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Abstract

Within the framework of social constructivism, this article seeks to explore the role played by conceptual integration in the collective identification of an oppressed ethnic minority, Sister Nations, a gendered contemporary version of the traditional North-Amerindian extended family. To this end it examines significant examples from their poetic production—a repository of tribal storytelling agreed as a lingua franca of de-colonization by in-group members—and focuses on its semantic impact at the ideational, interpersonal and textual levels, both from a propositional and procedural standpoint. Findings reveal two major types of blended spaces: spatio-temporal and personal, as well as the existence of a dual pragmatics of reconciliation and resistance acting as a pedagogical and vindicating strategy that maintains in-group cohesion and mediates between this Native collectivity and the domineering Euroamerican societies. Thus, blending contributes to poetic meaning, through which identities are constructed and disseminated, and proves to be an active agent of social change.

Keywords: Feminine Indigenous identity, Conceptual integration, Native American poetry, De-colonizing discourse

1. Sister Nations as Discourse Community: Cognitive Background and the Threefold Impact of Conceptual Blending

Blending Theory (henceforth BT) has found recent and fruitful application in the study of discriminatory ideologies, especially of anti-Semitism and various other instances of xenophobia (Chilton, 2005a, 2005b; Charteris-Black, 2005, 2008; Musolff, 2008 inter alia) as well as of a mercantile and deterministic sort of manipulative educational discourses (Dunn, 2008; Katz, 2008). However, it still has little repercussion in the analysis of the collective identities constructed and negotiated by oppressed minorities. It can be said, therefore, that as a tool for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and borrowing Goatly's terms (2007: 2), recourse to BT has focused more on its *brainwashing* function than on its *washing-the-brain* potential. That is, on its harmful indoctrinatory effects rather than on its coinage of more democratic ways of thinking and the removal of prejudice.

The aim of this paper, by contrast, is to underscore the role of conceptual integration as a major cognitive and interactive process in identity (de)construction within a specific discursive community¹, *Sister Nations* (Brant, 1984: 10; Erdrich & Tohe, 2002: xv-xvi), a gendered present-day version of the traditional Native North-American extended family. It arouses a singular interest since it gathers socio-cultural traits and articulates a dual multimodal discourse of reconciliation and resistance in its struggle for visibility and political self-determination amid mainstream English-speaking and francophone societies.² Such discourse is embodied in Native women's contemporary poetry, an agreed *lingua franca* of decolonization by academic and popular spheres alike due to its origin as tribal storytelling and its ancestral nature of everyday practice long before the European contact. The myriad of conceptual blends contained in *Sister Nations'* verse do constitute a cultural survival strategy that simultaneously models and disseminates a new collective identity by means of a selective hybridization of moral and aesthetic values. These blends encourage in-group solidarity through ritual and the verbalization of the North-Amerindian subaltern experience, and establish common ground with the Euro-American out-group³, performing a pedagogical function while vindicating and legitimizing counter-colonial stances. In order to examine these aspects, I will provide and comment on thirteen significant examples from a 635-poem pan-tribal corpus (Sancho Guinda, 2008) by female American Indian poets from 1917 to date.

From a Critical Metaphor Analysis perspective, Native American women's poetry is in itself a complex trope or, more accurately, a *macro-blend* at the *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual* levels in the Hallidayan sense.⁴ On the ideational plane, it may be conceived of as a journey of personal and political empowerment (*journey* and *home-quest* are vocabulary items infallibly pronounced or written by female Native authors in interviews, critiques, dedications and blurbs) which in turn evokes the actual displacement suffered by Indigenous peoples physically, culturally and spiritually in North America. Indigenous literature—usually referred to as *oraliture* owing to its fusion of the oral and written channels (Hoy, 2001: 23)—is felt as both path and shelter, as a *dwelling-in-travelling*: a dynamic home or home surrogate that mediates and transforms. It not only mediates between channels of expression (verbal and strictly oral and visual) but also between individuals and societies, the masculine and the feminine, the natural and the supernatural and the Aboriginal in-group and the Euroamerican out-group. It transforms by healing through ritualistic formulae, by instructing Natives and non-Natives against colonial subjugation, and as it will be explained in deeper detail when tackling the interpersonal component, by inverting power relations with the Euroamerican readership, re-creating a literary rite of passage that limits and directs its participation but at the same time demands cooperation to decode meanings.

