychic ills of the moment. That movement is, of course, a decolonization of the mind. Silko accomplishes this by constructing a native world in which Christianity subverts native community life. This world is one in which adopting and assimilating the values of the society outside of the community has negative repercussions in that the internalization of self-hate on the personal level implicates the well-being of the collective whole. She bolsters a positive image to counter the negative typifications offering an surrogate healing/shift in Tayo as he discovers that "he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time" (Ceremony 246). In my reading of Ceremony, this novel offers us a model for possible future mapped out in a textual terrain.

We are all the products of colonization. Five hundred years after the colonization of this continent, promoting the ideas of native peoples as Other, perpetuating as we parrot Othering language when we speak of ourselves are instances of the internalization of oppression – is, in fact, to speak in the language of the oppressed.

Our stories, our histories, our beings are inheritors all of a legacy of pain and disinheritance. But to speak of colonization only in these terms is to stay within the realm of creating boundaries between 'us' and 'them,' to stay locked into a static system with no resolution – which in fact, subverts the healing/shift that is necessary in the process of decolonization. In using the language of the oppressed, we repeat the same patterns of our initial siege. Each time we use "the dominant culture", or speak of ourselves as "minorities" we are perpetuating notions of our own inferiority and domination. In order to move out of colonizing instances of interiorized oppression, we first have to identify those moments in which we reinforce those useless paradigms and search for new approaches to the way we speak of ourselves in relation to our histories and stories. To imagine a future.

In reading Ceremony in terms of self-evaluation and as a critical fiction, I find a model for challenging hegemonic discourse. Tayo, as all of us are, is living with the results of colonization. His story is bound up in the challenging of the social, political, moral, ideological motivations that underlie colonization and is played out in a textual landscape. This model has been useful to me in my own creative work, and in teaching.

As an educator of Native American students, and in struggling with the particular issues of teaching my students to conform to the standards of conventional rhetorical forms, I am pained at a deep level of (self) recognition of finding that my students, educated in an unsympathetic system, have learned the "big lie" well, that they speak

in a passive language when they speak about themselves. What I recognize in my students' timidity to claim the English language is my own struggle to learn to speak.

Where I come from, as I suspect it is anywhere else in Indian Country, the ability to speak is valued and is essential to those times when we are called upon to speak for the dead and for the living, those moments when speaking from the heart is a manifestation of our continuation and is an empowering enactment. Often times, at these formal occasions of both stress and joy, we hear our native languages spoken. Thus, my memories of wakes, funerals, marriages, giveaways, ceremonies and name-givings are remembered as emotional moments that inscribed both my feelings of inclusion and participation and, paradoxically, of estrangement in not knowing my native language.

As a child, my mother at times would good-naturedly tease me about my Indian accent and mispronunciation of English words – she who was gifted with a knowledge of languages but who had chosen to not teach her children a native language. I should add that my mother was born of an era in which pride in one's heritage was not a given as it is now, and Indian people confronted much prejudice in Washington State. Though I did not recognize that I spoke with an accent, I became withdrawn and silent. Before I spent my first day in school, I was already conditioned to feel ashamed. I had learned at an early age how my own words could be used against me, and I learned the power of both silence and of silencing

Later, while in BIA boarding schools, I first noticed the phrases that we used as students, the passive language that we passed off as speech-making practices to pacify our teachers and administrators, such as, "My aim is to preserve my heritage." Empty noncommittal language that reeks of internalized oppressions. This claim presupposes that our "heritage" is in danger of being "lost," and reinscribes the notion that we are "dying." It also suggests to me a buying-in of the ambitions and desires which we had been exposed to and then claimed as our own. How well we had learned to reinforce our domination with our own tongues!

And have things changed all that much? What my students have successfully learned is to speak passively, as if their lives were lived in a vacuum and as if they did not bring their cultures and histories with them into the present, and that in order to conform to those standards that are not of their own making and often are at odds with the traditional wisdom and critical faculties of their ancestors, they fall into line. In place of all of the empowering aspects of speech they have learned instead to speak of themselves as objects, to avoid first person narrative, and the subjective – as if this were possible in the first instance. In effect they deny themselves, and any venue in which this type of dialogue might be constructed is conveniently closed.

At every opportunity, I have attempted to raise their awareness of the language in which they choose to speak of themselves and nudge them from complacency. I ask them, who better to write their stories than themselves? The novel Ceremony provides a model for opening the discussion to relevant issues that native students must grapple with, and in particular – over and beyond simple tolerance of differences – the issues that deal with identify and acceptance, of identifying instances of internalized stereotypes and oppression, and a way of tracing back issues of their colonization to its source, giving name to the inherited legacy of pain. The act of naming facilitates the much needed healing/shift that paves the way for a decolonization of the mind.

I suspect that once we come to an awareness of the 'word' as a creative force and, with that knowledge, that language has the potential to 'create' or 'make happen' that we have discovered much – maybe everything. I mistakenly assumed that native people approached language differently because they knew this, but I now realize that Western culture has known all along of the potential for language's capacity to create. The attempts at crushing native languages was motivated by the knowledge that our languages were potentially dangerous. We are not, as we have been taught, standing at the crossroads to two cultures making attempts at bridging that chasm of difference, but at the pivotal moment in the act of creating a reality of encoded – not 'borrowed' – language. Here is the potential site of resistance which can be the final liberating gesture of our decolonization. That is, if we can name this moment and in that recognition throw open the doors to not just envisioning, but, creating another future. A space where differences do not have to be a plague.

End Notes

1. My ideas on this precess are influenced by Helen Tiffin whose article "post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse" appears in Critical Approaches to the New Literatures in English. (Essen: Verl. Die Blaue Eule, 1989.)
2. Leslie Marmon Silko. Ceremony. New York: Penguin, 1977. This volume will hereafter be cited as Ceremony in the text.
3. Toni Morrison's playing in the dark (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992) reinforces, for me, similar ideas as the ones I am proposing. In playing in the dark, Morrison takes the trope of 'whiteness' as a representation of all that is 'good' and turns it around rendering it powerless and impotent as an image, whereas, the trope of 'darkness' retains all of its human contradictions.
4. Among some of the useful discussions of similar issues retained by African-American writers and critics, I would list in order of their impact upon my work: Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Abdul JanMogamed, June Jordan, and Chinua Achebe.
5. bell hooks. Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing. Ed., Philomena Mariani. "Narratives of Struggle," pp. 53-61. (Washington: Bay Press, 1991.) This volume will hereafter be cited as CF in the text.
6. Abdul JamMohamed. 'Race,' Writing and Difference. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.. "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," 78-106. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
7. See my article, "Searching For Evidence of Colonization: A Reading of Louise Erdrich's Tracks" in Wicazo Sa Review, Vol. 8, No. 2, November 1992 for discussion of these ideas.
8. Leslie Marmon Silko. Leslie Fiedler and Houston Baker, Jr., eds. English Literature: Selected Papers From the English Institute. "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective," pp. 54-72. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press: 1981)
9. I am greatly indebted to Greg Sarris whose strategy of incorporation personal narrative in academic discourse and recognition of the discontinuity between home life and classroom experience of American Indians have influenced me.

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Ms. Gloria Bird, member of the Spokane tribe of Indians, Wellpinit, Wa., is on the faculty of IAIA, Santa Fe, New Mexico, Her first book of poetry, Full Moon on The Reservation, 1993, is available from Greenfield Press, New York.