

**Deer-Hoof Clackers and Coke Bottles:
The Construction of the Postcolonial Nation
in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony***

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“We need to think ourselves beyond the nation.”

(Arjun Appadurai 415)

I.

In his critical survey of the American Indian novel, Louis Owens identifies the modernist impulses of some contemporary Native American novelists, who, by incorporating fragmented or mixed blood characters into their works, focus attention on the possibility of “recovering a centered sense of personal identity and significance” (19). By examining such texts as N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and James Welch’s *Winter in the Blood*, Owens highlights how both novels move from representing individual fragmentation and alienation to the discovery of “a coherent personal identity entirely dependent upon a coherent cultural identity” (20). It is hard to ignore the larger implications of Owens’ reading: the attention given in these novels to individual recovery is meant to signal the possibility of a larger tribal recovery and a return to stability. This future hope, in many cases, relies on a perception of the past as something to be uncovered; the displaced individual, as is the case of the unnamed protagonist in Welch’s *Winter in the Blood*, must learn to recognize how tribal history and myth continue to inform and provide meaning in the present day. This construction of history in more unified terms—as that which needs to be discovered rather than interrogated—becomes a source of hope, in part, because it provides a sense of continuity for tribal members.¹

Critics of Leslie Silko’s *Ceremony* have concentrated almost exclusively on how this more active vision of memory can be read in terms of rejuvenation and change, an approach that to varying degrees links the

interpretations of the novel to present-day discussions of postcolonialism and Native American nation-space.² While understandable, given the United States' history of dominance, it is an approach that does not take into account the more complicated nature of tribal existence, which I would argue is powerfully represented in the text. John Carlos Rowe, in a recent essay, speaks of the utopian nature of many postcolonial studies, and argues that "we would be hard-pressed to identify a successful example of such [postcolonial] states, even if we took 'state' as a philosophical or psychological condition rather than as a geopolitical reality" (80). Stuart Hall, following a similar trajectory, defines the postcolonial less in terms of success or failure, than in terms of a changing understanding and use of power: "It [the postcolonial] certainly does *not* mean that we have passed from a regime of power-knowledge into some powerless and conflict-free time zone. Nevertheless, it does also stake its claim in terms of the fact that some other, related but as yet 'emergent' new configurations of power-knowledge relations are beginning to exert their distinctive and specific effects" (254; original italics). It is Silko's refusal of this utopian vision of postcoloniality—symbolized by the recovery of a long-ago, precolonial past—that leads her to conceive, I would argue, of the "state" of the postcolonial as much more uncertain. Indeed, in *Ceremony* it is a "state" that offers the possibility of short-term improvements—avenues of self-determination or increased mobility, for instance—but, ultimately, these improvements are constrained by the creation of even more broad-ranging means of surveillance and control. Silko's portrayal of new technologies of war, of the emergence of a globalizing economy and of the changing cultural and political beliefs concerning tribal self-determination, as elements of Tayo's journey of recovery and return, means that any understanding of tribal regeneration is to be understood as invested in these colonial terms of repression.³ Seen in this way, *Ceremony's* significance should be understood less in the seeming hope that Tayo's cure provides, than in the way his journey envisions the emergence of these changing power-knowledge relations as a defining stage of the postcolonial. The mapping of Tayo's return in terms of the possibility and impossibility of Indian presence makes clear the double gesture of place

and loss that describes the postcolonial tribal nation. Silko, by staging Tayo's journey of progress and change in terms of interruption and fragmentation, creates a tribal nation-space whose being depends upon confronting the sense of loss represented by those unable to return to the reservation.