Propositional content, on the whole, epitomizes the paradoxical syncretism of cosmogonic myths (Eliade, 1955: 90), so profusely studied by the anthropological structuralism of Lévi-Strauss: order/chaos, creation/destruction, individual/collective, good/evil, light/darkness, masculine/feminine, and sacred/profane, all of them constituents of every symbolism and incarnated in the *trickster*, a trans-tribal and sexually ambiguous rambling rogue at once animal and human, clown and swindler,

shaman and destroyer and hero and victim. He/she represents the resistance and continuity of Native cultures and, like a *picaro*, lives interstitially and triggers subversion, selective change and re-invention without disintegrating the establishment. In this dualistic vein, Native American women poets divulge a contemporary feminine identity that amalgamates the ideas of immanence and change and the tribal and colonial imageries. On the one hand, they rescue traditional metaphors that characterise Indigenous females as fluid, cyclical and permanent beings through amniotic, astral and mineral images, often fusing those feminine attributes with masculine ones (e.g. with the mobility and chance inherent in the feather metaphor—see Sample 1, my bolds):

Sample 1

(...)

Real women caress

With **featherstone hands**

Not with falcon fingernails

That have never worked

On the other, they use the ideology underlying the colonial *pornotropy* (Lomba, 1998: 154) as (a frequently ironic) starting point for self- and collective (re)definition. While stones and rocks connote solidity, memory and immortality—that is, the role of tribal women as household and culture keepers, liquids and heavenly bodies (especially the moon, addressed as *Grandmother* in many tribes) praise motherhood and associated qualities such as periodicity, flexibility, nourishment and control (Sample 2, emphasis mine):

Sample 2

I'm age

image of woman

female of species

enchanted

light of the moon

passion, encounter

vital fluid of life

cosmic clockwork

eternity.

(...)

As for the *pornotropy* mentioned above, devised by the conquerors and colonizers during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, it consisted in the cartographic representation of Africa and America as dark and lustful semi-nude women, ready to be penetrated and exploited. This bipolarity virgin/concubine soon unchained gender abuse, even within the Indigenous communities, and the colonial term *squaw*, abundant in the explorers' diaries and settlers' manuscripts in the XVI and XVII centuries, was deliberately spread by missionaries to exaggerate Indian depravation and so raise more funds in the metropolis (e.g. through publications such as *The Jesuit Relations and other Documents*). It became one of the most degrading insults directed against Native women, meaning a mixture of drudge, prostitute and beast of burden (Erdrich & Tohe, 2002: xviii). Curiously enough, it had its origin as an empowering midwifery term in Mohawk (*otsiskwah*), literally meaning 'slippery' and denoting the mucus produced by the cervix when a woman is fertile (Katsy Cook in Harjo & Bird, 1997: 44-45). In their verses, American Indian women tend to depart ironically from this debasing token of the colonial creed as a threshold for re-definition: Sample 3 is a clear exponent of this strategy with an *in crescendo* assertiveness, whereas in Sample 4 the blend of the colonial and tribal mental spaces is not expressed gradually and offers an additional de-sacralization of western religious icons:

Sample 3

I am a squaw
 a heathen
 a savage
 basically a mammal

(...)

I am the keeper of generations

(...)

I am the strength of nations

(...)

I am the giver of life
 to whole tribes

(...)

I am a sacred trust
 I am Indian woman.

Sample 4

(...)

If I hear one more word
 about your Christian God
 I'm gonna howl
 I'm gonna crawl outta my 'heathen'
 skin and trick you
 into believing I'm the Virgin
 Mary and take you to bed.

(...)

