

**NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**THE PORTRAYAL OF MODERN NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN: A STUDY
IN JOY HARJO'S POETRY**

MA THESIS

Ala AHMED

**Nicosia
June, 2021**

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Supervisor
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June, 2021

Approval

We certify that we have read the thesis submitted by Ala Beshank Ahmed titled “**The portrayal of modern Native American women: a study in Joy Harjo’s poetry**” and that in our combined opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Social Sciences.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that all information, documents, analysis and results in this thesis have been collected and presented according to the academic rules and ethical guidelines of Institute of Graduate Studies, Near East University. I also declare that as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced information and data that are not original to this study.



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Abstract

THE PORTRAYAL OF MODERN NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN: A STUDY IN JOY HARJO'S POETRY

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The colonization of North America by the Europeans brought extreme consequences for the Indigenous people. Before the arrival of the colonizers, the colonized population led an organized society. After the contact with the settlers, the Natives' life greatly changed for the worse. The colonizers claimed that they wanted to "civilize" the Natives because they simply did not follow the same societal rules in which Europeans followed. The invaders caused mass murders, enslavement, death by diseases, raping the women, demolishing Native culture, etc.

During the Civil rights movement in the 1960s in America, Native activists initiated several movements to bring awareness to people of other races about their lives and encourage themselves to cherish their culture. Native literature thrived in the 1970s, which was later named as 'Native American Renaissance'. Many Native women poets emerged during this period. This study aims to examine the roles of modern Native American women in the poetry of Joy Harjo, it explores selected poems from three different collections of poetry; *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979), *She Had Some Horses* (1983), and *The Woman Who fell from the Sky* (1994). The research focuses on the consequences that has caused the changing roles of modern Native American women. Native feminist theory by the literary critic, Paula Gunn Allen is applied to analyze the female characters. The thesis mainly targets the empowerment of modern Native American women and the process of decolonization.

Keywords: Colonialism; decolonization; Native feminist theory; Native American poetry; empowerment.

Öz

MODERN AMERIKAN YERLİSİ KADINLARIN TASVIRI: JOY HARJO'NUN ŞİİRİNDE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü Yüksek Lisans Tezi

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Kuzey Amerika'nın Avrupalılar tarafından sömürgeleştirilmesi yerli halk için aşırı sonuçlar getirdi. Sömürgecilerin gelişinden önce, sömürgeleştirilmiş papülasyon organize bir topluma öncülük etti. Yerleşimcilerle temastan sonra, Yerlilerin hayatı daha da kötüleşti. Sömürgeciler, Yerlileri "medenileştirmek" istediklerini iddia ettiler, çünkü Avrupalıların uyduğu aynı toplumsal kurallara uymadılar. İşgalciler toplu katliamlara, köleleştirmeye, hastalıklardan ölüme, kadınlara tecavüze, Yerli kültürünü yıkmaya vb.

Amerika'da 1960'lardaki Sivil haklar hareketi sırasında, Yerli aktivistler, Yerli olmayan insanlara yaşamları hakkında farkındalık yaratmak ve kültürlerini el üstünde tutmaya teşvik etmek için çeşitli hareketler başlattılar. Yerli edebiyat, daha sonra 'Amerikan Yerli rönesansı' olarak adlandırılan 1970'lerde gelişti. Bu dönemde birçok Yerli kadın şair ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışma, modern Amerikan yerlisi kadınların Joy Harjo'nun şiirlerindeki rollerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır, üç farklı şiir koleksiyonundan seçilmiş şiirleri araştırmaktadır; *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979), *She Had Some Horses* (1983), and *The Woman Who fell from the Sky* (1994). Araştırma, modern Amerikan yerlisi kadınların değişen rollerine neden olan sonuçlara odaklanıyor. Edebiyat eleştirmeni Paula Gunn Allen'in yerli feminist teorisi, kadın karakterleri analiz etmek için uygulanır. Çalışma esas olarak modern Amerikan yerlisi kadınların güçlendirilmesini ve dekolonizasyon sürecini incelemeyi hedeflememektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sömürgecilik; dekolonizasyon; Yerli feminist teori; Amerikan yerlisi şiiri; Güçlendirilmesi.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background of the Study

In this chapter, a brief introduction of the study is discussed. It demonstrates the historical period in which the selected poems of the thesis were published. This chapter outlines the aim, significance, the main argument, proceeded by the limitations of the study. Moreover, the research analyzes the poetry of Joy Harjo, the selected poems of this research are limited to the era of modernism during the 1970-90s. The poetry of Harjo is mostly influenced by the colonization of Native women. Therefore, it is vital to discuss their history with colonization.

Before the arrival of Europeans to the New World, there were eighteen million people already living in the American continent and five million lived in what is now the modern United States of America. Native communities used to live in tribes like: Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Navajo, and Pueblo.

A great number of historians show the history of America as it has started with the arrival of Europeans. However, this claim has been disputed by Native historians, the fact is that they had their own traditions, cultures, and rituals. Moreover, they also spoke two hundred languages which were extremely different from Europeans before the explorer Christopher Colombes discovered it in 1492 (Salisbury, 1996). The Indigenous people of North America displayed extraordinary various types of "... languages, economies, political systems, beliefs, and material cultures" (Salisbury, 1996). The activist and historian, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, describes America's history as "a settler colonialism-the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy...and a policy of genocide and land theft" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 2). Dunbar-Ortiz's introduces that the American government has always been discriminatory toward its Indigenous people, and that the American society is prompted by Whites being the dominants. They encroached on the Natives and tried to eradicate their race.

During the pre-colonial era, women and men held the same positions of power in their tribes and communities. Traditionally, when a married woman would have

children, they would have been named after the mother's family name, "Females held responsibility for agricultural activities, while men either hunted or also worked the fields" (Mihesuah, 2003, p. 44). Women's work was appreciated by the Native society. In many traditional societies, women were farmers.

Before the conquest, men respected women's rights because they were considered to be holy beings. Anderson (2016) describes when Europeans colonized North America, they were shocked because of the position of women in the society. And the reason is the Natives' and the European's cultures were very different in the way they treated women. Soon enough the colonizers became aware of the fact that they needed to remove Native women in their positions of power in order for them to control their land and the entire population (Anderson, 2016). Traditionally in North America, men's work included hunting and providing food for their families, however, women were involved in agricultural fields. Furthermore, Anderson claims both genders had their particular activities that they had to do for their society, but it was typical for them to do each other's work as well no one was tied to one specific duty, they did whatever activities that suited them.

Native women were unaware of Europeans' views on females and how they wanted women to be restricted to domestic work only. This system included these ideals: men went outside to take care of real business because they were superior. While women had an inferior role just staying home and taking care of their home and their children, the Natives "understood that the work of every individual was necessary for the well-being of the family, the community, and the nation. What was known as "women's work," therefore, was highly valued." (Anderson, 2016, p. 35). This explains how their gender roles were completely different from the settlers' social construct.

Upon the arrival of the settlers the Indigenous people were often described as being primitive. However, that is a false conception, the Europeans created stereotypes about the Native women and sexualized their image. As a result of the patriarchal behaviors of the Europeans, they have adapted the beliefs of western and ideas, and acclimated to sexism.

The colonizers wanted to "civilize" the Natives because they saw them as savages, and forced them into believing in Christianity unwillingly. Another concept that

the colonized population had to believe was that God was male, therefore imposing the idea that males were the superior and females were the inferior, females in Christianity were required to obey and be submissive to men. Most of them had to believe in the European lifestyle because they had to survive, but many did not change their culture. Those who disobeyed the government were severely punished (Miheuah, 2003).

Soon enough they tried to behave according to what was acceptable by the White settlers and to be seen as civilized, the Natives “were introduced not only to new beliefs but also to a dramatically different canon of acceptable social and religious behavior, particularly as it related to women” (Valaskakis, Stout & Guimond, 2009, p. 18).

After the contact, women lost their importance in their community. They suffered through poverty and alcoholism, in order for them to deal with colonialism. Women lost their social status; they were treated with sexism by non-Native men and women. There have been studies which were conducted in the 1970s that have concluded women were sterilized; their ages were between fifteen and forty-five. According to those studies, these Native women were oblivious to what type of surgery they were being operated on (Miheuah, 2003). They did not only endure sexual and physical abuse under the rule of the colonizers but they were abused by the Native men as well.

Native female scholars do believe that the biggest issue in their society is colonization. They agree that decolonization is the solution, meaning they have to change the way they behave and try to look for their loss of identity in their ancestors’ lives (Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013). Perhaps women were the ones who became most brutalized as the result of colonization because their communities treated women with sexism even though many Native historians believe that they did not even know about the concept of sexism prior to the Europeans arriving at their land (Anderson, 2016). Native women activists had to create movements to resist and stop tolerating and being treated like they were the inferiors of society.

Native feminism is a different concept than what White people call feminism, mostly because the issues that they face are completely different from what White people go through. Joy Harjo has named Native feminism; “Empowerment”. Harjo is a Native American woman who is a poet as well as an activist and she is one of those

women who inspires and encourages women to empower themselves in a patriarchal society. The main focus of the previously mentioned theory is to decolonize their community and empower women to speak up against physical and sexual violence that happens to them. The theory “offers a method for analyzing literary practices that attempt to decolonize ideological oppression with a focus on concepts of gender and race identity” (Sneider, 2011, p. 7). Native feminist theory tries to search for the misrepresentations of females in literature and break the traditions of stereotypical characters. People of colour in all of America have been portrayed as being the “other”.

There are many advantages to being a White person, White women have privileges in society, they would not experience what Native women suffer from. Being Caucasian means “enjoying the often nationalist privileges of that whiteness, is made to seem neutral and inviting or inclusive of racial, sexual, and other minorities” (Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013, p. 10).

The scholar Rayna Green highlights the fact that the accurate representation of female characters were not apparent until the 1970s when women poets started publishing their work and portraying Native women characters in every field of life which is the reality of their community (Hollrah, 2004). Native female poets’ publishing’s bloomed in the 1990s, it was an era in literature called as ‘Native American Renaissance’. It seemed like there were more female writers than males. Women writers broke boundaries and the stereotypical presentations of Native females in literature.

In the 1960s the Natives embraced their heritage and tribal traditions in their writings, in the period of ‘Renaissance’. During that decade and the decade that came after Native Americans became part of academic studies, prompted by the movements like, Red power, Black American civil rights, and feminism, and many more protests that were happening in the country. Literature has always been an integral part of their community for the past thousands of years “Native American people have produced pieces of literature rich in diversity and imagery” (Hollrah, 2004, p. 15).

The middle of the twentieth century was a revival for Native literature, the authors used new techniques but at the same time, they embraced their oral literary history. Renaissance was not only a change in literature and art, but also in “economics, politics, and their public presence...Since then we have seen a resurgence of Native

pride. People are returning to their Indian cultures for a sense of who they are” (cited in Velie & Lee, 2013, p. 3). Poets like Joy Harjo and Chippewa Gerald Vizinor were the ones who wrote with pride embracing their past with honor. Native authors had a particular way of influencing each other’s writings. The selected poems of this study were published during the ‘Renaissance’ era.