Silko's strategic placement of points of interruption in Tayo's journey shifts the focus equally not only to the events of Tayo's journey, but also to the ceremonies of the underrepresented or marginalized figures in the novel. To read *Ceremony* only in terms of hope necessitates a forgetting or a displacement of those who are unable to return to their tribal home in the text—those characters such as Helen Jean and the men and women who populate the arroyos in Gallup—an interpretation that, unfortunately, replicates a similar colonial amnesia by a white America that forgets the contributions of the Pueblos and other Native Americans to America in World War II. To refocus one's reading of the novel to the margin means to unpack these layers of forgetfulness that determine tribal and colonial memory, to focus on the histories of those individuals who construct the tribal nation in terms of their doubled sense of otherness; they are themselves forgotten by a tribe that is in turn forgotten by American culture and history. But, one must be careful not to read the marginalized other only in terms of forgetfulness or despair. In *Ceremony*, the margin can also be seen as “the site of radical possibility” (hooks 341), where the forgotten characters revise the trajectory of rejuvenation attributed to Tayo's ceremony through repetition and mimicry, even as their revisions are always tempered by the struggles they face on the edges and beyond. Much as Gloria Anzaldúa's description of experiences of powerlessness along the border in *Borderlands: La Frontera* also undermines unified images of culture and nation space, Silko's attention to those who live in between complicates any simple separation between center and margin, colonizer and colonized. Her text works by blurring boundaries as much through a mixture of languages and belief systems as through a presentation of individuals who are both part of Tayo's ceremony and “parted” from the hope it represents.

Attention to these marginal characters highlights the competing movements of gain and loss that represent the progress of Tayo's jour-

ney, as well as daily life for the modern-day Laguna Pueblos. But, despite Silko's understanding of tribal progress as needing to be articulated in these competing terms, it is important to recognize that some tribal members call for a more divisive response to their experiences on and off the reservation. While Emo looks to "set things right" by "taking back" San Diego, Auntie is worshipping a Christian God, one that seeks to have "each person stand alone" (68), and Rocky—both before and during the war—moves away from Native American ritual, while working to reason out the difference between "us" and "them." These tribal divisions, which pit individual against individual or the tribe against the outside world, make clear the impact of an internal colonialism that has driven Native Americans to adopt Western conceptions of identity and power. In contrast to Tayo's more collaborative ceremonial journey, one that emphasizes combination and change, in the more binary visions of Emo, Auntie, or Rocky, there seems no middle ground, no acceptance for the experiences of the mixed-blood Tayo.

The ultimate futility of these oppositional strategies becomes apparent when contrasted to the positive imagery that surrounds Tayo's integration at the novel's conclusion. And yet, at the same time, Silko refuses to represent Tayo's return as the end of the story. The stories told of Indians who end up homeless in a Gallup arroyo or prostitutes, like Laura and Helen Jean, shadow the success of Tayo's ceremony, eclipsing his return in terms of their absence. Their failure to make it home underscores the openness and continuity of Tayo's ceremony as they emphasize the larger struggle for embodied presence faced by the Pueblos. The homeless of Gallup remain the forgotten within tribal memory; they are a lost presence in the novel that fractures the Pueblo nation and represents it both as oppressed, and as oppressor. By focusing attention on those who do not make it back, on those who remain outside and forgotten, Tayo's search for wholeness and self-awareness becomes understood as an unending process, one that underscores how the Pueblos are constrained by American imperialism and by their *own* tribal narratives that resist those who are in-between or beyond.

II.

Ceremony begins and ends with an offering to sunrise, presenting Tayo's story in terms of the Pueblos' prayers to sunrise and framing the novel in terms of a temporal and mythical timelessness. End merges with beginning to create a cycle, one that foreshadows the significance of circles and a "returning" to Tayo's eventual cure (Swan 317). This mythic image of a timeless continuum, however, is problematized by the image of the atomic blast at Trinity Site, described later in the novel, which many Pueblos mistook for the morning sun. By drawing together both images in the novel, Silko makes clear that the rising sun can no longer be a sign of only beginnings and endings, but must also be read as a signifier of beginnings as endings, of birth as death. Boundaries blur giving an added dimension to the "sunwise cycle" that Edith Swan identifies as necessary for Tayo's cure (317). The cycle, which is interpreted as a sign of regeneration for the Pueblos, now is haunted by the image of the atomic blast. Regeneration in the modern era must be understood in terms of its destructive other in the novel, posing a changing context for the Pueblos' prayer and making clear, as Homi Bhabha argues, that "existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival" (1). Tayo's regenerative journey is contextualized in terms of loss, and this added complexity underlines the virulence of the colonial relation, as it points to a competing temporality within the novel, a technological, colonial temporality based upon closure and destruction. A new day for the Pueblos is now also to be defined in terms of the end of all days; closure is to be understood in terms of widespread destruction.