At the interpersonal level, the individual and the communal converge, giving rise to a hybrid “novel postcolonial genre” (Rader, 2003: 128, 133)⁵ with lyric, bardic and ceremonial functions and to a notion of authorship as a joined venture—many authors sign under their tribal affiliation (e.g. poet Loucheux, from the Yukon Loucheux tribe), which prevents non-Native appropriation and silences anthropological texts, formerly manipulated by academic authorities and field interpreters. Through blendings, in addition, *a double discourse of reconciliation and resistance* is also deployed: of resistance because, besides accusing and reproaching Euroamerican readers, Native poets rarely give them all the basal information (cultural, contextual or subjective) from the generic space, which according to Fauconnier’s theory (1985, 1997) is indispensable to do the metaphorical and metonymic mappings between the input domains--source and target--and thus arrive successfully at the inferences of the blended space. Of reconciliation because they do bridge cognitive rifts by introducing common ground in the source domain to enable outsiders to grasp the concepts in the target one. True, Native American authors may resist to reveal sacred or intimate meanings and practices, to inform about concrete historical events overtly or even to make explicit certain ideological and philosophical tenets (their idea of power, for one, is more often suggested than enunciated), but also resort to shared knowledge and views or Euroamerican referents in the source domain (be they concepts, identifiable discourses or canonical texts in the European tradition), opt for paratextual hints, and intermingle channels (the verbal with the strictly phonic and visual) as interpretative aids. Let us think, for example, of the visual metonymies regularly used by Native women poets to recall the historic battle of Wounded Knee⁶: words like *wound, injure, hurt, scar, blood, knee, battle* and their synonyms and derivatives are placed within a narrow poetic environment to provoke connotation (see Samples 5 and 6, boldface mine). Such environment may depend on syntactic adjacency or on a loose nearness with typographic distances varying from a line or verse to a stanza-span. This kind of metonymies, actually a lateral variant of Lakoff and Johnson’s projection PROXIMITY IS EFFECTUAL FORCE (1980: 170-173) creates ideological collocations with words pertaining to remote semantic domains.

Sample 5

(...)

in **the scars of my knees** you can see

children torn from their families

bludgeoned into government schools

You can see through the pins in my bones

that we are prisoners of a long war

My knee is so badly wounded no one will look at it

The pus of the past oozes from every pore

This infection has gone on for at least 300 years

Our sacred beliefs have been made into pencils

names of cities gas stations

My knee is wounded so badly that I limp constantly

Anger is my crutch I hold myself upright with it

My knee is wounded see How I Am Still Walking

Sample 6

(...)

this bearing witness to
 our rebirth is painful to
 partake in the journey
 is over terrain strewn with
 sharp rocks and my feet
 are covered with open
**wounds my knees well
 scarred**
 there are those who believe
 that our destination has
 been arrived at when we lay
 in the rivers of our own blood
 drowning in front of their
 eyes others still who
 imagine it all to have ended

The confluence of mental spaces tends to reinforce the multivocality/intertextuality inherent to all texts (Bakhtin, 1986; Kristeva, 1980; Tannen, 1989; Fairclough, 1992), for even the most ‘pristine’ Indigenous voices isolated from the rest of civilizations do carry interdiscourses (Tedlock, 2003: 296). In Native American poetry situational irony, intertextuality, interdiscursivity and their intersection—parody, engender a cultural *third space* (Bhabha, 1994) that adopts norms, values, conventions, discourses, identities or practices and releases the tensions between pre- and colonial mentalities. The following parodic instance (Sample 7) connects trickster Coyote’s discourse of comic catharsis, apparently as addictive as drunkenness, with the stereotyped speech openings of Alcoholics Anonymous, alien to tribe members until alcohol wreaked havoc in their communities.

Sample 7

(...)

Being a coyote is not easy. The other night I
 was at a meeting of Coyote Anonymous.
 “Hi! My name is Coyote and I’m a (laugh, laugh)aholic.”