Joy Harjo’s poetry is a reaction to the oppression of Native American women. Many Natives believe writing in English gives them the power to renew the English language and use it to their advantage in order for them to get their message across to people from other races and ethnicities “For Indigenous women, English often reflects the power of language to heal, to regenerate, and to recreate, correcting misinformation and stereotypes long advocated by outsiders” (Archuleta, 2006, p. 91). Janice Acoose, another Native author declares that she writes in English because it will support giving a new image and empowers both Natives and non-Natives. Other female writers claim that their writings give them the power to have a vital and very much needed voice to educate people. Native women were torn from their identity composing about the topic makes them reclaim their true identity, and they agree that it is their responsibility to write for women and empower them.

Most Native women before the colonization were involved in politics, important decision making, medicine, they were even warriors (Lajimodiere, 2013). The image that the colonizers created of them gave a false misconception about their tribal communities to the whole world. Therefore, Native authors continue to write in order for the process of “the ongoing and continual healing of ... grief” (Bataille, 2001, p. 226).

The more poetry by women poets appeared, in which they discussed their experiences the more their voices became more significant in the community “Native women are undoing those damaging layers of stereotypes of native people in general and native women in general” (Harjo & Bird, 1997, p. 30).

Native female authors hoped that their voice would reach everyone not just their people. Poets like Joy Harjo, Wendy Rose, and Leslie Marmon Silko are determined that the main focus and theme of their writings to be about their own culture “the poetry of these and other Native American women poets creates a sense of tribal authority and authenticity while still maintaining a universal context to which women from all races

and walks of life are able to relate” (Montgomery, 2009, p. 13). Harjo and Bird describe contemporary Native female writers’ voices in *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language* (1997) as “to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction” (p. 21). Most Native literature is written in the English language, thus, it is for English speaking readers (Harjo & Bird, 1997). English is a way to bring a new perspective to the language because they were forced to speak the language for many years, therefore, they are using the English language to teach the world about their culture and history. Since the literature is composed in English this leads to non-Natives researching about the literature. Alexi Sherman is a Native poet who asserts he does not want White scholars to write about the Natives’ literature because it is a way of colonizing the literary text (Hollrah, 2001). Sherman claims it is not appropriate for White scholars to write about how his people feel or to interpret their writings. Others disagree like Duane Champagne who makes the argument: “there is room for both Indian and non-Indian scholars within American Indian studies,” (cited in Hollrah, 2001, p. 33). The author Angela Cavender Wilson, argues that non-Native scholars should mention Native writers’ perspective on the topic they write about otherwise, the paper will have a limited point of view (Hollrah, 2001). Because this researcher is non-Native, this study will be using sources from Native authors’ history books as well as studies that have been done about the selected poems, to understand their perspectives on the matter.

Joy Harjo’s Biography and Works

Joy Harjo is a poet, who was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the USA in 1951, she is Creek and Cherokee and she is a part of the Muscogee tribe. Harjo has published seven volumes of poetry, so far. These books are: *Last Song* (1975), *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979), *She Had Some Horses* (1983), *In Mad Love and War* (1990), *The Woman Who fell from the Sky* (1994), *A Map to the Next World: Poems and Tales* (2000), and *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems: 1975-2001* (2002).

A major theme of Harjo’s poetry is the influence of colonization on her community. Kolosov (2003), indicates that: “Harjo sees it as the responsibility of the tribal poet to record and therefore witness the destructive power of colonialism, as well as to imagine a way out of that suffering through love and memory.” (p. 40). Writing for

the Native women has been a form of activism and protest “Indigenous women have continued to express and validate their worldviews and experiences, producing knowledge in alternative sites of power and transforming aboriginal women’s lives by empowering them to speak out against violence” (Archuleta, 2006, p. 106).

Harjo’s poetry searches for the journey of empowerment of Native American women. Most of her writings deal with issues of oppressed people as pointed out by Bloom “Joy Harjo’s poetry engages in the complex social and political issues of not only Native Americans but also other marginalized and oppressed peoples” (2010, p. 71).

This thesis will analyze selected poems from different collections of poetry by Joy Harjo they are: *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979), *She Had Some Horses* (1983), and *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* (1994).

Aim of the Study

This thesis aimed to explore the roles of modern Native American women. And analyzed their changing roles in a post-colonial time in Joy Harjo’s selected poetry. The selected poems were analyzed according to Native feminist theory. The purpose of the research was to investigate the theme of survival and empowerment.

The selected poems in this study have been published during the 1970s and 1990s. This marked a new era for Native American literature and poetry more specifically, it was the era that was called Renaissance.

To have a better grasp about these issues, this study intended to analyze Joy Harjo’s poetry and how she empowers Native American women. The thesis examined these poems; *The First Noni Daylight*, *Kansas City*, *She Remembers the Future*, *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky*, and *Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace*.

Research Questions:

This study aimed to answer some key questions:

1. How are modern female Native American characters portrayed in Joy Harjo’s selected poetry?
2. How is the concept of “decolonization” represented in Joy Harjo’s selected poetry?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this thesis relies on two fundamental points. Firstly, the fact it shows the portrayal of modern Native American women. Secondly, it investigates the effects of colonialism on the roles of women.

There have been studies that have focused on female characters in Joy Harjo's poetry in which they are mentioned in this current research. However, these studies have held a biographical analysis. It introduces a new point of view by not analyzing the characters of the poems according to the author's life. The approach of Native American feminism is applied while analyzing the selected poems by Joy Harjo. This study also analyzed *Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace* which have not been studied before. Which presents the significance of this thesis, by analyzing this poem it will enlighten a broader representation of the changing roles of women before and after the White contact.

The thesis is an informative source of material for literary students who want to receive a better understanding of Native American literature, colonization, and how it changed their perspective on poetry.

Main Argument

The main argument is to show that the poetry of Joy Harjo serves as a reflection of the social changes concerning Native American women after colonialization. The changes are shown through the female characters of the selected poems. It argues that Harjo's poetry portrays the journey to the empowerment of modern Native American women. The study focused on the changing roles of modern Native American women during the 'Renaissance' period. As well as highlighting the changes that were caused by the patriarchal colonial society. It carried out a Native American feministic approach. There is a lack of studies that focus on the changing roles of women in Harjo's poetry. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, some of the selected poems of this study have not been looked at through Native feminist lance, therefore, this presents a gap in the literature.

Definition of Literary Terms

Colonialism: according to the Oxford dictionary the word has a Roman origin ‘colonia’ means ‘farm’ or ‘settlement’, and it indicates people who settle in a country that is not their origin land (Loomba, 2015). This is the broad definition of the word but more specifically colonialism means “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” (Loomba, 2015, p. 20). Colonizers mostly find new land and make it theirs to receive financial benefits from it; “it is a persistent social and political formation in which newcomers/colonizers/settlers come to a place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to disappear the Indigenous peoples that are there” (Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013, p. 12).

Decolonization: is the process of losing the colonizers’ culture and belief, and when the population that has been colonized tries to bring back their own traditions and folklore that they used to have before the colonizers arrived at their land, meaning they “reclaim” their past (Anderson, 2016). Million (2009) describes it as; “To “decolonize” means to under- stand as fully as possible the forms colonialism takes in our own times.” (p. 55).

Native feminist theory: was created by Native American scholars to analyze their literature. In which it focuses on the representation of Native women in literature. It sheds light on Natives’ tribal communities and history. This theory takes the colonialism effects on women into consideration. The theory targets how do women want to achieve decolonization. The theory is not focused on the differences between men and women or achieving total equality between the two genders, “Native feminist theories thus offer a number of useful starting points in problematizing the intersections among settler colonialism, hetero patriarchy, and hetero paternalism, particularly through demonstrating how white stream and other feminist movements often ignore and, at times, perpetuate this triad” (Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013, p. 16). Thus, they make the argument that Native women and women of colour have been ignored in White feminist movements, and it aims for them to have a vital voice in the society.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

To grasp a better understanding about the Native American women's status, this chapter discusses the historical context of the selected poems. It shows the studies that have been conducted that are related to the topic.

Native American Women Pre-colonization

Native tribal culture's beliefs included giving women power in their society and they had a purpose and their positions in the community were significant. For the colonizers to subjugate the colonized people they had to remove women in the position of power. The colonizers had a completely different point of views than, the colonizers mostly consisted of a patriarchal society; John Mohawk declares that "European-Americans saw the world in such different terms, in terms of hierarchies, male force and control, that they were blind to the fact that Native cultures were, in fact, community and woman oriented and non-abusive in nature" (cited in Hollrah, 2004, p. 17).

Women's roles were important to the economy, in many different areas in North America they were the ones responsible to gather food sources like nuts, onions, and corn. They were allowed to own their houses, unlike the British women who could not legally own a house "That Native women could own property was a shock to the Europeans, who believed that men had the sole right to own and control all property. Even their women and children were considered their property" (LaDuke, 2006, p. 54).

Joy Harjo gives a representation of the status of women before colonization by showing Native female characters from their mythology. Many female authors including Harjo have shed light on traditional stories by retelling them from contemporary perspectives. Harjo pays attention to oral folklore stories because most of those stories are about strong Native American women, for instance; the Iroquois creation stories believe in female creators. This story certainly has inspired her work and the creator character appears in *The Woman Who fell from The Sky*. This is a strong powerful character that can remind women of their social positions before colonization, it is a step

toward empowerment. The poem retells the myth by comparing it to a modern Native American woman. Adamson (2001) believes that “Harjo is interested in how the continued use of the oral tradition, whether it is conveyed in a traditional language or English, provides the resistance to those colonizing forces that would suppress the Native American voice is ongoing” (p. 123). As Eloisa Valenzuela-Mendoza’s study (2014), describes the title of the poem “In keeping with the theme of restoration is the title poem, “The Woman Who Fell From the Sky,” a mythic narrative embedded within a contemporary world.” (p. 36).

European patriarchal society included women staying at home and being looked at as inferiors meanwhile, men who had powerful positions in the society and they were considered privileged. In contrast in the Native communities in the Southwest, the roles of men and women were interdependent. Not all Native women were the same in all the tribes, but there is historical written evidence that women used to held positions in the military (Barman, 2010). The roles that women held whether socially or politically was approved by religious tribal beliefs in which they believed in feminine ideals of creation. Unlike, the Christians that believed in a God male figure, which led to beliefs that men were superior. The European colonists were inspired by the Renaissance system called the “Great Chain of Being” which is a belief that entirely everything in the world would be under the rule of God who comes first of the hierarchy, “with Hell and chaos at the bottom, or in politics, the king is at the top and peasants and generally are at the bottom” (Miheuah, 2003, p. 47). According to this hierarchy, the Native women were placed at the bottom because they were not Christians.

Anderson (2016) believes that most Native scholars agree that their society before the colonization appreciated and valued women, and that sexism was not a familiar notion in their society and most likely it did not exist and that sexism was a result of a patriarchal society, “We had ways that protected us against the *-isms* sexism, ageism, racism, heterosexism. Indigenous cultures often framed womanhood as a sacred identity” (p. 33). Accordingly, men did not have a higher social status than women and both genders were equally respected in traditional Native societies.