This fluidity of meaning and imagery is replicated by Tayo's dreams in the opening pages of the text, as he hears a jumble of voices and sounds as he tries to sleep; the voices of Japanese soldiers merge with those of his Uncle Josiah and possibly his mother, all to a soundtrack of a Spanish love song (5–6). There seems no way for him to control or to separate one from the other; Uncle Josiah becomes the soldier his outfit executes much as the Japanese child he later sees in the train depot becomes his cousin Rocky (8,18). And, while this experience can be seen as part of his inability to articulate the "web of meaning" that is part of the Pueblo experience (Owens 174), it is apparent that his confu-

sion of images also points to a cosmopolitan vision of nationhood in exile, one that poses the Native American experience in global terms. Tayo's vision of the Japanese child as Rocky occurs following his questioning why this child and his family are free to be at the train depot, Tayo believing that the Japanese remained in internment camps. Once Tayo learns that "they've turned them all loose again" (18), his thoughts merge the unnamed Japanese boy with Rocky, an overlapping that seeks to draw together the "tenebrous" existence and place of the Japanese-Americans in America, during and after World War II, with the experience of Native Americans fighting for American interests overseas. The result is an image of being in terms of disjuncture, the novel representing the shared experience of exile and difference as a site of connection, as the beginnings of a transnational vision that positions the Pueblos' place in America in broader terms.⁴ By drawing on this vision of Rocky as a Japanese boy, Tayo realizes "how the world had come undone, how thousands of miles, high ocean waves and green jungles could not hold people in their place (18).

To help him further this understanding of the world, Tayo's Grandma calls for the help of the traditional medicine man, Ku'oosh, grounding Tayo's growth in terms of past rituals. He speaks to Tayo of the fragility of the world, explaining "the story behind each word" so there would be no question of his meaning (35). Ku'oosh poses a way of being in the world that invokes webs of meaning and speaks to the individual's responsibility as part of a larger whole. As Tayo himself asks Ku'oosh, however, what happens if you just do not know, if you cannot trace all the meanings, mark the limit of all possibilities? He says "what if I didn't know I killed one?" and later wonders what the medicine man would think of a modern warfare that can kill from long distances, unaware of the results (36-7). Tayo's response is a telling one for it speaks to the introduction of uncertainty to definitions of otherness, of words and actions that cannot be understood or are forgotten, of larger contexts that cannot be framed, and of explanations that cannot account for everything.

As seen through the war images at the beginning of the novel, the United States responds to this type of uncertainty through violence, a response mirrored in the novel by the drinking stories told by Native

American veterans. The stories that Emo, Harley, and Leroy relate are less about battlefield heroics, though, than their sexual conquests, telling of the “victories” they achieve over white women. Emo tells, for instance, of the time he assumed the disguise of an Italian named Mattuci to have a one-night stand with two white women (57–9). Told in verse form, the story mirrors the presentation of the other verse myths in the text, mythologizing Emo’s conquest, and, in its dehumanizing vision of relationships, opposing Tayo’s future relationship with the mythic figure Ts’eh. The presentation of Emo’s story in verse form points to the changing nature of Pueblo tradition by forming a ceremonial vision of the future in terms of violence and misogyny. Even as Tayo’s journey underscores the failure of Emo’s violence as a response to difference, his drunken words continue to haunt Tayo’s efforts, and act as reminders of the hardships experienced by the numerous Native American war veterans struggling to return to the reservation. Their journey “home,” much as Tayo’s journey, become a necessary but unfulfilled part of his ceremony. Portrayed as excluded from the ceremonial healing, the destructive images associated with these veterans stand in contrast to the images of healing posed by Tayo’s journey, sensitizing one to the way tribal nation-building and growth must occur in terms of both hope and despair.

