IMAGINING A POETICS OF LOSS

Building Communities in the Works of Joy Harjo and Saadi Youssef

Bayan Al-Dahiyat and Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

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Abstract: This article aims at showing how the poetry of Joy Harjo and Saadi Youssef becomes the imagined geography of the Muscogee (Creek) nation and Iraq respectively. Despite the different contexts of struggle, both poets depict a national community through imagining a decolonized geographical space where intellectuals and poetry act as witnesses to defy the colonial erasure of memory. This article will attempt to highlight certain intellectual and literary texts that take active part in imagining and presenting an anti-colonial counter discourse that would lead to a new understanding of national identity and nation. It will rely on Bill Ashcroft`s theory of Postcolonial Utopianism and building imagined homelands as well as Benedict Anderson`s concept of imagined communities. Representative poems from the two poets, Joy Harjo and Saadi Youssef, will be examined in order to shed light on the theoretical and imaginative creation of nations.

Keywords: imagined geography, Iraq, Muscogee nation, Joy Harjo, Saadi Youssef, Postcolonial Utopianism, erasure of memory

Erasure of all forms—historical, cultural, political, and geographical—is the weapon by which the oppressive occupier appropriates a land and its people for destruction, amnesia, loss of identity, distorted history, paused present, and a lost future. The existential crises in oppressed cultures have motivated poets to use their poetic voice as a counter imagination that reconstructs history and land. Poets, as Joy Harjo and Saadi Youssef, have dedicated their voices to narrate histories that defy negation. They have woven the threads of past and present using criticism and imagination. Their communities are imagined defiantly beyond any attempt of hostile erasure; these communities are integral parts of the quilts of the Muscogee nation and Iraqi-ness.

Bayan Al-Dahiyat is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of English at the University of Jordan

Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh is a Professor of English at the University of Jordan

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The present study will examine the concept of poetry as a space of imagination where homelands are created. It will comparatively read some representative poems by the Muscogee poet Joy Harjo, and the Iraqi Saadi Youssef. The study aims at examining the poems in the context of postcolonial imagined communities, as proposed by the theorist Benedict Anderson. It also extends the concept of building homes and communities to instilling and imagining a future hope. The study explores the concept and methods of rearranging the past with its social and political relations to produce homelands.This imaginative rearranging is seen by Bill Ashcroft as the significant utopian function of literature. It also examines the relationship between memory and future, imagining a future—liberated land cannot exist without the excavated memory of the past.

The two crises of the Muscogee nation and Iraq are a practical incarnation of the first imagined idea of the possibility of colonizing a land. As Edward Said emphasizes in his *Orientalism*, occupation started with *the idea*; the idea of an imaginative geography is what made imperialism possible poetically, imaginatively, and then applied physically (1977: 55). The occupier uses this idea or the poetic process that gives the physical land its importance imaginatively, as well as literally, to deconstruct the land, erase its history, dispossess its people, and form the idea of the empty land that needs the imperialist arrival to bloom. However, this arrival has turned that land into dystopia. The occupier, Said adds, has been using knowledge to gain power and study the victim for surveillance, and "to have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it" (1977: 32).

In "Visions of the Not-Yet: Literature and Postcolonial Utopia," Bill Ashcroft thinks that utopianism as a function of literature could be mistaken for the naïve fully optimistic thought that everything will turn out to be well (2015: 1). However, it is more of a function of generating hope—a desire of imagining a new home, and dialectically, it contains and generates its opposite from within. For no matter how miserable life could be, the hope for a better future is the key to survival. Literature imagines a new world, and this production, this "aesthetic representation produces an object more achieved, more thoroughly formed, more essential than the immediate-sensory or immediate-history occurrences of this object" (Ashcroft, 2015: 2). The idea of nowhere, Ashcroft proposes, is essential to the process of changing, rethinking, and creating that will reach even ideologies, for in this nowhere even ideologies are critiqued (2015: 2).

The assumption that indigenous cultures are static and never changing underestimates these cultures` ability to adapt and evolve; their ability to survive. This transformative and "transcultural effect . . . forces us to reassess the stereotyped view of colonized people`s victimage and lack of agency" (Ashcroft, 2015: 2). In order to achieve a real postcolonial self-realization and reconquering one`s identity, a pre-colonial self-discovery is needed. Going back to a pre-colonial culture

is important in the process of addressing the impact of colonialism. Cultures have employed subtle ways to resist colonialism, in a way that changed both the colonizer and the colonized. Imagination is an integral part in the process of forming the cultural identity.