Native American Women Post-colonization

The sexual and physical abuse that Native women experience is connected to the colonization that their community went through, according to Barman (2010) the conquest has “involved their removal from positions of power, the replacement of traditional gender roles with Western patriarchal practices, the exertion of colonial control over Indigenous communities through the management of women’s bodies, and sexual violence” (p. 1). Native American activist, Winona LaDuke declares women are victims and under attack by society for a number of reasons,

We, collectively, find that we are often in the role of the prey, to a predator society, whether for sexual discrimination, exploitation, sterilization, absence of control over our bodies, or being the subjects of repressive laws and legislation in which we have no voice (as cited in Mihesuah, 2003, p. 41).

Native women have not been considered as human beings and it has become a common image in the American society “the physical and sexual abuse of aboriginal women demonstrates that they are more than symbolic” (Archuleta, 2006, p. 105). Furthermore, they were dehumanized and this concept became a familiar idea across the board. They were characterized by the colonizers as savages “squwa drudge” the symbolism of savages. The “squwa” is a presentation and an insult that was created by the colonizers about the women to dehumanize them. A definition for this term can be given as “the female counterpart to the Indian male "savage" and as such she has no human face; she is lustful, immoral, unfeeling and dirty” (Archuleta, 2006, p. 105). This false picture of Indigenous females led to racial and sex inequality in the society, and violence towards them was the result. They were not only portrayed like this only in life but in art and in literature as well by the colonizers, and they were described as “dirty” and “ugly”.

The White colonizers tried to characterize themselves as superior to Native women as well as other women of colour in order for them to weaken their power in their culture for the purpose of colonization. Native women were looked at as inferiors by everyone in the society after colonization because of their gender. After all this is what settler colonization is about they wanted to demolish the Indigenous population,

and claim their land their lands as if it was their own. They practically became slaves to the Whites they were forced and put into work, they were removed from their lands and ruined the spiritual relationship that they had with their lands, in order for the colonizers to benefit from their lands. The racial injustices in the US produced the identity loss of the Natives over many generations.

Natives by the end of the 1960s begun movements and demanded their rights from the government. As a result, this prompted into the process of decolonization. Because so much of their pre-colonization history was a mystery they had to investigate and find the womanhood identities they needed to “re-view their journey and reclaim the cultural base upon which we organized ourselves and our communities” (LaDuke, 2006, p. 30). Joy Harjo represents the concept of decolonization in her poetry when the female characters of the poems achieve their own identity and free themselves from the oppression of post-colonialism. Noni Daylight in *She Remembers the Future* describes all the consequences that her people have dealt with because of colonization then she realizes that she should follow the steps of her ancestors. This is a representation achieving decolonization.

All the drastic social changes the Indigenous people had to deal with can be further explained by the process of “hegemony”. This occurs when two different and independent cultures clash together which will result in dramatic changes in one of those systems or perhaps both. The colonized population will gradually lose their own self of identity as well as their culture. Their old beliefs and ideas will just become a myth according to Vecsey, “the popular Western mind to this day equates myth with falsehood, stupidly believed and foolishly studied.” (cited in Valaskakis, Stout & Guimond, 2009, p. 15). Eventually, their reality will become whatever their colonizers are set to be. This study will search for how is the concept of “hegemony” portrayed by Harjo through the character of Noni.

Empowerment of Modern Native American Women in Joy Harjo’s Poetry

Joy Harjo’s poetry is not about holding grudges toward the colonizers rather it is about finding their true, strong, powerful identity that women used to possess before colonization as Kolosov (2003) declares; “Harjo, going home is about going back to a

sense of wholeness for tribal peoples. Through love, the poet acquires the power and the vision to transform hatred and persecution” (pp. 42-43). Through the character of Noni Daylight who appears in some poems from two of Harjo’s collections of poetry, Harjo empowers Native women by representing this individual.

The first poem in which the character of Noni Daylight appears is *The First Noni Daylight*, the character is depicted as an alcoholic and an addict. She is portrayed as some trickster character as described by (Holmes, 1995). Trickster characters feature in many Natives’ oral literature. Kathrine Gleason defines tricksters as; “they are usually self-centered and think about fulfilling their own desires, regardless of the consequences.” (1997, p. 18). This description of tricksters can be understood as a comparison to the character of Noni, she attempts to end her life for the sake of her lover, without thinking about the consequences of her reckless behaviors.

Kristine Holmes (1995) characterizes Noni, “Noni’s risk-taking takes her to the edge of self-destruction” (p. 57). However, this statement can be disagreed with, because there is no mention of the mythological figures ‘tricksters’ in the poem. Instead, it gives a representation of many attributes associated with contemporary Native American women. The reason Holmes (1995) describes Noni as a trickster because they believe Noni faked her suicide attempt so she could convince her lover to stay with her. Many researchers like Holmes make this claim, although there is no evidence to be provided for this declaration in the poem. This study argues Noni’s suicide attempt was for her lover to stay, however, the speaker of *The First Noni Daylight* does not in any way state that Noni has been deceiving.

The journey of Noni Daylight continues in these poems: *Kansas City* and *She Remembers the Future*. Which are part of *She Had Some Horses* (1983) poetry collection. Montgomery (2009), describes the identity of modern Native American women, “Joy Harjo’s collection *She Had Some Horses* assumes the voice of women who long for the security of home and family but find themselves living between the ideal and the harsh reality of everyday life” (p. 167). Montgomery describes Noni’s journey depiction as a way for her to find the Native voice that she has longed for all her life. Montgomery’s depiction is an accurate statement, Noni throughout her life finds

herself lonely and has no family members to support her. Which gives the readers an insight of how Native family dynamics are in contemporary American society.

Andrew Wiget's (2013) book claims Noni as "may be just one Native American woman in contemporary America, but she lives in the middle part of the country and certainly represents many" (p. 441). Wiget explains that Noni is a representation of an urban Native American woman. Despite this statement reflecting Noni's characteristics, Wiget further explains that Noni is a representation of Harjo's other self, meaning her alter-ego. Nancy Lang (1993) follows the same analogy by declaring that "Wiget's ideas help to give clarity to much of Noni Daylight's seemingly erratic behavior" (p. 43). Furthermore, Lang (1993) declares that Harjo has recited this poem about her own life, this argument cannot be proofed, as there is no evidence to be provided for. This concept is disagreeable the reason is such analysis limits the possibilities of exploring Noni's character. Ronald Barthes' essay *The Death of the Author* (1977) explains when a text is narrated the voice of the speaker is no longer the voice of the author. The voice of the written text is anonymous, Barthes further claims when the author writes he enters his death. In other words, the identity and original intended meaning will be lost in the writing process. According to Barthes writing: "is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (1977, p. 142). The readers are the ones who can determine what the text is about without analyzing the characters by comparing it to the life of the writer. Therefore, in this study the analysis does not refer to Noni Daylight as Joy Harjo's "other self", because there is no way of knowing the identity of a narrative voice in a literary text.

Joy Harjo illustrates female characters who are overburdened with the ramifications of colonialism as a result, they become angry and do not seem to understand the cause of their issues. Therefore, they seem to believe that ending their life is the only solution. Cagle (2006) contends the women characters consider suicide because they suppose they "will be set free" (p. 118). Therefore, Cagle's interpretation is assumed that the female character feels trapped in her life and suicide is her way of freeing herself. From this standpoint, one can understand that the source of Noni's desperate life is 'fear' which stops her from moving forward in her life.

Kansas City represents the loss of identity of Native American women in modern-day America. Noni in this poem appears lost and saddened by the devastations that colonialism has caused her people.

Noni appears that she has no ambition in life and she does not have anyone to encourage her, it is shown that Noni does not have stable relationships and has children with different men. Wiget (2013) explains that Joy Harjo; “casts a direct gaze on the fragmented family lives of many urban Indians and their consequent suffering” (p. 439). This statement can be looked at as a depiction of Noni’s character.

Noni’s story ends in *She Remembers the Future*, it represents Noni’s survival and self-empowerment. Noni decides to connect with her ancestors’ past and co-operate their wisdom and knowledge into her life. Rose-Vails (2003) presents an argument about this poem “Daylight moves through the stages of her journey, uses anger to overcome the voicelessness imposed upon her by racism, defeats the dialectical binaries of self definition, and arrives at cultural survival” (p. 35). Rose-Vails’ argument informed that Noni establishes having a vital voice in the American society after being suppressed for so long.

Joy Harjo’s poetry is about the empowerment of women, “Harjo’s work ultimately foregrounds the way tribal identity, as well as feminism and other philosophies, can empower one's writing” (Kolosov, 2003, p. 40). Kolosov describes Harjo’s writing as it is concerned with the force of colonialism, and how the identity of Indigenous Americans are a powerful recurrent theme in her poetry.

The way Harjo recites her poetry is that she uses one of a kind style of narrative storytelling. In her poetry, Harjo gives an insight into her people’s culture, history, traditions, and myths. Most Native American poets draw inspiration from stories in “oral literature” and certainly Harjo is one of them. She uses oral literature to retell stories connecting them to modern women’s issues. It is fundamental to discuss why do oral stories influence Native writers heavily, that is because as pointed out by Ruoff (1990) “the oral literatures of Native Americans reflect the diversity of their religious beliefs, social structures, customs, languages, and lifestyles” (p. 5). Intertwining contemporary and oral stories is an attempt by Native writers to show their rich culture, because after the colonization they were not allowed to practice their rituals and traditions.

In the Navajo tribe like many other tribes, they believed in a female divine presence. For instance, for Navajos the word “mother” represented something holy to them it symbolizes “the earth, sheep, and corn- the three major elements of Navajo substance...the earth mother is also known as “Changing Woman,” a self-renewing entity who symbolizes hope” (Mihehuah, 2003, p. 42).

The Woman Who Fell from the Sky is an illustration of Joy Harjo blending mythological characters into contemporary storytelling. It tells a story of a boy and a girl in the 20th century who have struggled through the consequences of colonialism. The characters elevate each other's spirits by believing in the ‘Sky Woman’, who is a symbol of a feminine goddess in Native mythology. As mentioned previously they believe in female creators, hence this belief empowers the female character. The female character's feelings of empowerment factor in strengthening the male character.

Montgomery (2009) declares that in this collection of poetry *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky*, Joy Harjo tries to intertwine the modern issues women to strong mythical female figures, it attempts to “project the strong voice of Native American women who face modern situations and dilemmas yet also attempt to keep ancestral voices alive.” (p. 81).

This thesis argues Harjo's use of mythical figures is an attempt to decolonize the minds of modern Native women. Harjo depicts characters who are lost because of the consequences of colonization, and how those characters lost the faith of their ethnicity as they were being brutalized for years. Cagle's (2006) study describes Harjo's portrayal of mythical figures in the collection of *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky* “Harjo imaginatively uses language to create a world in which women are once again strong, active, and creative figures.” (p. 135).