Tayo tries to separate Emo from the images of the war, from the voices of the English and the Japanese that haunt him, and he too seeks revenge, looking in his own way to take back what “they” got, by stabbing Emo (62–3). The emptiness he feels as a result of this violence and his uncertainty over whom to believe anymore makes clear the need for a new healing ceremony, one that no longer attempts to separate and place in opposition, but works to recognize and expand the web-like connections found in Ku’oosh’s words. Tayo’s search for the spotted cattle and their hybrid offspring becomes symbolic of this shift. His concern for their care reminds Tayo of the time he had spent with Uncle Josiah, and, more significantly, the cows’ survival in the face of a drought focuses attention on the importance of negotiating the space of the overlap for the continuity of the Pueblos.

The fact that it is these very cattle that Tayo must search for, and that, according to the medicine man Betonie, their capture will help in

a healing process, says much about how Tayo's healing is to be understood. Tayo must bring back to the tribe the opposing images of hope and despair, telling the story of cattle that survive, clearly, but cattle that must survive being stolen and abused. Tayo, in capturing the herd, performs a healing that more accurately reproduces his own hybrid experiences and gestures toward the present and future concerns of a Laguna Pueblo tribe whose survival in the United States must take place in the shadow of abandoned uranium mines and radioactive slag. His healing underlines this spaciousness of merging, where the elements of survival and destruction combine to create a future vision of the tribe in plural, less certain terms. Tayo's return poses less a return to wholeness for the tribe, than a call for a new understanding of how the nation's survival is inextricably linked with its impossibility. Through the construction of alternative ceremonies, Silko emphasizes that this impossibility results as much from the colonial domination expressed in the slag's virulent radioactivity as from the multiple constructions of otherness that are part of the Native American experience: the many Native Americans who remain along the tribal margin, either through a fractionality of blood or through their experiences off the reservation. In contrast to the growth experienced by Tayo, these marginalized war veterans and prostitutes that populate Gallup appear even more hopeless, caught by what Bhabha has referred to as the "fixity" of stereotypes of otherness, "always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (66).

III.

Tayo's return of the cattle draws one back to the beginning of his healing, back to the perspective of Betonie's hogan which looks "down on all of it" (116), from the homeless and unemployed Native Americans who are pushed to the riverbeds by the powerful in the town, to the Native American performers who are hired to draw the tourists to white-owned hotels and businesses. Betonie is introduced in terms of this past and present-day removal of the Navajos and other Indians in and around Gallup, making clear that his cure of Tayo must be understood in the larger colonial terms that the different tribes face. By charting the prog-

ress of this removal, Betonie remains on the edges of society, marginalized, and yet able to use this position to see how these edges constantly change, come together, and intermesh. As Karen L. Wallace points out, Betonie, as a marginalized figure “is able to utilize resources that Tayo does not know how to access. Cognizant as he [Betonie] is of his liminal position as well as its concomitant power, Betonie can articulate the need to synthesize seemingly disparate and, at times, contradictory modes of both thought and behavior” (99).

These “contradictory modes” extend from Betonie’s appearance, as he draws together elements of both young and old (117), to the medicine he practices. Coke bottles are mixed with the more traditional “brown leaves of mountain tobacco,” and Woolworth bags are piled with “bouquets of dried sage,” creating a clutter that makes it difficult for Tayo to gain his bearings (120). He feels “dizzy and sick” as he surveys the hogan, not because the objects of Western civilization and Indian culture should not or have not been mixed, but because history shows him they cannot mix in a meaningful or positive manner. His only reference point to understanding American culture is in terms of oppression and opposition, of missionary teachers criticizing Pueblo ritual and of Americans giving Indians blankets infected with smallpox. This colonial ideology of difference and opposition is unable to interpret a spaciousness without it, and, lacking this colonial foundation in Betonie’s hogan, Tayo struggles to see. Nothing makes sense for Tayo in the hogan because he is experiencing what, from a colonial perspective, cannot be recognized—himself.