Joy Harjo has situated her poems in images of frustration of contemporary Muscogee people`s life. Her response, as J. Scott Bryson argues, was attempting to "go back to what she calls the mythic world [where she] demonstrates a keen sense of place-and space-consciousness" (Bryson, 2005: 46). For Harjo, the modern world is far from being a home, but rather a placeless void, and this "placement—or displacement conjuring historical as well as sociogeographical associations—is the contemporary American city" (Bryson, 2005: 47-48). Harjo claims that much of the present alienation is "a verbal, cultural construct resulting from Anglo society and language" (Bryson, 2005: 51). Here comes the essential role of the counter imagination. Harjo has stated more than once that this verbally induced separation is actually an illusion. In an exchange with Bill Moyers, she asserts that an artist is held responsible to find connections during these difficult times when the ghost of separation threatens peoples` existence (Moyers and Harjo, 1996: 40).

"The Flood" is a mythological prose poem that alludes to "the watermonster." This Muscogee tribal myth of the snake that lived at the bottom of the lake is no longer remembered in the age of inventions. Harjo uses this myth as the basis on which imagination builds a hopeful future. Although the myth of the watermonster is forgotten, it still subconsciously exists in the collective memory of people. Mystery and reality here are elusively intertwined. The speaker returned from the abyss as the mythological figure`s wife. She wears a blanket of time that is decorated with patches and feathers. The speaker uses the pronoun "our" in "our favorite clothes" to broaden the scope of the experience; it leaves the personal to transcend to the communal:

> When I walk the stairway of water into the abyss, I return as the wife of the watermonster, in a blanket of time decorated with swatches of cloth and feathers from our favorite clothes. (www.ashevillepoetryreview.com, June 7, 2021)

The speaker is aware of the power of the victim to hope and create possibilities. Along with hope comes imagination. The speaker`s imagination is large enough to create communities and nothing can stop that hope to build homes.

> Her imagination was larger than the small frame house at the north edge of town, with the broken cars surrounding it like a necklace of futility, larger than the town itself leaning into the lake. Nothing could stop it, just as no one could

> stop the bearing-down-thunderheads as they gathered overhead in the war of opposites. (www.ashevillepoetryreview.com, June 7, 2021)

The living drought is unrecognizable; people just lost memory of the myth of the watersnake, no one recognizes it, no one speaks of it. But the hope for a flood of awakening is still living. The speaker, as any intellectual, has the role of bearing witness and transmitting myths, history, and past to new generations. Imagination is a responsibility in such societies that are disconnected from the past which entails living a fragmented present.

> Years later when she walked out of the lake and headed for town, no one recognized her, or themselves, in the drench of fire and rain. The watersnake was a story no one told anymore. They'd entered the drought that no one recognized as drought, the convenience store a signal of temporary amnesia. (www.ashevillepoetryreview.com, June 7, 2021)

For Harjo, memory is reconciliation. People are in need of recalling their mythic world, songs, and stories. Finding a way back transports "poets and readers back to a place of nonduality, where people have not experienced what she calls the shame of forgetfulness" (Bryson, 2005: 54). Harjo refers to memory as "the other sight" that is significant in shaping and creating the present. Memory for her becomes "a big word. It is like saying world. Memory is nucleus of every cell" (Bryson, 2005: 55). Memory is the tool with which people would reconnect with the past without losing their sense of the present. Harjo`s memory and remembrance are not nostalgic in the sense of merely imagining a return to the past as it is. Harjo draws a line to distinguish between "going back" and "going backward." Going back means "recuperating and maintaining an awareness of the past while allowing it to translate itself into present and future wisdom and insight" (Bryson, 2005: 57); returning does not entail regressing.

Harjo`s "watermonster" is Saadi Youssef`s "winged bull." Both reconstructing attitudes share the process of visiting the past and selectively remember and "re-member" nations. For both poets, the past is never a nostalgic reservoir but an archive of historical ignitions waiting to be relit and begin again. Unity and solidarity of all sects are what Youssef`s communal "We," in "Free Iraqis," tries to achieve.

> We will not raise our arms in the square
>
> Even if we carry no arms!
>
> We are the descendants of the snake of the first water!
>
> We are the descendants of those who worshipped winged bulls! (2004a: 29)

What the poet selectively erases from the present scene is religious, historical and ethnic sectarianism. His use of pagan myths of snakes and "winged bulls" is a deliberate remembering of Iraqi`s "Sumerian and Babylonian past specifically to downplay current religious, sectarian and ethnic divisions, reminding Iraqis that they belong to the same land, histories and civilizations and share the same blood" (Hamdi, 2016: 48), all united around worshipping their "imagined" winged bulls. The reader can certainly feel the proud poetic voice; proud of his country`s once oneness. Despite the shattering plight, the poet is still defiant. He refuses surrender; he will not raise his arms. He refuses extinction.

Through the use of myth, legend, and epic, poets penetrate many lost realms. Youssef`s imagined realms are, paradoxically, real. He speaks of "real villages, real cities, real civilizations and real people" (Akash, 2000: 27). Not only geographically, the poet enters the psyche of people; he tells "us a lot about the hopes and fears of real people, their achievements and defeats, and above all, about the oppressive disaster of exile" (Akash, 2000: 28). He participates, not in the passive myth-visiting act, but in myth-making. His myth-making is never decorative; it is a necessary key to his imaginative realm.