Review of Related Studies

Dejuan Ann Montgomery's dissertation (2009) *Speaking Through the Silence*, gives attention to the Native American voice in poetry. Mainly in the poetry of Indigenous American women poets like Joy Harjo. The researcher targets how does Joy Harjo use her voice to speak out about the issues that are related to American women. Montgomery also discusses how the poet adds her people's rituals and culture to her

poetry. As the researcher expresses “the issues of authenticity and authority are examined through the tribal roles of Native American women as storytellers and culture bearers that emphasize the importance of the woman-line” (Montgomery, 2009, p. v). Moreover, Montgomery explains how women have been silenced and suppressed because of the colonization, and throughout the study the researcher then expresses how they achieve having a voice in their society.

Shannon Rose-Vails study named *Joy Harjo’s Poetics of Transformation* which was conducted in (2003), discusses the roles of female characters in Harjo’s poetry. This researcher analyzes Harjo’s poetry according to mediational theory. Rose-Vails focuses on the psychology of the female character of Noni Daylight.

Eloisa Valenzuela-Mendoza in the research of “*Tending to the past*”: *the historical poetics of Joy Harjo and Natasha Trethewey* (2014), discusses the survival of Indigenous Americans through colonization. The researcher focuses on the themes of survival in Harjo’s poetry. This concept is relevant to this current thesis because empowerment cannot be achieved without survival. Valenzuela-Mendoza (2014) highlights the historical contexts in Harjo’s poetry. In addition, the researcher analyzes *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky* and points out the heroic representation of a Native American character. This researcher uses philosophical theories by Emmanuel Levinas.

Amanda Nicole Bass Cagle’s (2006) paper *Pushing From Their Hearts a New Song: The (Re)Construction of the Feminine in American Indian Women’s Poetry* examines multiple poems by Joy Harjo. More specifically the researcher analyzes Noni Daylights’ character and the source of her self-doubt and fear as a Native woman. As well as explaining how does Joy Harjo’s poetry try to connect between their ancestors and the new generations. Therefore, the researcher believes that Harjo tries to reconnect a bridge that was lost because of colonialism.

Chelsea Burk’s (2014) study titled “*We are alive*”: *(Mis)Reading Joy Harjo’s Noni Daylight as a Yellow Woman**, analyzes every poem in which Noni Daylight is featured. The researcher analyzes Noni as a symbol of womanhood. Burk compares Noni’s character to another piece of literature by a Native writer. The influence of oral literature on the character of Noni is interpreted, her identity, gender, and sexuality. In

general, Burk focuses on what does it mean to be a Native woman and how does womanhood appear different than western ideals.

Kolosov's (2003) study *Poetries of transformation: Joy Harjo and Li-Young Lee*, explores the reasons Joy Harjo uses mythical figures and time in the poem *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky*. Kolosov explains mythical time in the poem creates a setting in which there are no boundaries by blending historical events into the events of the plot.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides the methodology which is utilized while conducting this study. Research rationale and research design of the study are shown as well. The research study consecrates on the journey of the Native American women characters to empowerment and decolonization. The selected poems of this thesis are: *The First Noni Daylight*, *Kansas City*, *She Remembers the Future*, *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky*, and *Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace*. Native feminist theory is followed to analyze the poems.

Research Rationale

There are different types of theories to be used to analyze Joy Harjo's poetry. Many researches have been conducted about Harjo's poetry focusing on the loss of identity of Native American people, and how do they deal with being mixed-heritage, meaning being half Native and half another race. This is considered to be some sort of crisis in their communities. These researches have shown how these mixed-heritage people feel that they are rejected by both sides of their ancestors.

This research mainly focused on modern Native American women from the 1970s until the 1990s. While discussing the issues women face, colonization cannot be ignored. Natives before colonization held stable controlled lives, most importantly women held high positions of power in their communities. Some tribes even had matriarchal communities. This study has discussed how has the roles of women drastically changed before and after the arrival of colonizers, in the poetry of Joy Harjo, these changes are shown. Joy Harjo's poetry pays tremendous attention to the theme of "survival", mostly because her people have been through great devastations and it seems that the colonizers wanted to end their race. However, they are still alive, this theme is very visible in Harjo's poetry. This study sheds light on those two significant themes in selected poems by Harjo. Those themes are represented in Harjo's poetry, for instance,

the poet creates a Native American female character named Noni Daylight, in which the reader follows her journey to survival then empowerment.

Design of the Study

This thesis carried out a qualitative research design. To interpret the text and describe the roles of Indigenous American women characters in selected poems by Joy Harjo; *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979), *She Had Some Horses* (1983), and *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* (1994). John W. Creswell (2002) describes; “qualitative procedures rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry” (p. 205).

Content analysis approach is chosen to describe and discuss the roles of modern Native American women. The research argues that Harjo’s poetry can be interpreted as an encouragement for women to be empowered, and to be strong like their ancestors before colonization. It also concentrated on Harjo’s use of Native American mythology female figures to empower modern women. The qualitative research design is selected instead of quantitative because the study focuses on qualitative data. A qualitative design was selected to analyze the poems, and the reason is it helps in achieving an explanation for the aim of the thesis.

For the aforementioned reasons, qualitative research is more suitable for this research rather than quantitative. As David Silverman (2020) argues “Qualitative research is the type of research that finds out about people’s experience. It helps us understand what is for people” (p. 3).

Content Analysis

This study used content analysis which is a technique of a qualitative research. Barbara Wildemuth (2017) describes content analysis as, “Qualitative analysis of content involves a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation” (p. 319).

To demonstrate the finding and discussions of the study, it analyzed the data and established it to several themes from the documents which are the poems by Joy Harjo. This thesis was organized and designed to analyze the text, characters, and themes of

these poems. Qualitative content analysis is the most appropriate design to conduct the research. Since this study analyzed the portrayal of Modern Native American women, while interpreting the female characters, themes of empowerment and survival can be the result of such an analysis.

Native Feminist Theory

The approach of Native feminist theory is accumulated for this thesis to analyze the female characters that are represented in Joy Harjo's from her three volumes of poetry *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979), *She Had Some Horses* (1983), and *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* (1994).

Joy Harjo believes that White feminism does not include the Natives' tribal lives and traditions, when asked in an interview what should it be called then, she declared: "The word "feminism" does not carry over to the tribal world, but a concept mirroring similar meanings would. Let's see, what would it be called then-empowerment-some kind of empowerment." (cited in Keller & Miller, 1994, p. 165).

Critical Native feminist theory was created as a reaction to the Euro-American patriarchal U.S. society. Fay Blaney discusses "patriarchy is so ingrained in our communities that it is now seen as a 'traditional trait,'" (cited in Barman, 2010, p. 3). Native feminists are more concerned with the process of decolonization. Decolonization is the process in which Native people attempt to leave the colonizers' traditions and rules and have their own traditions in which they used to call their own before the arrival of the settlers (Anderson, 2016). There is not an equivalent word to feminism in their languages, but they have always been strong and empowered commanders in their own community (Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013).

Joy Harjo labels some of the issues in her community "hatred... self-doubt, poverty, alcoholism, depression, and violence against women, among others" (Archuleta, 2006, p. 94). Harjo is one of those who believes the act of speaking up against the oppression that her people have to deal with (Archuleta, 2006). These concepts are certainly presented in her poetry. This study discussed how do these issues have affected modern Native American women. These poems; *The First Noni Daylight*, *Kansas City*, and *She Remembers the Future*, which follow the journey of Noni

Daylight, from doubting herself and her identity to self-empowerment. Mihesuah (2003) declares that Native women may not agree about what to call themselves because some refuse to be called feminists, but they all agree that the aim of the theory is decolonization and empowerment.

In this thesis theories by the Native American woman scholar and literary critic were adapted by Paula Gunn Allen in her book; *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering The Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1992).

Allen (1992) declares the mentioned theory explains the oppression of Native women's suffering through colonization, "such an analysis can provide strategies for ameliorating the effects of patriarchal colonialism, enabling many of the tribes to reclaim their ancient gynarchical, egalitarian, and sacred traditions." (p. 223). In other words, Allen suggests their mythology and folklore should be known whilst analyzing Native literary texts.

Allen concentrates on debunking the patriarchal society that was brought by the Europeans. Allen argues that women before colonization held matriarchal societies, and they were not the inferiors of society. Allen analyzes several mythical stories as she aims to explain how did Natives held women to high standards before the colonization almost as sacred human beings. The aim of her theory can be understood in the title "Recovering" Native femininity, habits, and culture previous to the White contact.

Allen attempts to restore the history of Native literature that was long suppressed by the Anglo-American patriarchal society. Czarnecki (2016) describes Allen's theory as vital to 20th and 21st-century gender studies. Allen suggests contemporary Native writers are reclaiming their past and they are in control as to what they put into their writings "the contemporary prose and poetry of American Indian writers, particularly of woman-centered writers, is a major part of Indian resistance to cultural and spiritual genocide" (1992, p. 42). In other words, Allen believes Native women should embrace their identity, and therefore, they will have their power back in society. Allen states that women's power were taken from them by the settlers because they believed as long as they had influential positions in the society the colonizers were not going to achieve their purpose of taking over their land.

Joy Harjo's poetry in which Noni Daylight is featured is an example of Native women being ashamed of their race and gender. The female characters of the poems do not know their history and their culture. Allen argues the reasons behind this issue: "rejection of one's culture—one's traditions, language, people—is the result of colonial oppression and is hardly to be applauded" (1992, p. 210).

Another theme that is recurrent in Allen's theory is "Survival", she believes that Native writers, women writers particularly write to survive the devastations of colonization. Allen claims their survival bond them together and make them connect emotionally "we even write songs and poems, make paintings and drawings that say "We walk in beauty. Let us continue."" (1992, p. 191).

According to this researcher's view, Allen's theory may impose a problematic matter, because after centuries of colonization her people have lost their traditional roles and culture, mostly because they were forced by the colonizers to not practice their rituals. So much of their history was destroyed and remains unknown to this day. The identity of Native Americans is a complex subject and the reason is there is not a crystal clear definition for it. In the interpretation of the researcher "reclaiming" does not necessarily mean bringing back history, however, it signifies Native women having an important voice in their tribal communities and in the American society in general. As well as refusing to be the inferiors of society.

CHAPTER IV

Noni Daylight's Journey to Self-empowerment

Introduction

Native women after colonization were degraded, sexualized, raped, and striped out of their positions of power in society. As a result of colonization the modern women faced many issues for example; sexual and physical abuse, mental health weakness, high suicide rates, substance and drug abuse, their culture was lost, as well as they faced problems finding appropriate jobs to provide for their families which led to poverty. Therefore, contemporary Native American poets like Joy Harjo try to strengthen and empower women.

This chapter depicts how does Joy Harjo try to empower women by writing about an urban Indigenous American woman. This character is named Noni Daylight it appears in many Harjo's poems in two of her collections of poetry *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979) and *She Had Some Horses* (1983). The poems that are analyzed in this chapter are; *The First Noni Daylight*, *Kansas City*, and *She Remembers the Future*.

“What Moon Drove Me to This?”

This collection of poetry was published by Joy Harjo in 1979. It paints a picture of their suffering as a result of colonization. This collection is divided into two sections; “Winter” and “Summer”. Since “winter” in literature is symbolized as death or sadness and “summer” symbolizes life and hopefulness. It means the poems start from sadness and goes into happiness. Rose-Vails (2003) declares that this symbolism suggests “the possibility for cultural survival” (p. 33).