At the same time, Betonie, by generating this spaciousness of contradiction, is posing the complex sense of being/not being in the world experienced by Tayo and by the Pueblos themselves. In other words, the clutter of Betonie’s hogan is meant to create for Tayo a new way of seeing the world and his place within it, even as colonial narratives that attempt to define or understand the Pueblos only in terms of otherness counter this mixture. Confused by what he sees in the hogan, Tayo realizes that what “he could feel was powerful, *but there was no way to be sure what it was*” (124; my emphasis). The uncertainty of Tayo’s experience speaks to the ways in which he struggles to understand Betonie’s

attempt to construct more fluid and adaptive pathways between the past and present, America and Native Americans, and thereby problematize we/other oppositions. By doing so, Betonie manages to remain on the margin, with other Navajos afraid to come close to his hogan, even as his medicine seeks to counter the space of the margin itself. This instability means that there can be no outside to Betonie's healing, no sense of closure, and this in turn redefines the space of resistance in more uncertain terms of connection and involvement.

While Betonie's wish for Tayo to continue with the ceremony can be seen as a reminder by Betonie of the danger of marking limits, critics are unwilling to see the possibility of a text without limit, and attempt to reinscribe closure to the text by interpreting Tayo's search for the stars as a hero quest.⁵ Since Tayo's discovery of the spotted cattle and his return to the tribe is contextualized by images of fertility, critics conclude that he is cured and that the Laguna Pueblos have also returned to health. This reading, however, fails to consider the question Tayo asks of Ku'oosh concerning the space beyond knowledge, and fails to consider the alternative ceremonies of those who shadow Tayo's tale. The story of Helen Jean, for instance, as well as the stories of the Native Americans who are forced to live in the Gallup arroyo, provide an important context to Tayo's own journey, undermining attempts to read the text in singular terms.

Helen Jean, the prostitute Tayo meets on the road outside Gallup, is herself one of the forgotten, and her absence is meant to represent another lost woman in the text, Tayo's mother, Little Sister. Leroy and Harley "find" Helen Jean in Gallup (156), and the three come across Tayo, after he has left Betonie to continue his healing journey. The men make Helen Jean uncomfortable, reminding her of the reservation she had left behind a year ago. Their lack of money only increases Helen Jean's discomfort, and when they arrive at a nearby bar, she leaves the men behind. The narrative shifts disjointedly following her departure, moving from Tayo's journey to focus exclusively on Helen Jean, creating a textual gap between the two characters that reinforces the distinction between Tayo's experiences and Helen Jean's: Tayo's ceremony may have a communal element, but it is an element that struggles to recuperate Helen Jean's individual experiences.

Like Tayo, her story takes the form of a ceremonial journey, but one more focused on finding ways of combating the poverty she experiences on the reservation. Unlike the communal images of sunrise or the invocation to Thought-Woman that brackets Tayo's story, Helen Jean's story is bracketed by selfishness and pretense; it begins after Helen Jean tells Harley and Leroy she has to go to the bathroom and never returns (160). As a narrative, Helen Jean's biography occurs in the space framed by this lie and her eventual betrayal of Leroy, Harley, and Tayo (161–66). Her implicit promise to return to these men becomes an ominous foreshadowing of her failed promises to come—to mail money home to her sisters and to leave Gallup. In this way, her ceremonial experience restages the unity promoted by Tayo's journey. Similarly, her story draws attention to the gaps within the construction of the tribal family and community, gaps, which, in this case, seem never to be removed.

This feeling of exile is exaggerated by Helen Jean's attention to her appearance in Gallup, as she is shown plucking out her eyebrows and then penciling them back in, curling her hair, and using large amounts of makeup (162). While this ritual mask taps into the power seemingly promised to Emo by becoming white, it only leaves her with the opportunity to play the role of another, becoming a substitute for the white women in the stories told by Indian veterans in the bars. By assuming this mask, she is presenting herself in forgotten terms, replacing herself much like Emo with the mask of another, in a futile attempt to find herself only in colonial terms of otherness. She is wanted by these men both as a willing audience to listen to their stories of sexual and military conquest, as well as a "participant" allowing the tellers to reconstruct the past in the present. She helps them to forget their present poverty and unemployment, but as an explicitly masked actress she also acts as a reminder of the futility of this nostalgia, of the absence of a better day.