Place is a dimension that is considered to be the core of all dimensions of colonialism—political, social, and ideological. The experience of place, as well as displacement, "emerge out of the interaction of language, history, visual perception, spatiality and environment in the experience of colonized peoples" (Ashcroft, 2001: 125). The little details of language, stories, legends and myths, art and literature all contribute to structuring a cultural identity which offers a sense of place and belonging. This sense of place and cultural history was not a source of content or struggle until disrupted by colonialism (Ashcroft, 2001: 125). This disrupted sense of place has imposed the feeling of being uprooted and displaced, enslaved and alienated. The question here is "where is my home?" Hence, if one thinks of diasporic people, one can find that their sense of belonging has little to do with location; it is in the community, family, and all the symbols and myths that constitute a communal identity and culture; a homeland that is constructed on memory.

In Benedict Anderson`s concept of forming nations and communities, communities are described as imagined. They are "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1983: 49). Anderson argues that the nation is an imagined community; the word community implies solidarity and sacrifice. It is imagined as a one and all-together community "because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1983: 50). This state of "fraternity" would make possible "for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (Anderson, 1983: 50).

Identity can never be an outside representation for if it is imposed then it is no more than an ideological imprisonment. Identity is “always constituted within” (Hall, 1990: 222); it is, as Hall argues, “a production, which is never complete [and] always in process” (222). Within Anderson`s imagined community, a corresponding imagined “cultural identity” arises and rises above all differences. Stuart Hall defines this cultural identity as a “sort of collective ‘one-true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall, 1990: 223). This solidarity, this oneness and continuity, is the essence of cultures in crisis. This kind of identity should be formed, reconstructed, and excavated.

In Harjo`s “Grace,” the speaker finds grace within a transcended moment of ordinary present. She seeks a temporal fusion where barriers are diminished. Harjo`s journey of return is “an imaginative one that allows her to reclaim what language and Western culture have threatened to take from her” (Bryson, 2005: 60). The purpose of her poetry is to build places and to maintain cultures. In “Grace,” the speaker uses names of places to create a state of connectedness with the surroundings. Grace in the poem symbolizes hope and happiness in a world where the mythic is integrated in the ordinary. Harjo seeks grace or hope; a space where she can balance the “stubborn memory” of the atrocity of the colonized past and the unrealized future of imagined “hope of children and corn”;

> We still talk about that winter, how the cold froze imaginary buffalo on the stuffed horizon of snowbanks. The haunting voices of the starved and mutilated broke fences, crashed our thermostat dreams, and we couldn’t stand it one more time. So once again we lost a winter in stubborn memory, walked through cheap apartment walls, skated through fields of ghosts into a town that never wanted us, in the epic search for grace. (www.poetryfoundation.org, June 9, 2022)

Trickster in the form of the crow or rabbit in Muscogee mythology appears when facing the horror of modern life; “Like Coyote, like Rabbit, we could not contain our terror and clowned our way through a season of false midnights. We had to swallow that town with laughter, so it would go down easy as honey” (www.poetryfoundation.org, June 9, 2022). White buffalos are creatures that symbolize the birth of hope, their appearance is a sign, in the Muscogee society, that their prayers have been heard and granted. In the opening, atrocities have frozen that hope as it froze the white buffalo. In the third stanza, the speaker associates the white buffalo with hope of balance:

> I could say grace was a woman with time on her hands, or a white buffalo escaped from memory. But in that dingy light it was a promise of balance. We once again

> understood the talk of animals, and spring was lean and hungry with the hope of children and corn. (www.poetryfoundation.org, June 9, 2022)

Although the next season was even worse, the speaker asserts that the past holds more than just a memory of dispossessed people; hope was born in the past. In order to create a sense of home and place-rootedness, one must return to the past and begin again.

Similarly, Youssef makes it important to produce geography and geographical awareness for native peoples to survive. Imagining a space and "spatial control [were] necessary part[s] of forming the settler state. For Native people whose bodies are highly regulated by the colonial settler state and for whom places are highly regulated by settler discourses of where one belongs, examining embodied geographies is a necessary component to decolonization" (Goeman, 2013: 120).

Iraq has been suffering from the consequences of the occupation, politically and culturally. This agony has changed the very Iraqi fabric of the country and turned it from one of the wealthiest countries in resources to one of the poorest and most dangerous ones to live in, in the world (Al-Ali and Al-Najjar, 2013: 260). However, in such a bleak tunnel, there is always a light of hope. Saadi Youssef is one of the Iraqi figures who has the ability to cultivate hope in the future and in one`s ability to cope with the present. Saadi`s poetry shows the beauty of the little ordinary things that might have been left unnoticed, just like the neglected marginalized.