“The First Noni Daylight”

Noni Daylight is first introduced in this poem which is a part of *What Moon Drove Me to This?* she embodies the aspects of contemporary urban Native American women: a loss of identity, and a lack of hopefulness towards the future. “The First” in the title means that it is the first poem in which the character appears. Or it could refer to how her personality initially is and how it changes, meaning she will become a new

person at the end of her journey. The first letter of Noni's name in *The First Noni Daylight* is spelled with small letters, which may imply that the name is not about one person but it is the portrayal of a group of female characters' stories. From this point of view, it can be assumed that "The First" could illustrate the first story of multiple women who share the same disastrous life experiences.

Noni is a character who is full of flaws. She has many problems that society causes her or she puts herself in these situations. Noni is portrayed as a woman who is imperfect and tries to do whatever it takes to pull herself out of her life problems. She is characterized as a woman who has low self-esteem and as someone who has no self-value unless they are loved by a man. This mirrors the patriarchal male-centered American society, and how men are the superior gender, and a high social status can be achieved by being married.

Noni does not have a sense of belonging and she is in desperate need of attention. This characterization can be linked to the consequences of colonialism; women were degraded because of their gender as well as their race. Noni represents the generation of Native women who struggle with their identity and how women became disempowered after the contact with the colonizers. "Daylight" according to Cambridge dictionary means "(the period when there is) natural light from the sun" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d) it also symbolizes a time of hopefulness and happiness. This shows an ironic point of view as Noni's name shows something completely opposite from her personality and life which appears miserable. Noni does not seem to think about what or how her actions might affect herself or others. As it is quoted from the poem below:

noni daylight tried it
Saturday night special, the little white pills
whiskey and a note
she said, i did it for you.
laid back and circled around her bedroom
until her lover found her. (Harjo, 1978, p. 19).

Initially, Noni is a drug user and an alcoholic. Alcoholism in Native American communities is one of their biggest issues. Drinking to them is one of the coping mechanisms in dealing with the problems that have been caused by colonialism.

Drinking alcohol is how men and women deal with poverty and trauma. Allen (1992) declares that 500 years of colonialism of course had its consequences on their people “many of us, just give up. Many are alcoholics, many are addicts. Many abandon the children, the old ones. Many commit suicide.” (1992, pp. 190-191).

The marginalization of contemporary urban Native women sometimes results in their alienation from their own identity, culture, and their community. Hence, they end up putting their survival in danger. This could explain why does Noni turn into alcoholism and suicide.

Eventually, it appears that Noni Daylight attempts suicide so her lover could stay with her. The speaker of the poem mentions “it worked” this could imply two interpretations: the white pills she takes kills her. Or her plan of suicide was for her lover to stay and he decided to not leave. However, the unknown narrator declares Noni’s partner agreed to stay by her side. Which implies she did survive her suicide attempt. Despite Noni surviving, she does not seem to understand the reason for her loneliness is fear. The finding of this thesis is supported by Cagle’s (2006) study in which they declare Noni’s thinking of suicide is “a way of freeing herself from bouts of depression and self-doubt that, although she does not yet realize it, have been caused by centuries of sustained attacks on and the continues suppression of traditional forms of Indian women’s empowerment” (p. 121). The speaker mentions Noni’s “recovery bed” which could also depict her healing through the wounds of colonization and trying to survive. For Noni to be free she needs to achieve having a voice and an identity that is not caused by the oppression of colonialism. Noni’s characterization indicates she does have a significant role or purpose in society. As mentioned earlier Native women prior to the colonizers arriving in North America had meaningful roles. After the colonization the patriarchal society associated women’s identity with male figures. This explains why does Noni go to such an extent to save her relationship with her romantic partner. The second and the last stanza of *The First Noni Daylight* is quoted below:

it worked.
daylight survived and her lover
was oh so guilty and promised never
to love anyone else again

and couldn't
 tied to noni daylight's
 recovery bed. (Harjo, 1978, p. 19).

“She Had Some Horses”

This volume of poetry was published by Joy Harjo in 1983. This collection contains four sections: “Survivors,” “What I Should Have Said,” “She Had Some Horses,” and “I Give You Back”. This volume follows the journey of survival of Native American women some of the characters are based on real people and activists some are fictional. It follows their journey through self-empowerment.

“Kansas City”

Kansas City is from the first section of the book which is called “Survivors”, which indicates that after every terrible thing this character has been through she is still surviving her life. In this poem, the reader learns that Noni Daylight is standing at a train station staring at trains pass by.

The narrator describes Noni’s status “Noni Daylight’s a dishrag wrung out over bones watching trains come and go.” (Harjo, 1983, p. 26), here Noni is being compared to a dirty cloth who is being moved by someone or something that is not known. This perhaps suggests that Noni is a symbolism for how low-class Native women work hard so they would be able to provide for their families, but they never go anywhere meaning they Never achieve something significant. Hence, this statement “watching trains come and go” symbolizes that Noni has watched people all her life moving from one part of life into another and succeeding, but she has stayed at one place her whole life failing over and over. Noni’s life is a representation of how is capitalism in America perpetuates in people’s lives in which their whole life is about working. Burk’s (2014) study further explains Noni as: “a person whose existence revolves around consumption” (p. 89). Burk’s (2014) investigation about *Kansas City* aligns with the findings of this current study.

The unknown speaker tries to explain that the train of life has missed for Noni. It seems that Noni like any young lady had dreams of moving to a big city. However, this

dream was crushed by her circumstances, assuming years have passed and Noni is older. The “trains” can also be interpreted that she did not only not move physically from a city to another but she did not grow emotionally either. Meaning up to this point she remained static throughout her entire life. Noni’s experience can be understood how Native women and women of colour, in general, have a harder time finding chances that will help them turning them successful and have better chances in their lives. The “trains” that the speaker mentions could as well imply Noni’s “train of thoughts” is wondering off thinking about her life choices and how she could have made different decisions that would have led her to a life unlike the one she currently has. This line is evidence for this interpretation “They are lights, motion of time that she could have caught” (Harjo, 1983, p. 26), it explains all the missed opportunities Noni has lost which might have helped her to become a better woman. Furthermore, it can be understood that Noni’s failings were caused by her lack of interest in changing her life as well, she stayed the same what appears to be all her life. It demonstrates how contemporary women are lost about their cultural identity which results into creating obstacles in their lives, Miheesuah (2003) speaks about this issue “Some of the greatest stressors that Indigenous women face have to do with their appearance and with not knowing their tribe’s history and culture and, therefore, their identities as Natives” (p. 81).

Furthermore, the speaker explains Noni’s thinking “like the spirit in her that flew” (Harjo, 1983, p. 26). It is clear that the word “spirit” is a description of Noni’s state of mind and how she is travelling through her mind, however, this interpretation becomes problematic because the word “spirit” has different meanings. According to the Cambridge dictionary “spirit” means “the characteristics of a person that are considered as being separate from the body, and that many religions believe continue to exist after the body dies” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d). This raises the question did Noni die from her suicide attempt? The narrator becomes ambiguous. Furthermore, if we look deeper into the poem, it will be fathomed Noni did not die she did survive, however, her death is metaphorical she killed her “old self” and bad habits and she appears to think about how she will make her life move towards something good and meaningful.

While the narrator describes Noni at the train station the unknown speaker uses the present tense, but, in the previous one, she was described by the past tense, which can be

provided as an evidence that she is becoming another woman. And pushing herself towards empowerment but she does not seem to comprehend it yet.

The speaker describes how devastating her life is in that she has children fathered by different men. Here it appears that the narrator is trying to depict how broken the modern Native family is, Noni does not seem to have anyone to lean on or someone who can support her. Montgomery (2009) describes Noni's character in *Kansas City* which is similar to the finding of this study, Noni's name "takes on metaphorical significance, representing someone who appears to be drifting aimlessly and has "no light" to guide her, as in the poem "Kansas City,"" (p. 173). Moreover, the speaker describes the men with whom Noni had relationships with but she seems to be lonely at this stage of her life. The anonymous speaker depicts this picture in the stanza that is quoted below:

Early morning over silver tracks
 a cool light, Noni Daylight's
 a dishrag wrung out over bones
 watching trains come and go.
 They are lights, motion
 of time that she could have
 caught
 and moved on
 but she chose to stay
 in Kansas City, raise the children
 she had by different men,
 all colors. Because she knew
 that each star rang with separate
 colored hue, as bands of horses
 and wild like the spirit in her
 that flew, at each train whistle.
 Small moments were cycles
 at each sound. (Harjo, 1983, p. 26).

In this poem, there is a reference to the genocide of the Natives and how Noni seems to be haunted by her people's history. The narrative voice is saying that the tracks of the train have been built on the bodies of Native children.

Colonization and its consequences on Indigenous people and how the fact their ancestors were tortured and murdered for centuries has affected the new generations of the 20th century is represented *Kansas City*. It appears that Noni Daylight is struggling with her identity and her ancestors' devastating past. This concept is represented by this stanza of *Kanas City* which is quoted below:

Other children elsewhere
being born, half-breed, blue eyes,
would grow up with the sound
of trains etched on the surface
of their bones, the tracks
cutting across Kansas City into hearts
that would break into pieces
in Cheyenne, San Francisco
always on the way back home (Harjo, 1983, p. 26).

The narrative voice continues to describe Noni's thinking process. The speaker describes all the men whom Noni had relationships with, and how each one of them had impacted her life experiences. It appears Noni does not have any regrets rather she seems to appreciate all the hard things she has learned throughout her life. Which could be explained that Noni is coming in peace with her people's history and she is trying to not hold grudges towards the legacy and impact of colonization.

if she had it to do over
she would still choose:
the light one who taught her
sound, but could not hear his
own voice, the blind one
who saw her bones wrapped
in buckskin and silver,
the one whose eyes tipped up

like swallows wings (whose ancestors laid this track, with hers),
 all of them,
 their stories in the flatland belly
 giving birth to children
 and to other stories
 and to Noni Daylight standing near the tracks
 waving
 at the last train to leave
 Kansas City. (Harjo, 1983, pp. 26-27).

In another poem in this collection called *Heartbeat* Noni tries to commit suicide by shooting herself with a pistol. It is clear that she believes that the only way to solve her problems is by killing herself. Ultimately, she decides not to go through with her plan. In Noni's poems, the concept of empowerment is represented by three stages: grief, acceptance, and survival. So far it is indicated that Noni Daylight has realized that she has survived her suicide attempt and she is trying to transform her life.

“She Remembers the Future”

This is the last poem, in the section of “survivors” in the collection of *She Had Some Horses*, in it the journey of the character of Noni Daylight comes to an end. This character appears to have been through a depressive life. She has dealt with substance and alcohol abuse. She is also a young mother who has struggled to raise her children. Noni has also turned into suicide twice thinking it would solve her problems. Noni's character is the portrayal of the survival of modern Native American women. The Native American poet Gloria Bird discusses the importance of survival, by saying that women have been through many struggles. Bird makes a point about surviving all these horrific times, “it seems, there is a continuity, a native tenacity to *persist through*” (Harjo & Bird, 1997, p. 30). The narrator of *She Remembers the Future* depicts the importance of this idea, Noni needs to realize she is a survivor for her to achieve a peaceful mentality.