In this light, Helen Jean's desire to send money home to her sisters on the reservation is less a noble wish than a necessary part she plays in the stories these veterans tell. One veteran tells Helen Jean, "Her name was Doreen. She only needed the money because her mother was a cripple. She wasn't like the others. She went with me because she loved me. I could still have her if I went back to California" (164). Helen Jean's

failure to send money home itself becomes part of a story told many times before, her poverty becoming ritualized as part of a performance that encourages the men to give her more money. Any conceptualization of herself in familial or communal terms—as a sister or a Native American female—is undercut by this ritualization, by the demands of the role she plays, creating a tension between self and other that mirrors Tayo's own search for self in the stories first told by Betonie's grandfather, Descheeny. Helen Jean's challenge to construct herself in terms of the ever-present storyline of capital and exploitation poses the challenge Tayo himself must also face to discover himself in other terms, coming to terms with an identity caught between the past and present, Betonie's stories and Pueblo traditions.

Helen Jean's transience, however, still contrasts sharply with Tayo's more focused search, and only begs the question why Silko presents her life in such depth. Why does Silko try, in other words, to give Helen Jean a story, especially given the lack of information about such other characters as Leroy or Harley? One possibility is that by telling her story Silko can underscore Helen Jean's difference, and by doing so create a text that narrativizes the medicine practiced in Betonie's hogan, where belonging and place are defined in the fluid shifting of connection and difference. Seen in this way, Pueblo survival is written in terms of the "tenebrous" connections that help to define separation; Helen Jean's biography is part of *Ceremony* but seemingly should not be, her story is seen as separate and her self stigmatized as that which does not fit, and yet her story remains. The narrative of Helen Jean differs from the rest of the novel and thereby turns her story into an obstacle; and yet, at the same time, it is this very difference that makes her story stand out, making her story and herself singular and important. Her story draws one back to Ku'oosh's concern over speaking about that which is not recognized as part of "one's world." Silko is saying that Helen Jean's story is one that must be heard, but one that can only be heard as that which does not fit into the larger trajectory of Tayo's healing, complicating the success of his ceremony as a story that cannot be avoided.⁶

As this story of disjunction and fragmentation, her story counters the wholeness posed by the conclusion of Tayo's ceremony, and pres-

ents a vision of the tribal nation in terms of separation and fragmentation. One cannot attribute to Helen Jean the images of continuity and growth associated with the mythic images of Thought-Woman or of Ts'eh, Tayo's guide. Instead, Helen Jean's experience poses an image of the tribal nation facing its own end, caught up in ritualized performance of otherness that is reflected in a never-ending search for capital and recovery. Her story is one of the many examples in the novel of the breakdown of the family unit and of isolation, as represented by the many who line the arroyos in Gallup, resituating the image of the family as a metaphor for the continuity of the tribal nation. As Anne McClintock has shown, "women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking and natural), embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent and historic), embodying nationalism's progressive, or revolutionary principle of discontinuity" (359). While Tayo's journey could be interpreted in these more modern terms, it is clear that Helen Jean's experience, by leaving her family and living her life as a prostitute who does her best to avoid having sexual contact, is posing an alternate construction of the place and representation of the female in the tribal nation. Her experiences with discrimination, alcohol and prostitution in Gallup construct an unenviable narration of national (dis)continuity that opposes the matrilineal construction of existence represented by Thought-Woman, and the continuity of existence represented by the knowledge of past traditions held by Tayo's Grandma. Helen Jean's experiences pose the gap between tradition and the real world, creating a counter-ceremony that conceives of an alternate ending to tribal healing: the breakdown and disappearance of the tribe in terms of stereotypes of otherness and poverty.

IV.