It is apparent that his poetry focuses on ordinary everyday objects, but he "charges them with metonymic significance" (Al-Ali and Al-Najjar, 2013: 222). Objects are symbolic. In his poem, "The Wretched of the Heaven," that echoes the title of Frantz Fanon`s manifesto-text of the dispossessed, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Youssef pleads to God and relates the ugliness of the atrocities of the jail of Abu Ghraib where Iraqi prisoners are tortured by American soldiers.Change, for Youssef, does not happen once and for all; rather it is a continuous process. The faced calamities can be turned into lessons, reflections, and opportunities for building hope for the future.

In "The Wretched of the Heaven," Youssef breaks the walls of "the closed cell" (2004d: 63) and imagines not only a future space, but a future afterlife. He starts with the communal "we" that represents human agency; "we will go to God naked" (63). They, as one people, share the same misery, pain, and destiny. Youssef evokes the idea that no matter what the person`s religious or ethnic background is, he shares his brother`s pain. This pain was doubled by the silence around the victims, but

> we are on the way to you [lord].
>
> We will remain on the way even if you let us down,
>
> We are your dead sons and have declared our resurrection.

> Tell your prophets to open the gates of cells and paradise!
>
> *
>
> The angels know us one by one. (65)

We are Iraqis discusses the poetry of Saadi Youssef as setting a map of aesthetic and cultural resistance. In his work, Youssef emphasizes the new, but that does not mean he has overlooked the tradition. He goes back to traditions, to the past, and begins again through practicing the art of modifications. Through intertextuality, he refers back to myths and epics as well as past poets to reconstruct a new reality where past and present fuse to produce home.

> In an interview with Majid al-Samirra'i, Saadi comments on his relation to heritage: I consider the poetic tradition the root that should not be cut. The Arabic word is not abstract, though it has potential for abstraction. From this perspective I see the Arabic word has a history. (Al-Ali and Al-Najjar, 2013: 222)

Harjo, as well, "(re)maps Native politics as important on a larger scale, resisting the dominant narrative that Indigenous politics pertain exclusively to a small minority group within the larger nation-state"(Goeman, 2013: 122). Harjo imagines and recreates the spaces of the United States. In order to remember the history of displacement, occupation, and exploitation, Harjo approaches the remapping of the land through cultural metaphors. In his book, *Red on Red*, Craig Womack recounts the story of the birth of the Creek nation and migration. Just like Harjo`s poetry, his story is a declaration "to exist as a nation[.] The community needs a perception of nationhood, that is, stories (like the migration account) that help them imagine who they are as a people, how they came to be, and what cultural values they wish to preserve" (Womack, 1999: 144).

In "The Path to the Milky Way," Harjo uses "the metaphor of the stomp grounds and other specific Creek and tribal metaphors to locate herself within a Creek tradition, to note her connections to others, to re-center those normally left out of knowledge productions, and to thwart the violence of global designs" (Goeman, 2013: 134). She resists the erasure of the indigenous presence and continuity. Harjo summons the trickster crow to face the forces of displacement and alienation of indigenous people who were forced to disconnect from their culture and homeland.

> Crow just laughs and *says wait, wait and see* and I am waiting and not seeinganything, not just yet.But like crow I collect the shine of anything beautiful I can find. (www.genius.com, June 9, 2021)

Her "local metaphors (re)map a global restructuring of space" (Goeman, 2013: 136). Local histories are heterogeneous; conveying different contexts and stories. Hence, to face the imposed and imagined colonial thought that local history is homogeneous, the hierarchy of local/global must be diminished. Local is part of the global and at the same time global is within the local; they travel, they intertwine. In the opposition of the "songs of the human voices" and "the whine of civilization," the speaker sustains home. The speaker uses the land of Los Angeles to construct her home with all its customs and myths.

> But we can buy a map here of the stars' homes, dial a tone for dangerous love, choose from several brands of water or a hiss of oxygen for gentle rejuvenation. (www.genius.com, June 9, 2021)

Harjo`s aim is not to create or recreate a nostalgically old community, but rather to go through the process of sifting the indigenous memory and time. The poem presents a new map that encompasses traditional knowledge of indigenous people and Los Angeles, the American city, which is alternatively used as a place to construct home with imagination and mythology. The poem offers a new song of hope even within the "trash of humans."

As Bill Ashcroft has suggested, the act of naming places and mapping is essential to the colonial discourse that claims the burden of turning empty spaces into inhabited lands. The colonial "shift from space to place in this context depends upon the belief that there are no present inhabitants worthy of mention; and, indeed, it is a shift in name only, because what is paradoxical about colonial mapping is that these maps do precisely the opposite of what might be expected: they disengage the links between place and space by not attending to the strong connections among language, identity, and place already established by the local population" (Andrews, 2011: 254). Harjo and Youssef agree that, for poets, even the status of placelessness constructs a place; a home. It is the poet`s responsibility to bear witness and to record history. The process of deconstructing and recreating history and maps demands the subversion of the colonial cartographic construct.