In *She Remembers the Future* Noni Daylight Noni becomes a new woman with a new identity. The Indigenous culture was destroyed by the colonizers and the genocides,

they had to search for their own identity which was different and unique before the colonizers arrived to their land “reclaiming our Indigenous ways is the only way we will recover ourselves as individuals, families, and nations” (Anderson, 2016, p. 13). The reason why Native writers like Joy Harjo look at their history is to discover all the events that made them who they are in the present and to understand the abilities and traditions that were maintained by their ancestors. In today’s age when women take the position of power professionally, they take inspiration from their ancestors’ tribal spirituality.

Noni like many other modern Native American women her identity has been put into jeopardy by colonization. Noni appears to represent many others of her race who have lost their sense of identity and belonging. They went through many traumatic experiences for centuries their social beliefs and systems were lost after many years of the colonizers forcing the colonized people had to act and look like White people. After they were treated this way by the colonizers for a long period of time they turned their attention away from using their powers, this is called “diffusion” by anthropologists, it is a form in which people out of their need start adapting their own beliefs, ideas, and their life styles by perhaps their colonizers, and their old ways of life gets replaced. The new lifestyle that they adapted is perhaps not the ideal way or the best choice it is a process in which is called “self-abuse” and “hegemony”. This term is coined by Antonio Gramsci, “hegemony” is defined as “It occurs when oppressed groups take on dominant group thinking and ideas uncritically and as ‘common-sense’, even though those ideas may in fact be contributing to forming their own oppression.” (Valaskakis, Stout & Guimond, 2009, p. 15). This declaration by Valaskakis, Stout & Guimond (2009) describes Noni’s character, she appears to have self-hatred and self-doubt, because of the oppression she has dealt with the burden of her race and gender. Noni does not know her ancestors’ history and when she appreciates her identity then she starts the road to empowerment. Noni’s gender and race have led her into attempting suicide which explains her frustration with the patriarchal modern American society. The unknown speaker of this poem wants to emphasize to the readers that Noni had to reclaim her Indigenous identity and power so she can continue her life.

Noni Daylight in the first stanza of *She Remembers the Future* is having a conversation with herself which is represented as a dialogue. In which it is indicated she encourages herself and she is trying to convince herself she is a survivor. For her to continue having a life with no problems she needs to realize this. Noni understands that she has been living recklessly destructing herself. Noni is speaking to “other self” which can be given as an evidence of how Noni in these poems is represented as two personalities “The first Noni” and the present Noni. Therefore, the empowerment of Noni is portrayed as a revival because she did not only survive years of oppression and suppression as a Native woman but she is thriving and being empowered by her identity instead of being ashamed of it. Noni is speaking to herself encouraging herself to reconnect with her people. This is present in the stanza which is quoted below:

“We are closer than
blood,” Noni Daylight
tells her. “It isn’t
Oklahoma or the tribal
blood but something more
that we speak.”
(The otherself knows
and whispers
to herself.) (Harjo, 1983, p. 41).

Eventually, Noni appears to have decolonized her thoughts and she is taking a step by being in peace with her ancestors’ history. Native feminism focuses on the movement of decolonizing women’s roles in society and decolonizing their thoughts and beliefs. Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, argue this point “Native feminist theories suggest that actively decolonizing the very process of decolonization is just as important as achieving Indigenous communities’ political end-goals” (2013, p. 15).

Noni appears that she has grown and she is recognizing that after all, she is a survivor. Noni is an oppressed woman because of the patriarchal sexist society that was brought by the Europeans. Noni has been oppressed for so long that she has forgotten to have a voice. Noni after years of facing her ancestors’ devastating past, has realized she has survived everything against all odds. This becomes a step towards empowerment,

Noni appears to be speaking with herself that she is alive. The fact that she is speaking with herself is an indication that she was the one who pushed herself to empowerment and there was no one there for her to guide her through the correct choices and paths. Noni has survived her problematic romantic relationships, has let go of her bad behaviors, and she has created a new identity in which she no longer drinks or uses drugs. Rose-Vails (2003) suggests Noni Daylight has a satisfactory closure to her story, moreover, the researcher further explains this argument “Harjo’s use of Noni Daylight places her within a feminist tradition of utilizing a patriarchal based novel form, the bildungsroman, to voice the journey of self-exploration a woman takes toward achieving identity and an authentic voice” (pp. 35-36). Noni’s image of survival is portrayed in the last stanza of *She Remembers the Future* which is quoted below:

She asks,
 “Should I dream you afraid
 so that you are forced to save
 yourself?
 Or should you ride colored horses
 into the cutting edge of the sky
 to know
 that we’re alive
 we are alive.” (Harjo, 1983, pp. 41- 42).

The root of the problems of an urban Native woman is fear. This is what is preventing Noni Daylight from becoming a strong woman. Most of them people end up being alcoholics because that is how they try to forget the pain of colonization. The last section of *She Had Some Horses* is called “I Give You Back” it contains only one poem with the same title. The unknown speaker declares that the narrator is disregarding “fear”, and that fear has been the source of all their problems. This poem does not have an identified speaker but one can understand that is narrated by the survivors of the first section. The collection of *She Had Some Horses*, starts with “survivors” and ends with “I Give You Back”. This symbolizes the journey of Native women survivors organizing their lives achieving inner peace and forgetting fear so they could have a voice in the American community, which is an empowering concept.

Moreover, when Noni Daylight decided to let go of her fear, she became a strong empowered woman. It appears the key to be empowered is to realize that you are a survivor. Allen (1992) argues that after everything Natives especially women went through they are still surviving,

We survive war and conquest; we survive colonization, acculturation, assimilation; we survive beating, rape, starvation, mutilation, sterilization, abandonment, neglect, death of our children, our loved ones, destruction of our land, our homes, our past, and our future. We survive, and we do more than just survive. We bond, we care, we fight, we teach, we nurse, we bear, we feed, we earn, we laugh, we love, we hang in there, no matter what. (p. 190).

The traditional roles that Indigenous women of America used to have disappeared after their contacts with Europeans, gradually their society became male-centered. Their communities shifted into becoming a patriarchal society. The settlers constructed very well-thought-out plans to remove women from their positions of power, they were belittled and were sexualized by White men, and created stereotypical roles for them. For many years they were called offensive names like “savage sqwua”, and were portrayed as “ugly” and “dirty” in both life and literature.

The effects of colonialism are great and they still exist, the sexualization of women contributed to the sexual abuse that they still face. The oppression of women led them to be victimized for centuries, and Native feminism is a way of protesting against the cruelty of colonialism. Harjo’s poetry serves as a voice of resistance against social injustice that her people especially women face. Harjo shows the real devastations of women’s lives but she also shows their journey to survival and strength. This journey is portrayed by the character of Noni Daylight.

This chapter focused on how does Joy Harjo empower women by presenting an urban Native American woman character. Selected poems were analyzed in which the character of Noni Daylight appeared. Noni has issues like alcohol and substance abuse, she attempts suicide, and she is struggling through the history of her ancestors with colonization. Eventually, this character lets go of her bad habits creates a new identity.

Noni recognizes that she is a survivor. And she becomes empowered in the process. Noni Daylight's journey to empowerment is represented by a metaphorical death. The findings of this chapter are supported by Rose-Vails (2003) in which the researcher describes the oppression and sexism that Noni has faced in her life as a result of the patriarchal American society. Furthermore, the researcher describes Noni Daylight's journey to cultural survival as an example of modern Native American women. Also in Montgomery's study (2009) describes Noni Daylight as someone who does not have anything or anyone to guide her, thus, her life feels empty to her. However, Montgomery interprets her journey to someone who had no voice and in the end, she will have a vital voice as a Native American woman. Cagle's (2006) study examines Noni's suicide attempts as a solution for her to end the oppression she has been under and feeling like an inferior because of her race and being a woman, which was the result of colonialization. Bloom (2011) depicts Noni as someone who characterizes a modern Native American woman who attempts to find her path home.

CHAPTER V

Cultural Survival from Trauma

Introduction

In this chapter, empowerment through Native female figures from their mythology is discussed. Joy Harjo's poems; *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky* and *Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace* are analyzed according to Native Feminist theory. They are a part of Joy Harjo's *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky* collection of poetry which was published in 1994.

"The Woman Who Fell from the Sky"

This volume of poetry is divided into two parts: the first one called "Tribal Memory" and the second part is called "The World Ends Here". Most of the poems in this collection are told through narration and the identity of the narrator and gender are not known. They do not follow the traditional western rhymes and meters. The collection of *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky* surrounds Native female mythical figures. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "myth" as "a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon" (Merriam-Webster, n.d). Thus, from this definition it can be understood that this collection of poetry will give an insight into Natives' folklore, traditions, tribal stories, and mythical characters.

It is vital to discuss the meaning behind the title; it was inspired by one of the tribes' creation myths of the Iroquois culture of eastern North America. The legend is about a woman who is referred to as "Sky Woman". She has fallen off the heavens and was placed on a turtle's back, while the turtle was on the sea. When she fell on the turtle's back mud grew under them, and become a large piece of land which then was called "Turtle Island" which is currently known as North America (Shenandoah & George, 1998). The hole in which the Sky Woman falls from the heavens to earth symbolizes "the process of creation, which is also birth from the upper world into the world below our world" (Leeming, 2010, p. 351). When the "Sky Woman" bears children supposedly this is how humanity was created.

“Sky woman” is also a fertility figure, she “supervises the descent into the maternal waters to find potentially germinating soil, and it is she who supervises the growth of the world and the planting of food products” (Leeming, 2010, p. 352).

Joy Harjo retells this creation story connecting this mythical figure into telling a story of a boy and girl in the twentieth century in *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*. It is told through an unknown speaker. The ordinary Native American woman is symbolized as “Sky Woman” not just because of her unspeakable beauty but the way her character is. She is an ordinary woman but at the same time, she is portrayed as a strong person.

Joy Harjo recites historical events in her poetry, by developing characters who achieve self-empowerment through tribal myths and rituals. This idea is present in this poem in which the Vietnam war, boarding schools, and the creation myth of “Sky woman” is portrayed. Which empowers the Native American women reader. The first stanza is quoted below:

Once a woman fell from the sky. The woman who fell from the sky was
neither a murderer nor a saint. She was rather ordinary, though beautiful
in her walk, like one who has experienced freedom from earth's gravity.
When I see her I think of an antelope grazing the alpine meadows in
mountains whose names are as ancient as the sound that created the first
world. (Harjo, 1994, p. 5).

The second character of the poem is a boy, his name is “Saint Coincidence” he appears to have been a soldier during the Vietnam war. He seems to have experienced traumatic events from killing soldiers at the war. Saint Coincidence has also attended boarding school. The events are not in chronological order; his continuousness goes from one thought to another. The description of this character is quoted below from the poem:

Saint Coincidence, who was not a saint, perhaps a murderer if you count
the people he shot without knowing during the stint that took his mind in
Vietnam or Cambodia—remembered the girl he yearned to love when
they were kids at Indian boarding school. (Harjo, 1994, p. 5).