Considered in the context of Helen Jean's ceremony, Tayo's healing is given an added level of meaning when he begins to recognize how the clutter he sees at the uranium mine forms a larger pattern, and that "all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, [and] their

stories" (246). Helen Jean's story fits within Tayo's ceremony and yet does not, a disjointed vision of difference that Tayo recognizes as part of Betonie's lesson. As he prepares himself for his encounter with Emo, Tayo begins to understand how difference should not be understood in oppositional terms, and that mythically the evil that Emo represents needs to be accepted as part of the world community. Much as Helen Jean's ceremony should not be ignored, Silko is arguing, when discussing the tribal future, Tayo needs to recognize the mythic evil of Emo as also a defining factor of Indian existence. The location of Tayo's ceremony, at an abandoned uranium mine, however, becomes a sign of the challenge presented by this larger vision. It is a reminder both of American penetration on Indian land as well as of the far-reaching nature of colonial power that supports Emo's evil and threatens Helen Jean's return.

As Tayo stands near the mine shaft "he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with Josiah's voice and Rocky's voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting" (246). The power of the atomic bomb underscores the futility of boundaries and the impossibility of constructing differences between past and present, us and other; and yet, this same boundless power becomes for Tayo a means of linking differing colonial experiences. Tayo's experience at the mine provides a counter-image to the threat posed by the atomic bomb, reading its boundlessness also as a means of forming connections and, ultimately, of survival. His unwillingness to engage in violence with Emo, to resist the continuity of difference found in the stereotypes of otherness—"He would have been another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud" (253)—means his acceptance of a global vision developing across time and space, one that merges "Japanese voices" with those of the Laguna Pueblos. The hope this vision of connection poses, however, can never escape the real-world shafts in the ground or the destructive violence posed by the bomb and radiation, but must be seen in the very terms of destruction and loss. As Shamooin Zamir has noted, the radiation that remains from the uranium mining done on Laguna Pueblo land

continues to cause both birth defects and respiratory cancer (399).⁷ Seen in this way, tribal presence for Silko means coming to terms with its impossibility; it means joining together the ceremonies of Tayo and Helen Jean in order to conceptualize a tribal future that can recognize itself both on and off the reservation.

Given that tribal healing entails confronting the real-world loss and destruction represented by the atomic bomb, the many deaths that conclude the novel, then, from Harley to Leroy to Pinkie, should come as no surprise. In part marking its difference from other Native American fiction that ends on a more hopeful note for mixed bloods, like Michael Dorris' *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* or Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, *Ceremony* closes on a more tragic note. And though Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter argues that the deaths of Leroy and Pinkie are the "natural consequences" of their actions in attacking Harley and, hence, should be of less concern, Kenneth Lincoln opposes this argument, rooted in the seeming justness of balance, claiming that the men die "pointlessly;" the deaths should be seen as "signs of the destructive self-hatred in young Indians encased in shells, veterans sucked empty over a century of foreign and civil wars" (250). In other words, the return of Tayo to the tribe and the return of fertility to the people only can be understood in terms of the surrounding violence, which means that Tayo's journey is only a success if recognized in terms of a larger context of colonial control. Much like the stories of Emo and Helen Jean, the violence at the end of the novel frames Tayo's journey, resituating the search for the postcolonial in terms of the alternative stories, the hauntings, and the miscommunications that exist within each community. Just as Tayo finds support for his refusal to fight Emo through the destruction posed by the atom bomb, it is through the forgotten, the left behind, and those figured as others that the tribal nation must negotiate its emergence. Seen in this way, the struggle for tribal presence is more clearly determined, since it always must take place in terms of those people, places or events that are thought best forgotten or opposed.⁸ By broadening one's vision in this way, the tribal community is able to recognize important linkages, allowing it to develop a more global understanding of what a tribal nation means.