In his poem, "Prologue on Poetry," Saadi Youssef stresses the role of the intellectual, culture and literature, poetry in specific, in changing and recreating reality. Poetry is not a mere representation of reality, "it is deeper and more vast than that" (2004b: 3). Unlike other ways of reading life through science and politics,

> Poetry is current, direct and immediate. I mean that poetry`s ability to read, participate, and change is more effective and deeper in the veins Poetry is transformative. (3)

Poetry has the power of building nations. Poetry, not only reads people, but also penetrates their psyche and shakes every element of defeatism and plants the

roots of transformation. But at the same time, Youssef is shocked at the silence of intellectuals, at betrayal. In "The Concern of a Man, 2000 BC," he cries out:

> But where are the poets?
>
> It is said (I don`t believe it) [he certainly does] that many are now extemporizing
>
> poems in praise of evil merchants,
>
> and that officers of the Akkadian garrison are . . . [treacherous]. (14-15)

Self-criticism is shown in Youssef`s poetry. The destruction of Iraq is painfully and bitterly best described by Youssef as a feast: Iraq is being devoured by the oppressive occupier with the help of mediators. So, the question is who served Iraq on a plate? Who filled the American plates with "bone soup and lizard meat"? Who opened the gates "to soldiers, infantry, navy, and flying angels" of death? (Youssef, 2003: 9). Mediators, treachery, and silence are all accomplices in turning Iraq into a feast.

Youssef imagines a new Iraq, a contextualized, postcolonial Iraq, one that is not seen through the Western eye, not an object, but a life. If Iraq is not Iraqi in identity, then it is objectified by the Western gaze and its plans to remap and divide it, signaling the end of Iraqi sovereignty. In such a crisis culture, an imagined space is a necessary step towards reconstruction and liberation. This imagined space requires intellectuals "to initiate a counter discourse of national, social and cultural consciousness that emphasizes Iraq`s present in dialogue with its past, a present that takes into account the knowledge and experience of past civilizations, histories, [and] colonizations" (Hamdi, 2016: 40).

Harjo responds to Youssef`s question; "Where are the poets?" by calling a meeting. In her poem, "We Must Call a Meeting," Harjo calls for action and change. The poem starts with a position or a state of fragility. The state of mind of the speaker is a product of colonization and its power of hegemony which turn dreams and imagination into nightmares. What can save the speaker is the arrow of writing:

> I am fragile, a piece of pottery smoked from fire
>
> made of dung,
>
> the design drawn from nightmares. I am an arrow, painted
>
> with lightning
>
> to seek the way to the name of the enemy,
>
> ***

It is a language of lizards and storms, and we have

begun to hold conversations

long into the night.

***

I begin to draw maps of stars.

The spirits of old and new ancestors perch on my shoulders. (www.thefreelibrary.com, June 9, 2021)

Harjo considers literature, poetry in specific, to be a tool forcing change. The speaker connects dreams and hopes with present, past, history, and tradition in a spiral of fusion and movement. The poem`s ending lines cross colonial limitations and create “madness”; madness of hope and a promise of building houses for the dead. The poem is formed as a spiral which is a traditional Muscogee Creek image to overcome the limits formed by colonization. The usage of this traditional spiral is a recurrent image in Harjo`s poetry. It is “associated with the three dimensions [of past, present and future]. Building houses out of our own material, largely embodied material, is necessary to decolonization” (Goeman, 2013: 131). Harjo continues her calling for a meeting by demanding her language:

Give me back my language and build a house

Inside it.

A house of madness.

A house for the dead who are not dead.

And the spiral of the sky above it.

And the sun

and the moon.

And the stars to guide us called promise.

(www.thefreelibrary.com, June 9, 2021)

Looking for freedom and finding it “in language—and applying it to our politics—becomes the mechanism for producing a space free from subjugation; the act of calling, praying, and holding conversations is the precursor to building a house strong enough to deal with the madness of colonized life” (Goeman, 2013: 132). The reimagined house surpasses the exclusivist idea of citizenship; it is more of a sphere

of limitless hopes and possibilities. The interior domestic life of the house becomes politicized. The new house is a fusion of past, present, and the examination of that past; the speaker "recognizes that the enemy is also found within her and that it is the past ancestors and spirits as well as the new that have to meet if she is to build a house based on possibility and not foreclosure" (Goeman, 2013: 132). Mishuana Goeman agrees with Henri Lefebvre that space is a social product to which history, past, tradition and memory have contributed (2013: 132). Hence, past is ongoing and its ways must fall under an ongoing examination and interrogation.