Saint Coincidence has named himself this name, his name used to be Johnny. Because when he was at the boarding school the teachers could not pronounce his Native name it is explained in this line: “Johnny was named Johnny by the priests because his Indian name was foreign to their European tongues.” (Harjo, 1994, p. 6).

The speaker of the poem never mentions what used to be Saint Coincidence’s Native name. Which suggests that he forgot his name just as he forgot his culture and identity. Saint Coincidence was not allowed to have his name even though it is one of the basic rights of any human being. According Rose-Vails naming ceremonies in their communities is a sacred ritual “The burden of history stays with Johnny and controls his life’s present and future possibilities because he has not successfully confronted and resolved the trauma stemming from his boarding school experience.” (2003, p. 132).

Here the speaker shows the cruelty that children had to endure in boarding schools. For six decades Indigenous children were forced to leave their homes and families to attend these schools. In which they were taught to act according to what was acceptable by White standards. These children were sexually abused and beaten for disobeying the teachers. They were forced to wear White people’s clothes and have hairstyles like the Whites. This became a policy by Richard Pratt in Pennsylvania. Pratt has stated that he created this policy to: “kill the Indian and save the man.” (cited in Smith, 2015, p. 36). These policies continue to affect them even today because their cultures and their identity were stolen from them. Through the character of Saint Coincidence, the speaker attempts to emphasize the emotional and physical abuse those children have suffered and how it has caused them to be burdened with these devastating events. It can also be noticed that Saint Coincidence has forgotten his first language which is an indication of how the force of colonization has negatively affected modern Native Americans, which can be seen from this line: “His own language had become a baby language to him” (Harjo, 1994, p. 6). The root of Saint Coincidence’s issues can be connected to those events, this finding aligns with Cagle’s (2006) study “Johnny’s youth was marked not only by familial disruption but also by the loss of his mother tongue.” (p. 132).

Saint Coincidence can be taken as an example of how modern Natives are ashamed of their ethnicity, language, and culture. The speaker demonstrates how Saint

Coincidence has lost faith in his Native spirituality, he prays assuming to Christian God but he believes he needs to speak fluent English so his prayers to be answered. This is significant in how the colonizers forced them to believe that their religion and language were superior to Natives' beliefs. These images are portrayed in the stanza that is quoted below:

Johnny was named Johnny by the priests because his Indian name was foreign to their European tongues. He named himself Saint Coincidence many years later after he lost himself in drink in a city he'd been sent to to learn a trade. Maybe you needed English to know how to pray in the city. He could speak a fractured English. His own language had become a baby language to him, made of the comforting voice of his grandmother as she taught him to be a human. (Harjo, 1994, p. 6).

The policy of boarding school enforcement by the United States government is evidence that the Indigenous population continued to suffer even after the declaration of independence of America. Andrea Smith (2015) discusses the consequences of boarding schools: physical, sexual, and emotional violence in Native communities; unemployment and underemployment in their communities; increased suicide rates; increased substance abuse; loss of language and loss of religious and cultural traditions; increased depression and post-traumatic stress disorder; and increased child abuse (p. 43).

The speaker of *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* attempts to describe the consequences of these schools on the mentality of the colonized children, and how it affects them as an adult as well. Moreover, the reader learns from this poem that Saint Coincidence used to be at the boarding schools with his two brothers tried to run away more than once but they never succeeded. The speaker declares that Saint Coincidence's two brothers died while they were trying to elope. And Coincidence was forced to return to the school. This is represented in the stanza which is quoted below:

Johnny ran away from boarding school the first winter with his two brothers, who'd runaway before. His brothers wrapped Johnny Boy, as they called him, with their bodies to keep him warm. They froze and became part of the stars. (Harjo, 1994, p. 8).

The narrator of *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* then tells the story of the girl who is portrayed as “Sky Woman” and her name is “Lila”. This girl has been imposed to attend the same boarding school just as Saint Coincidence. The narrative voice depicts the pain that she had to tolerate by being separated from her mother. The fragmented life of modern Native families is present in this poem. Lila does not have anyone who can support her just like Saint Coincidence. As it is depicted by the stanza below:

Lila never forgot about Jonny, who left school to join the army, and a few years later as she walked home from her job at Dairy Queen she made a turn in the road. (Harjo, 1994, p. 8).

Even though Lila has suffered through boarding school but the narrator explains that she never lost faith and strength in herself or her tribal culture. Lila believes that her culture’s myth can be a saving grace for her people. Here the concept of decolonization can be understood, the colonizers forced the colonized people to forget their culture and their ancestors’ history. Therefore, the speaker declares that believing in Natives culture and honoring their myth and history will bring peace, strength, and empowerment for them. The narrator mentions that Lila since her childhood has heard the myths with curiosity and her belief in them eventually turns her into the “Sky Woman”, which can be understood from this line “It was what led her into the story told before she’d grown to hear,” (Harjo, 1994, p. 8).

The events of the poem are mixed through real events and mythical times. The character of Lila is represented as a character who has experienced the mythical and real world. Rose-Valise’s (2003) dissertation brings a similar argument as they describe Lila’s acceptance and awareness about her culture supports some type of safety to her and in return, Saint Coincidence feels the same.

Lila becomes a savior for Saint Coincidence. It appears that Lila saves Saint Coincidence out of his misery. Usually in western traditional literature, the man is portrayed as a prince who saves the girl. Contradictory to this point gender roles appear to have been reversed, the woman in this situation saves the man. Lila feels empowered because of her identity, as Patrice Hollrah (2004) declares, “Numerous Indian women assert that they are not ‘unfulfilled.’ They refuse to be victims of gender oppression by taking charge of their lives, reveling in their roles and status as women who hold their

tribes together” (p. 157). Valenzuela-Mendoza (2014) supports this point of view by saying; “Johnny, a man who has not been able to save himself from pain and addiction is miraculously there at the moment of Lila’s earthly impact. Catching her is destiny for them both” (p. 38).

Lila does not let the struggles of life make her pessimistic. *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* is different from the other selected poems that are analyzed in this study. Because the speakers of the other poems show the struggles of modern Indigenous American women that were caused by colonization, and how did they turn into alcohol or suicide to ease their pain. However, Lila does not allow the colonizers to succeed with their plan and destroy her people’s culture. Lila has been a powerful woman all along. Along the way, she inspires Saint Coincidence and empowers the woman reader. The reason why Native American writers specifically Joy Harjo use female mythological figures in their poetry is because it empowers the listeners.

The narrator of *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* emphasizes how boarding school was a traumatic experience for Lila and how she used to pray and those prayers and her spirituality saved her. Lila believed in the legend of “Sky Woman”, which can be understood from this line; “This story was Lila’s refuge those nights she’d prayed on her knees with the other children in the school dorms. It was too painful to miss her mother.” (Harjo, 1994, p. 9). Lila appears that she used to be the “Sky Woman” somehow she does not realize it until she returns to the upper world. The speaker of the poem declares:

While Lila lived in the sky she gave birth to three children and they made her happy. Though she had lost conscious memory of the place before, a song climbed up her legs from far away, to the rooms of her heart. (Harjo, 1994, p. 9).

This could indicate that she is imagining herself as the “Sky Woman” meaning because of the beliefs of her ancestral creation stories, that those beliefs helped her through her misery. It is something that gives her strength and force. Lila’s strength is rooted in her being a Native female in the contemporary world of America. Her empowerment mirrors how her people used to celebrate femininity and how important the roles of women were in society. Lila’s imagination about “Sky Woman” signifies

how rich her culture was prior to colonization. The speaker asserts Lila is not an extraordinary character; she has been affected by the consequences of colonialism like any other Native American person. Rather, she is a normal person who does not have supernatural talents so she could fly and fall to the sky. From this perspective, it can be interpreted as the narrator does not retell the story of the mythic legend of “Sky Woman”, she signifies a woman who is surviving her difficulties because of her culture. This finding is supported by Hussain’s (2000) paper, they make the argument that Lila’s flight to the sky is symbolism for Indigenous Americans refusing to be controlled by how White people want them to act, speak, and look. Therefore, the flight is a statement for change towards a life in which they behave and live not by the standards that is acceptable by people from other races.

The fact that the characters of these poems are ordinary people shows that these two characters could be any Indigenous American person. The narrator tries to shed light on Natives’ lives after colonialism and the violence that existed in boarding schools. The female character of *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* is empowering herself through her ancestors’ myths and ideology. The findings of this thesis represents that the speaker of *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* tries to portray a comparison between women prior to and after colonization. Even though the “Sky Woman” is a myth she is represented as a respected woman who is strong and powerful. And the modern generation is represented through the character of “Lila” she seems to be broken by the consequences of colonization but she is strong because of her Native identity and culture.

“Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace”

This is another poem from *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* poetry book. This poem is also from the “tribal memory” section. It starts with an anonymous speaker, talking about a heavenly “panther” panthers appear in more than one Native American mythology. In *Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace* the “panther” seems to represent some sort of a God-like creature looking over humans.

The pronoun “she” is used to describe the “panther”, unlike the Christian Europeans who have forced the idea of God being male. Many Natives idealize the idea

of the creator of the world being female. Because God to Christians is male society has naturally thought of men being superior because they were the perfect representation of God in this world.

It appears that “panther” is trying to take care of those who are looking for “grace”. The ones who cannot sleep she says, “Insomnia” according to Cambridge Dictionary is a condition in which someone is not able to fall asleep usually caused by stress (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). The first stanza of the poem is quoted below:

At dawn the panther of the heavens peers over the edge of the world. She
hears the stars gossip with the sun, sees the moon washing her lean
darkness with water electrified by prayers. All over the world there are
those who can't sleep, those who never awaken. (Harjo, 1994, p. 33).

The speaker appears to be a grandmother telling a story about her family. The poem tries to have a connection between three generations of women. The grandmother and the “panther” appear to be the same character. The grandmother is represented as a mythical figure. The narrator attempts to represent the importance of elderly women in their communities. The Native woman in this poem leans on her mother for guidance, as well as believing in the mythic female creator. Rose-Vails (2003) points out “The act of recovering mythic memory and reshaping tribal myths empowers readers because it combats the loss of core identity that results from the destruction of a culture’s mythical underpinnings” (p. 42). The mention of “milk” in the next stanza signifies the nourishment of motherhood. Overall, it symbolizes femininity and the important roles of women in society. Here the speaker describes her daughter and granddaughter as shown from the quotation below:

My granddaughter sleeps on the breast of her mother with milk on her
mouth. A fly contemplates the sweetness of lactose. (Harjo, 1994, p. 33).