Miming, imitating, stereotyping and parodying the discourses of other communities (in this case the domineering societies’) implies learning to some degree to act like them (Lemke, 2008: 37) and in the Bakhtinian view, an act of appropriation of somebody else’s words, a reformulation that achieves transformation through reporting. Transformation is, by the way, the objective of ceremony and ritual (to favour personal and communal evolution and restore cosmic equilibrium) and hence a key concept in Native American philosophy (Gold, 1994: 3-7; Cáliz-Montoro, 2000: 136-143). It is instantiated by the trickster and other *shape-shifters* in the oral literatures or by the Algonquian and Plains tribes sweat-lodge purifying practices (Versluis, 1993: 10-14), aimed at perpetuating life in general and that of humans in particular by linking the tribe with its mythical origin, both earthly and celestial.

As a textual organizing device, blending mixes different genres or their characteristics (recipes, diary and dictionary entries, letters, the layout and discourse of legal and bureaucratic documents, etc.), switches codes to show cultural hybridization—including Native sociolects like Cree English or Métis Patois, and straddles the poetic conventions of the western tradition (e.g. linear developments, Aristotle's three unities, canonical verse forms, etc.) and the rhetoric of tribal storytelling. The main storytelling resources are fixed opening and closure formulae, circular or regressive topical progressions through sacred pattern numbers, choruses, refrains and accumulative repetition, onomatopoeias and drum-beating rhythms, logical gaps in argumentation, *in medias res* beginnings, and sudden appearances of characters in pan-tribal reverence for the spoken word as an act of creative power. Conceptual blending, in sum, resolves the tensions between the oral and the written, the communal and the personal, the practices of innovation and reproduction, and the functional antagonism between assimilation and differentiation (i.e. between group membership and individual uniqueness) noted by several researchers (Tajfel, 1981: 255; Grad & Martín Rojo, 2007: 12).

2. Conceptual Integration as an Affiliating Pragmatics of Resistance

So far I have contended that blending mirrors Aboriginal values and the colonial experience from a propositional and procedural standpoint. Propositionally it denounces injustices and transmits the tribal ideology, patent in the overarching icon of the trickster, as well as the new female Native identity. Procedurally it is an icon of the cultural and racial miscegenation practiced over the centuries, fosters in-group cohesion, and challenges the asymmetric relationships with the colonizing societies through its oblique discourses and modes of cognition (e.g. tropes, inter-texts, riddles and silences), traditionally used by the Native communities as non-interventionist means of instruction. Let us pay closer attention to this latter facet.

It has been said in passing that the notion of power is not outlined frontally by North-Amerindian poets. From the eight metaphorical projections of power listed by Goatly (2007: 35-87), Native American thought transgresses at least three of them: **ACTIVITY IS MOVEMENT FORWARD**, **GOOD IS PURE/CLEAN/WHITE** and **IMPORTANCE/STATUS IS HIGH**. Concerning the first projection, its complementary reversal (**ADVANCEMENT/ACTIVITY IS MOVING BACKWARD AND FORWARD**) derives from the cyclical conception of time of many Aboriginal peoples and generates the image of a circular trajectory due to the widespread mapping of space onto time across cultures (Radden & Dirven, 2007: 317-332). A (nowadays) pan-tribal embodiment of this philosophical principle is the medicine wheel, originally exclusive to the Plains tribes. It is composed by a circle with an inscribed quaternary division (called the axial or solar cross) standing for the cardinal points, the seasons, the parts of the day, the four winds, the primordial medicines (tobacco, sweetgrass, cedar and sage) and the components of self (intellect, emotion, physicality and spirituality). This cross describes two sub-

trajectories that should be travelled to reach harmony, being necessary to return periodically to the centre every time a new direction is taken. Surprisingly, until the 1990s the writing assignments of reservation schoolchildren across the US tended to be poorly graded by their Euroamerican teachers, not familiarised with the Native rhetoric and mentality. All they perceived was compositions lacking metadiscourse and the classical structure introduction-development-conclusion and abusing regression, personification and allegory (Ramírez Castaneda, 1974; Cooley & Ballenger, 1982). Native American women poets combine linearity and circularity and as a result postulate a necessary return to the past (a “journey backwards” to tradition and the elders’ wisdom) to ensure cultural continuity (the “journey forwards”), as shown in Sample 8, or even do so by transposing the image schema of the medicine wheel onto the verbal message into a tetrameter pattern to capture both the circular trajectory and its straight inner wanderings, as in Sample 9 (my emphasis), whose rhetorical organization and propositional content synergize:

Sample 8

(...)
 this woman that i am becoming
 is a combination of the woman that i am
 and was
 this journey backward will help me
 to walk forward

Sample 9

We remember

Once fish swam
 these great rivers
 once the buffalo roamed
 these plains

We remember

The little Child picked
 blueberries while listening
 to the whispers of the
 cold wind.

We remember

The fine lines
 through the walk of life
 leaving our mark

We remember

The Great One
 who put us here
 and will take us
 back.

The second metaphor (GOOD/CONTROL IS UP) gets debunked in the numerous redefinitions of Native women as snakes, a rung lower than that of humans in the Judeo-Christian Great Chain of Being (Lakoff & Turner, 1989:

170-171; cf. Musolff, 2008: 6-8). Within it the snake conjures up the ideas of imprudence, danger, temptation, sin and evil, while for the holistic Native mentality it is a living token of wisdom and transformation (symbolized by the skin-shedding, see Sample 10), the two North-Amerindian pillars of power. Lastly, the third metaphorical projection, GOOD/PURITY IS WHITE, is reversed by the countless poems synthesizing polarities and praising miscegenation (see Sample 11):

Sample 10

(...)

I am a snake.

I begin to crack.
Shed the old. Slowly peel.
My new head emerges.
Tongue tastes the wind. Caution fills my
every bone. Raw my skin is.

I am a snake.

Vulnerable above and below. Hot rock,
cold rock. Slithering off, slithering in, slithering
down, up, around, away.

I am a snake.

Equivocating tongue.
I see the light. I see the dark.

Sample 11

I am created by a natural bond
between a man and a woman,
but this one, is forever two.
one is white, the Other, red.
a polarity of being, absorbed
as one. I am nature with clarity.

(...)

Conceptual blending plays on implicitness and on a set of rules tacitly shared by the interlocutors. In this light it may be considered a *mediating* practice, a sort of riddle with a crucial pragmatic import for both Natives and non-Natives. Scollon & Scollon (1981: 127) highlight the rootedness of this genre in the Athabascan cultures of Alaska and Northern Canada, where it materializes a “school of no-intervention” in the decoding of meanings⁷. For these tribes, the adoption of essay-like prose would entail an excessive display of knowledge (inclusively taboo) conducive to a crisis of ethnic identity, since they accomplish instruction indirectly. In fact, the tribal narratives they assess as optimum sketch little more than the topic, so that the audience can

contextualize and interpret it according to their own experience. Blendings, like riddles, take much information for granted but also open up a solidary space of intercultural cooperation. Somewhere else (Sancho Guinda, 2008) I have compared their workings with those of a rite of passage, whose phases of separation and ordeal (Jung et al, 1964: 128-136; Harris, 1980: 435-437) require from the individual an initial and temporary expulsion from the community to be put to the test and finally be accepted with a new role or position. In our case, however, there is no clue as to which is the status achieved by the cooperative and successful Euroamerican reader: is it one of full member, of ally, or of mere consented spectator? It does not seem probable that the division in-group/out-group ceases, despite the poetic attempts at political reconciliation.

Another interesting similarity between blendings and riddles is that they admit contradiction and disparity, which links up with the mythic syncretism characteristic of oral societies and the very essence of Native poetry: Hodge and Kress (1979) observe that the oral channel is more tolerant towards contradiction than the written one and their contents are more vividly and easily remembered. The fused oppositions presented here have been stone/feather as metaphors of the feminine and masculine attributes (Sample 1), change or fluidity/immanence (Sample 2), colonial imaginary/tribal ideology (Sample 3), virgin/prostitute (Sample 4), which is a specific realisation of the dichotomy shown by Sample 3, visual/verbal (Samples 5 and 6), trickster discourse/salvation discourse (Sample 7), past/future (Sample 8), Great Chain of Being/holistic mentality (Sample 10), and Native/non-Native (Sample 11).