The call for action is not governed by systems and structures imposed by the state powers. This is illustrated by Harjo`s use of mythic past images to be woven into the lived present. Traditions are not fixed in the past, they are not momentary; they migrate through time, thought, and language. Harjo`s poetry creates a space of contact zones. Within each zone, she relates her individual stories and people`s history which at the same time transcend to meet other similar experiences of displacement and exclusion of complete strangers who were united under the same agonizing circumstances of global economic and political forces.

In "We Must Call a Meeting," Harjo demands her language back to "build a house / inside it." Language here functions as a shelter, as a home. With the physical loss of homes, the speaker demands constructing homes in language. Language becomes empowering; it is capable of healing and creating. Images of loss, starvation, and grieving represent reality. In order to be healed and find a way out of this destruction, Harjo evokes the powers of nature and ancestry (stars and spirits). However, this starvation evokes the rise to imagination, dreams, and the will to change.

The intellectual has the transformative power to change even the most traumatic situations and instill hope and creativity. Trauma, here, is an agent of creation rather than a destroyer. Iraqi people are "not merely passive victims of violence, vulnerable recipients of repressive regimes, or bystanders of their country`s destruction" (Al-Ali and Al-Najjar, 2013: xxvi). Iraqis continue to live and cope; they continue finding hope in their everyday life despite the trauma. They are still socializing, preparing food, and doing what might impose a sense of normality in their life. They still hope for a better future. Imagination for them is a method of healing; however, this process of healing can never be without creative ruptures, so writers continue to create, criticize, and write. Imagination, dreaming, and literature are all forms of the Iraqi's nonviolent resistance to colonialism and the consequences of occupation, like sectarianism. Iraqi writers "retain, subvert, and produce art/activism as ways of coping with despair and resisting chaos and destruction" (Al-Ali and Al-Najjar, 2013: xxvii). In such works, the reader finds the dismal and the hopeful in a relationship of contrast and connection.

Memories are not always healing. The collective memory of the indigenous people is filled with hatred, genocide, suffering, and dispossession. However,

remembering the pain becomes an essential part of the process of healing. Images of death and despair are important to keep the struggle existent, so beautiful things in life can go on. Poetry communicates the personal and the tribal in a contemporary set up. It always projects the elements that destroyed life so the reader can identify with the wounds that need to be healed. Memory is a present occurrence—it occurs right now.

The poem "Conversation" resurrects hope from a scene of struggle. The speaker and his friend are two rocks in the face of the wailing winds, cold and harm. They have been through atrocities and yet, they stand here;

> are we, my friend, two rocks?
>
> How often have the winds wailed?
>
> How often have we been struck
>
> by cold and harm?
>
> How often have we lost our bets?
>
> Yet we stand here. (Youssef, 2012a: 46)

In the last two lines, the speaker replies with "don`t grieve. We are the eye of time" (46). The reader might interpret the eye of time as the agency of change and bearing witness. Or to allude to Salvador Dali`s "The Eye of Surrealist Time," these two characters and their background of atrocities are components of a dream. Time intervenes and changes everything around them. The surrealist Dali believed in what he called the "paranoiac critical" method to access the mind of the artist. It is the ability of the artist to perceive multiple images within the same configuration which creates a new way of looking at the world around. Youssef employs this technique through perceiving dismal images of struggle as well as resistance in a way that enables him to stay hopeful and create another perception of his home/world, where imagination eradicates grief. Time is not rigid, it is one with space, and memory lives within that fluid cycle of time.

This idea of the fluidity of time is also present in Harjo`s "spiral." The spiral, employed by Harjo in many of her poems, symbolizes the fluid nature of the boundaries between past, present, and future where memory can travel. Therefore, "a movement back into the past simultaneously and paradoxically is a movement into the future" (Bryson, 2005: 58). Spirals represent the architecture for the mythic return; they serve as modes of going back to a time when duality and hierarchy do not exist. Harjo`s poetry "provides nourishment for memory, which strives to retrace the past not as an inducement to curl inwards on oneself, as if it

were a point in time without escape route, but rather as a dynamic process to reaffirm ancient heritages and proceed forward on a path of constant renewal" (Coltelli, 1996: 9). Harjo explains;

> I don't see time as linear. I don't see things as beginning or ending. A lot of people have a hard time understanding native people and native. For us, there is not just this world, there's also a layering of others. Time is not divided by minutes and hours, and everything has presence and meaning within this landscape of timelessness. (Moyers and Harjo, 1996: 38-39)

"A Map to the Next World" "reconfigures conventional cartographic principles" (Andrews, 2011: 264) through poetry, where the focus shifts from the physical and actual world to the creation of a hole of escape and hope in a way people can travel within different spaces; from the underworld of disorder to the upper world of hope. Memory itself is a map; a map that draws history, traditions, and a whole past. In the poem, the speaker stresses visions of destruction and blood to generate action and change. The speaker tells the child to use the past as a source of knowledge to draw her future path. Returning to the past to search for a beginning does not entail defeatism since there is no one definite map. From the past, multiples of futures burst.