Notes

- 1 Cutchins argues, for instance, “*Ceremony* becomes, at least potentially, a powerful tool for the revitalization of culture” (77). Owens emphasizes the hope *Ceremony* poses in less qualified terms: “The central lesson of this novel is that through the dynamism, adaptability, and syncretism inherent in Native American cultures, both individuals and the cultures within which individuals find significance and identity are able to survive and grow, and evade the deadly traps of stasis and sterility” (167).
- 2 See Moore and Krupat for a broader examination of the applicability of the term “postcolonial” to Native American studies. Krupat outlines the argument over whether tribal literature should be considered postcolonial by relying on the definition found in *The Empire Writes Back*. According to Bill Aschroft, Garreth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, postcolonial literatures “emerged in [its] present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted [itself] by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing [its] differences from the assumptions of the imperial center. It is this which makes [it] distinctively postcolonial” (qtd. in Krupat 169). While Krupat sees Native American literature as differentiating itself from the “imperial center,” the violence and control over the tribes remain, making the term “*postcolonial*” politically and culturally problematic. By coining the phrase “anti-imperial *translation*” (170; original emphasis) to mitigate this difference, Krupat ultimately elides the question of the connection of the postcolonial to Native American writing. The new phrase takes for granted that problems on the reservations continue to exist—that tribes are still dealing with colonial concerns—but sees Indian literature as providing an important critique of colonial power.
- 3 A recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* that described the current problems faced by many tribes that are trying to recover museum artifacts emphasizes how tribal life remains shadowed by control. Using the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, tribes have requested the return of many ceremonial objects, ranging from headdresses to animal skins. However, since museum officials used a mixture of arsenic and other dangerous chemicals, such as mercury, to preserve many of the objects, Indian officials fear that contact with these objects once returned could cause illness to tribal members. Robert Geary, an Elem tribal leader, states, “We don’t know what we’re going to do. . . . We want to wear them [ceremonial headdresses and sackcloth dresses] in our dances, but they could have stuff that can get under your skin and really do some damage. . . . When our dance regalia are worn out, our tradition is to send them back into the water. If they’re toxic, how are we even going to get rid of them?” (Fausset B1). This concern over the importance of developing a toxic waste plan for ceremonial objects underscores how artifacts, used to establish a sense of continuity, have today become a source of harm and possible destruction for many tribes.

- 4 See Dariotis for a further examination of the way in which the appearance of Japanese soldiers and former internment camp detainees in the novel pose the beginnings of a more transnational vision for Tayo.
- 5 See Zamir "Literature in a 'National Sacrifice Area'" (405–409), for a discussion of Tayo's journey as a hero quest.
- 6 In an interview with Laura Coltelli, Silko speaks of the uncertainty of Helen Jean's story as both necessary to the text and yet not. Helen Jean is "just there, and she goes. In one way, if you were judging her by more conventional structural elements of a novel, she just sort of comes and goes. But I would rather have you look at her, and get a feeling for her, so that when we make a brief reference to Tayo's mother, the one who dies early and is disgraced and so on, then I don't have to tell you that story. I'm trying to say that basically what happened to Tayo's mother is what happened to Helen-Jean, is what happened to—on and on down the line. These things try to foreshadow, or resonate *on* each other (140; original italics).
- 7 With the discovery of uranium and the resultant waste generated from its excavation, the Laguna Pueblo's communal relation with the land has taken on a new, more hazardous meaning, and the Earth itself now threatens the very existence of the tribe itself. LaDuke and Churchill have shown that the tribe's water sources have been contaminated by radiation, and that various public buildings, including the tribal council building, record various levels of radiation (125). Moreover, according to Matthiessen, the tailings left behind from uranium strip mining, conducted by the Anaconda Company from 1952–1981, have also been linked to birth defects among the Indian population (301). And, if this were not enough, the company, after completing its work, left behind a "massive crater and piles of radioactive slag" to remind everyone of the now more toxic relationship the Laguna Pueblo tribe holds to the land (LaDuke 125).
- 8 The task, as San Juan argues, is one faced by writer and critic alike, since post-colonial criticism often forgets the real-world individual in its attention to the play of language or the search for hybridity. His attention to the individual struggle in a colonial world reflects the larger challenge posed by *Ceremony's* vision for tribal progress.

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