The grandmother describes her daughter as a “prophet”. Cambridge dictionary defines “prophet” as “a person who speaks for God or a god” (Cambridge dictionary, n.d), furthermore, this proves that the panther is portrayed as “god” who is acting as a guide for the female character. The narrative voice is depicting the struggles of modern Native American women and how they barely find a suitable job to provide for their families. As a result, their life becomes a mess. Women of colour especially Indigenous

women are less likely to be employed in the USA. This caused poverty and mental health crises among their communities. A study conducted by Jeffrey D. Burnette (2017) explains that unemployment rates of Native women and men comparing to White people are significantly lower. The data shows that the effects of colonization among Native American women still have not disappeared, and they still deal with the consequences. The struggles of the young mother character of the poem are portrayed from the quotation below:

Her mother has business in the house of chaos. She is a prophet disguised as a young mother who is looking for a job. She appears at the door of my dreams and we put the house back together. (Harjo, 1994, p. 33).

As a result of women not being able to be employed, it leads to more problems, for instance, poverty, drug use, alcoholism, domestic violence, and suicide (Barman, 2010). In *Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace* appears that the grandmother is no longer alive and looking after her daughter and granddaughter from the heavens. According to the activist Kim Anderson, Elder women before the colonization were significantly respected among Native tribes, and children used to receive education at the hands of elder women (Barman, 2010). The grandmother is observing the villages and says that people have been staying up late and getting drunk. The grandmother is signifying older generations before the colonization, the speaker wants to emphasize how has the roles of females changed before and after colonization. The older generations of women are portrayed as female gods, who is guiding the new generations through spirituality. While, modern Native women are dealing with the consequences of poverty, and leaning on suicide for a solution. Which is apparent from the stanza that is quoted below:

Some have been drinking and intimate with strangers. Others are escapees from the night shift, sip lukewarm coffee, shift gears to the other side of darkness. (Harjo, 1994, p. 33).

Many of the issues that the Natives deal with are caused by colonization, which leads people to commit suicide, according to Lizardi & Gearing “Suicide is the sixth leading cause of death among Native Americans” (2010, p. 379). It can be understood

that the ramifications of colonization are still visible to modern Native American women.

The speaker indicates that there is a woman who wants to end her life by running a red traffic light. It seems this unknown woman is trying to decide between life and death, and eventually does not go through with her plan. Perhaps she has thought that committing suicide is her only way out of her misery, which is presented from the quotation below:

One woman stops at a red light, turns over a worn tape to the last chorus of a whispery blues. She has decided to live another day. (Harjo, 1994, p. 33).

This female character after she has decided to not commit suicide returns back home to her family. It appears that she has more than one child, the struggles of this woman are not indicated by the speaker. However, it appears that the story of this anonymous woman is intertwined with the speaker's daughter. It seems that both female characters are going through the same struggles in life. They are both mothers and having a difficult time raising their children. The "Panther" can be understood that it symbolizes security and safety for the modern Native females in the poem, Lake-Thom (1997) describes panthers in their myths as: "good hunters and protectors. Their power and medicine can be used for good luck and skill in hunting, or for protection against other powers and people." (p. 81). Furthermore; this can be provided as an evidence that the panther saves the female character from committing suicide because they are Natives' protectors. This interpretation perhaps also suggests that their myths and culture provides as a saving grace for understanding their pasts can save their future as well, and not deal with loss of identity.

The speaker mentions the female character has been driving late and her children are sleeping when she comes home to them. The speaker mentions how their terrible lives are about to be changed for the better. "Nightmare" here symbolizes darkness and "sun" symbolizes hope. This woman when she decided to go back home has decided to make the life of her family better not just her own. This character has taken her first step towards empowerment. This scene is shown from the poem which is quoted below:

She guns the light to home where her children are asleep and may never know she ever left. That their fate took a turn in the land of nightmares toward the sun may be untouchable knowledge.

It is a sweet sound. (Harjo, 1994, p. 34).

The concept of empowerment is portrayed when the female characters believe in the significance of myths and being guided by their past culture. The poem starts with hopelessness and it changes to hope. Paula Gunn Allen states that her people have tolerated so much and have survived everything that has happened throughout their history,

it is of utmost importance to our continuing recovery that we recognize our astonishing survival against all odds; that we congratulate ourselves and are congratulated by our fellow Americans for our amazing ability to endure, recover, restore our ancient values and life ways, and then blossom. Indeed, there are many among us who realize the necessity of celebration of native life (Allen, 1992, p. xi).

“Grace” according to the Cambridge Dictionary means a blessing of human beings by God specifically in the religion of Christianity (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). There is no mention of Christianity in the poem. This means that the female character is trying to forget her fears and wants to achieve inner peace. Harjo has used the concept of “grace” in other poems as well, Eliza Rodriguez Gibson argues this matter; “In Harjo’s work grace does not concern reconciliation with a Judeo-Christian God but rather the ability to continue living in the face of historical and cultural genocide and, more important to flourish creativity and culturally” (2002, p. 111). This is portrayed in the final stanza which is quoted below:

The panther relative yawns and puts her head between her paws. She dreams of the house of panthers and the seven steps to grace. (Harjo, 1994, p. 34).

At the end, the narrator shows that the “panther” seems to be relieved that she has led these two women of the poem to salvation. The speaker is portraying the issues that modern Native American women face. The concept of them restoring their powerful gender roles before the colonization is a step towards decolonization. In conclusion, the

narrator shows all the ways that they react to oppression. As Gretchen Bataille points out “that there are three responses to oppression: assimilation, internalized violence, and empowerment” (cited in Rose-Vails, 2003, p. 48). The whole theme of this poem was to compare how female Native roles has changed throughout the few hundred years, the poem compares old generations with modern generations.

In this chapter, the poems of Joy Harjo were analyzed and it focused on the issues of colonialism in modern American society. It also spotlighted how does the poet Joy Harjo portray Indigenous American women’s empowerment. And that is in her poetry describes unknown female characters at their lowest point of life and how these women overcome these issues, and that is what empowerment is about in Harjo’s writings.

It also discussed why does Joy Harjo use female characters from mythology in her poems. The reason according to Paula Gunn Allen (1992) that contemporary women poets like Harjo use these figures in their poetry is because, these female figures are holy, and these women were strong and powerful. As Mihesuah (2003) points out that in most Native American mythology there are female creators of the world. Mihesuah explains that these female characters are represented in contemporary Native American literature as a process to empower modern women as well as to decolonize their culture. Rose-Vails (2003) represents that the concept of using female mythological figures in Harjo’s poetry is a form to empower women. Moreover, Montgomery (2009) argues *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* is about presenting social issues Indigenous American women encounter. Valenzuela-Mendoza’s (2014) study claims Harjo’s representation of Lila in *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* is showing the importance of powerful Native American women.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of this study are presented. As well as concluding the results of the thesis. Followed by suggestions for further studies.

Conclusion

This research analyzed selected poems by Joy Harjo from three different collections of poetry; *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979), *She Had Some Horses* (1983), and *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* (1994). Native people used to have a balanced controlled life all over North America, until the Europeans arrived at their land. This study specifically focused on Native American women. They endured five hundred years of colonization which have caused disastrous consequences; genocide, wars, epidemics, forced marginations, etc.

As a result of colonization women were the ones who became the most affected. Their gender roles changed, prior to colonization women were respected by their communities they held powerful positions, and they had significant roles in their societies. The Europeans caused the Indigenous people's culture to change. Their societies changed to a patriarchal society. This thesis focused on these poems that were published during the 1970s through 1990s. It spotlighted the roles and the representations of modern Native American women.

During the American Civil rights movement in the 1960s Native scholars and activists created movements to change the unfairness that they had to deal with. Their literature bloomed during this period. The Indigenous American authors attempted to use their voice to educate their people to be proud of their ethnicity and to honor their culture and their ancestors. The authors also used their voices to try to tell White people about their ways of life and their culture. This movement in literature is called the 'Native American Renaissance'. Their goal has always been to decolonize the thoughts of their people through poetry. They have long been suppressed and women have been

oppressed because of their gender as well. Native American poetry tries to reclaim their traditions and gender roles prior to colonization.

Joy Harjo's poetry shows the real consequences of colonization and follows the journey of Native women to self-empowerment. Harjo shows the reality of her people living in modern American culture. Her poetry portrays traditional gender roles of women in society, she attempts to restore their culture through female characters.

Native scholars have created 'Native Feminist theory' to analyze texts by Native authors. Theories by the literary critic Paula Gunn Allen were used to analyze the poems. In Harjo's poetry the characters do not hold grudges or anger toward the colonizers. The grief of the characters is represented, however, at the end of their journey they achieve peace.

This study tried to answer these questions:

1. How are modern female Native American characters portrayed in Joy Harjo's selected poetry?
2. How is the concept of "decolonization" represented in in Joy Harjo's selected poetry?

In chapter four, this thesis focused on the character of Noni Daylight, the poems in which she appears were analyzed; *The First Noni Daylight*, *Kansas City*, and *She Remembers the Future*. The findings of this study concerning the first research questions show that Noni is portrayed as a flawed character, who deals with postcolonial oppression, she was an alcoholic, and a substance abuser, these are the type of issues that modern Native women face. The findings of this research show the character of Noni achieves empowerment through believing in her ancestors' culture. Hence, Noni realizes she is a survivor of colonization and achieves empowerment. The final research question can be explained as: the idea of "decolonization" is portrayed when Noni frees herself from the degrading thoughts that have been engraved in the minds of Native women by the colonizers. Eventually, Noni decides to embrace her ancestors' culture and identity. The theme of survival is portrayed when Noni survives two suicide attempts as well as realizing she is among the ones who has survived the colonization, hence she becomes empowered.

In chapter five, this study analyzed these poems; *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* and *Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace*. This thesis concludes that these poems represent the empowerment of Native women by showing Native female mythological figures. Most tribes of Natives believe in the idea of female creators of the world, it is sacred for them. Powerful female mythological figures appear in the lives of ordinary Native women and empower them. The speakers of the mentioned poems attempt to make a comparison between female gender roles prior to and after colonization, by mixing mythical and modern life stories. The speaker tries to show the trauma that Native collectively faced and how to overcome them. The findings of this study show that the poems show by embracing their Native identities and not to refuse their traditions. The answer to the first research question for *The Woman Who Fell from The Sky* shows that Lila the female character has been marginalized as a Native and as a woman. However, contradictory to Noni's representation she is not broken rather those experiences has made her powerful because she never loses faith in her Native identity and she empowers the other character as well. And in *Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace* the issues of unemployment and poverty are brought to the reader's attention. The unknown narrator shows how the female character of the poem becomes empowered because of her older women generations, and myths.

In these poems, the concept of "decolonization" is represented when the female characters decide to believe in powerful female mythological characters which answers the second research question. This indicates that they are decolonizing their minds by embracing their history and culture before the arrival of colonizers.

Therefore, the poetry of Native American women serves as a voice of encouragement and survival of the Native women reader. This study introduced a new perspective while analyzing the selected poems, which previous studies have focused on female characters in Harjo's poetry, there is a gap in which they have focused on modern Native American women in the Noni Daylight poems. This study was unique in the scene that it is the only one that analyzed *Insomnia and the Seven Steps to Grace*, which serves as an example of how Harjo portrays Native female mythological figures to empower Native American women.

Further studies on the theme of “empowerment” can be conducted about Joy Harjo’s poetry in the collection of *A Map to the Next World: Poems and Tales* (2000). This will represent a bigger picture of this theme.

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