In Native American women's verse, blends are in the service of vindication and dissemination and branch out into two chief classes: *spatio-temporal* and *personal*. The first class condenses the colonial experience to narrate what happened. The second portrays the *Sister Nations* collective to describe what the new Native American woman is like. Spatio-temporal blendings make use of well-known frameworks (e.g. banks and restaurants in Sample 12) to account for the long centuries of Euroamerican domination and may involve a complex net of semantic operations in the building of meanings. For instance, at the root of the metaphorical mappings between these two source domains (banks and restaurants) and the target colonization features they intend to explicate, are the two (quasi)immediate and metonymic connotations of profit/business and treat/greed, which involve other tropes as well, such as irony, via semantic operations like polysemy (e.g. *reserve/reservation* with its possible interpretations as banishment territory, moral objection, table booking, aged quality wine, or a kept-back turn for future revenge), politeness moves expected within the given framework (e.g. *bon appétit* at the end of the meal, here wishing the guest an indigestion), or near-homography (e.g. dessert/desert—many Indian reservations are barren or desert lands). Figure 1 shows the intricate web of semantic premises implied in the poem and collected in the generic space, the trope mappings between the input domains (solid arrows), the multiple conceptual projections between mental spaces (dotted lines), and the decoding deductions made from all the above, itemized as propositional content in the blend space. Notice how the European frameworks are phrased in an Amerindian chant-like cyclical pattern, slightly varying its refrain.

Sample 12

Shamon you,
dipping into the bank of our culture
with no collateral,
no mortgage.

Shamon you,
borrowing against your fantasy
of who you want us to be.

Shamon. You.
with slight of mind
and twist of tongue
invents, invests,
in corporate white lies.

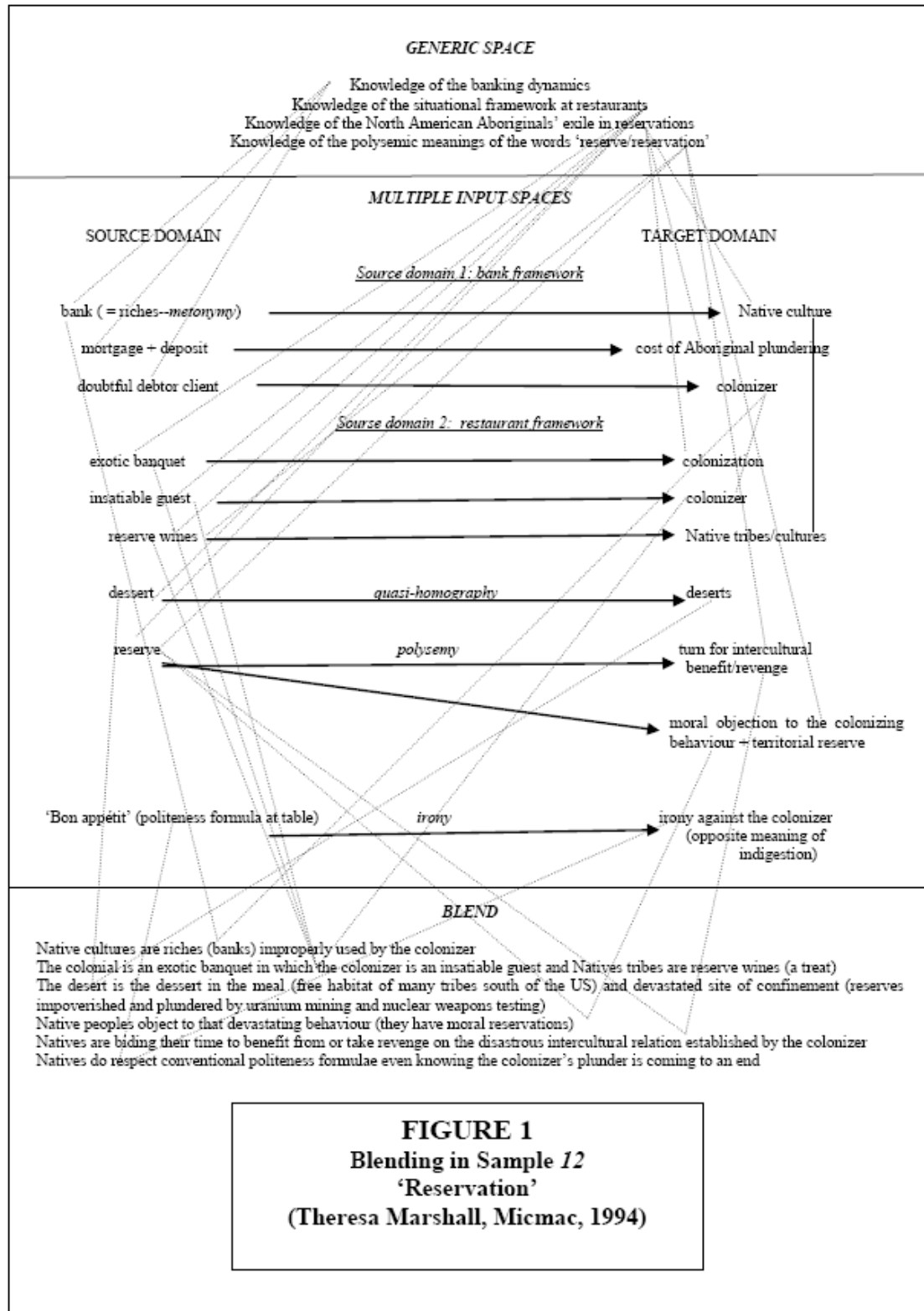
Shamon. You,
in the cardboard headdress
with the plastic drum
chanting in tongues not your own.