Unlearning colonial constructions along with imaginatively revising and selectively reconstructing the past give hope for a better future. The presence of the white deer in the poem symbolizes the Muscogee people`s ability to fight and survive. The poem also presents the idea of self-examination. The speaker says that "we were never perfect" either. Attitudes are to be altered and examined to make sure that, through the journey of change, there is not any chance of repeating the same mistakes. People`s relationships with their lands need a change.

Harjo stresses the idea that hope and survival emerge from death and struggle: "You will travel through the remembrance of death." Despite the presence of death and encampment in this part, the reader can sense hope and home in the image of the family, of the smell of cooking and the togetherness in a Muscogee Creek village dinner. One can find comfort and solace in his own heritage;

> You will travel through the membrane of death, smell cooking
>
> from the encampment where our relatives make a feast of fresh
>
> deer meat and corn soup, in the Milky Way. ("A Map to the Next World," www.genius.com, June 9, 2021)

Harjo draws the readers` attention to the past roots as she draws the map of the future. There is no map that can guide the people to the next world other than what they already have. The instructions of the map are all about the beauty of nature and tribal grounds. She resurrects the suffering in order to create a peaceful future.

Womack argues that there is a need for an examination of old disciplines, too. Although he calls for the importance of change and not to merely accept the past, Womack thinks that the past has passed on traditions from which stem generations of indigenous intellectuals. The form of "nineteenth-century [indigenous] resistance [was not a mere group] of plains warriors on horseback, [indigenous] people authored books that often argued for Indian rights and criticized land theft" (Womack, 1999:3). Literature bears a relationship to communities and their survival; it generates communities of the primary culture and writes others. He explains that

> [t]he idea of being the victims of history should be replaced by the thought that people are active agents who receive history and play parts as well.In terms of Native literature, [he] relate[s] this to a more radical "Red Stick" approach—the assumption that Indian viewpoints cohere, that Indian resistance can be successful, that Native critical centersare possible, that working from within the nation, rather than looking toward the outside, is a legitimate way of examining literature, that subverting the literary status quo rather than being subverted by it constitutes a meaningful alternative. (12)

In the Iraqi scene, memoricide is in action. In his chapter, "The Iraq War and International Relations," Amir Taheri evokes the term "the birth pangs of a new Middle East" as used by Condoleezza Rice to describe the catastrophic situation in the Middle East. Pain is alleged to be necessary to destroy what is left of the old Middle East and to reconstruct the West`s pre-imagined version of the Middle East. Taheri explains that this "rhetoric signaled the administration`s decision to embark on building a new platform for America`s role in the region" (Taheri, 2009: 33).

Disguised as a mission of uprooting "non-existent weapons of mass destruction, these wars paved the road for creating massive destruction to the country`s infrastructure, history, culture, army, people and the very social fabric that held this society together for economic and strategic gain" (Hamdi, 2016: 37). Under such a painful and terrifying state of uncertainty, people lose their identity; the "Iraqiness" of Iraqis is under the threat of complete erasure. This so-called "creative chaos" needs to be encountered with creative reordering of the state. And in order to rise and reconstruct another reality, people should become aware of all aspects of the lived crisis. A recreation of a mindset that rises above all

distinctions, as a counter discourse of the American think-tank experts, is the process that can withstand destruction and extinction.

Along with reconstructing the Iraq that Youssef and all Iraqis know, Youssef deconstructs the naïve thought of the good intention of the destructive force of occupation. Youssef reminds his people of the atrocities and destruction and how death became the master of the scene. So, "do not say good-bye" to America (2007: 17). The country that demolished your homeland and "hired death" to assassinate every aspect of life does not deserve any association with the word good. Do not reconcile, do not settle:

> Don`t say anything
>
> To the country that bequeathed madness to you,
>
> The country that demolished a homeland over your head
>
> *
>
> and uprooted the meaning of branches
>
> from your garden—(Youssef, 2007: 17)

The United States of America has "designed a constitution that institutionalizes and ingrains divisions, literally destroyed the culture and infrastructure of Iraq" (Hamdi, 2016:40). Sectarianism has left no room for "branches." It uprooted the Iraqi nation, replacing tolerance and solidarity with fatal apathy that turned any opposing view to an enemy. Youssef is reminding Iraqis that Iraq is their only garden and assimilating with America will not create them another.

Similarly, Harjo, *in Soul Talk, Song Language: Conversations with Joy Harjo*, views the American culture as being rootless, with no sense of place and time, and "with no reference or power rooted in the earth, ancestors, or historical and mythical sense" (xi).The federal Indian law and policy attempted to map the indigenous Muscogee land through a colonial discourse that homogenizes and erases the histories and experiences of indigenous people. The colonial "settler spatial imaginaries and their enforcement implemented removal, formed Indian Territory, remapped it as the state of Oklahoma, incorporated it into the settler state, and eventually applied the Dawes Allotment Act" (Goeman, 2013: 124). Despite people`s displacement and relocation, the lands that remained under the tribal governance are of great importance to the idea of survival and implementing hope for a better future, as they save their history and wage a war against the erasure of memory.

The recreation of that history entails an engagement with "the history of American colonization of Native peoples, in particular, the subjects of dispossession and land loss, [which] may be extremely psychologically debilitating"

(Andrews, 2011: 257). To alleviate the pain, Harjo employs humor in her poetry. In "Anchorage," Harjo creates the character/narrator, Henry, who is an indigenous Muscogee in an Alaskan jail. The narrator describes the streets and the physical geography of the place. The speaker is "equally interested in the spiritual and mythological dimensions of place, which for the Muskogee have traditionally included the division of the cosmos into three primordial worlds: the upper world, this world, and the lower world" (Andrews, 2011: 258). Despite the dark image of the grandmother that represents the bleak history of dispossession and displacement, Henry`s anecdote is somehow funny.

"Anchorage" is itself an anchor that connects past and present. It recollects history and agonies of the memories of sufferings. The Athabascan woman could be interpreted as representing the ancestors; their past of suffering, their blood and "piss." Harjo`s description of the land and its every cornerstone is an announcement of belonging. The speaker takes a look at the "unimagined darkness" of the past that is "buried in an ache in which nothing makes sense." However, she keeps breathing, walking, and surviving only by reclaiming her land and her history. The speaker`s life has not come to an end yet, neither have her dreams and hopes. Harjo juxtaposes the two images of past—the old woman, and the present where Henry represents the modern survival of indigenous people:

> On a park bench we see someone's Athabascan
>
> grandmother, folded up, smelling like 200 years
>
> of blood and piss, her eyes closed against some
>
> unimagined darkness, where she is buried in an ache
>
> in which nothing makes
>
> sense.
>
> ***
>
> What can we say that would make us understand
>
> better than we do already?
>
> Except to speak of her home and claim her
>
> as our own history, and know that our dreams
>
> don't end here.(www.poets.org" www.poets.org, March 10, 2022)

In the last stanza, Harjo "mocks a lengthy history of enforced tribal genocide that has failed, like Henry`s shooter, to eradicate the existence of [indigenous people]"(Andrews, 2011: 259-260). His narrative of escaping death shows that the dispossessed have the will to survive despite the grim situation. Harjo uses a line from Lorde`s poem "A Litany for Survival" and turns it into a question to directly interrogate the belief of the non-existence of indigenous people. The poem acts like a map of space where the Native experience demands survival and challenges erasure and the killing of the spirit:

Everyone laughed at the impossibility of it,

but also the truth. Because who would believe

the fantastic and terrible story of all of our survival

those who were never meant

to survive? (www.poets.org" www.poets.org, March 10, 2022)

Despite the dark past, indigenous people are still surviving; they never lost their hope of reclaiming the land. Harjo, brilliantly, weaves the struggle of the past and the survival of the present into an image of a future hope. The past is never forgotten; although it is buried, it is not dead, for the transformative memory will always bear witness and act to change. The eight shots of Henry could be interpreted as measurements of the government to exterminate minorities. However, Henry has proved the "impossible" possible.

So, what is resistance? Is it only the violent physical armed rebellion? The word resistance, argues Ashcroft, has become adaptive as it has the ability to be used as an umbrella under which all kinds of political struggles fall. However, if resistance is thought to be a "form of defense by which an invader is 'kept out,' the subtle and sometimes unspoken forms of social and cultural resistance have been much more common" (Ashcroft, 2001: 20). These subtle ways of saying "no" are even more important than other forms of decolonization, for fighting them is not easily achieved. Resistance is a fascinating feature of postcolonial societies, that resistance "manifests itself as a refusal to be absorbed, a resistance which engages that which is resisted in a different way, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and altering them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being" (Ashcroft, 2001: 20).

Iraqi and Muscogee (Creek) poets have created their counter discourse and counter poetics which value resistance and struggle especially when their

homelands and identities are in crisis. Poetry is characterized by the use of nostalgia for a pre-frontier and pre-colonization past which now only exists in imagination. Disregarding the religious, cultural, geographical, and historical differences between the two nations, both of them have been subjected to genocide and erasure of memory under the racial myths that view the colonized people as savages whose existence threatens the image of a better world. The colonizer`s discourse tries to ignore the pre-colonial civilization of indigenous people so as to dismiss them outside history all together. Such an ideology views the colonized as barbarians and affirms the superiority of the colonizer which has legitimized the extermination of indigenous people. Poets, on both sides, explore the displacement and loss of one`s homeland and its effects on the individual and the collective consciousness of the nation. Poetry is their instrument that would force change.

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