Shamon. You,
At a table for two
Feeding on the exotic.
Something rare, under glass,
With a vintage reserve: a Beothuk, a Natchez,
A Mohican or some Tobacco perhaps?

Shamon you
with the silver spoon
stained with greed,
lifting centuries of denial into your belly,
spitting out the undigestable morsels of reality,
banging on the table for your just deserts.
We have some reservation.

Bon appétit.

To illustrate personal blendings, let us analyse the intense verses by Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna-Pueblo-Sioux), which claim to recover the ancient notion of ‘two-spiritedness’ (i.e. double gender roles, homosexuality and bisexuality normally fulfilling shamanic purposes in Native communities) and rid of the homophobia instilled by the European conquest. In her poem, and on the grounds of their experiences of marginalization and prosecution, Allen equates the plight of the lesbian collectivity with that suffered by the Indian cultures in a double metonymy of the schema *whole-for-part-for-whole* that stresses the common feature of oppressed minority (see Sample 13, its metonymic representation in Figure 2 and its conceptual integration diagram in Figure 3).



Sample 13

i have it in my mind that
dykes are indians

they're a lot like indians
they used to live as tribes
they owned tribal land
it was called the earth

they were massacred
lots of times
they always came back
like the grass
like the clouds
they got massacred again

(...)

because they gather together
(...)

like indians
dykes are fewer and fewer

(...)

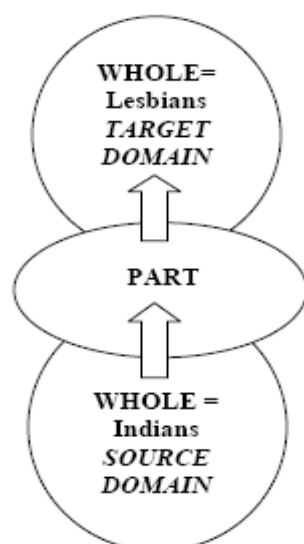


FIGURE 2
Metonymy 'Dykes are Indians'
from 'Some like Indians Endure'
(Paula Gunn Allen, Laguna-
Pueblo, 1988)
**PART = feature of oppressed
minority**

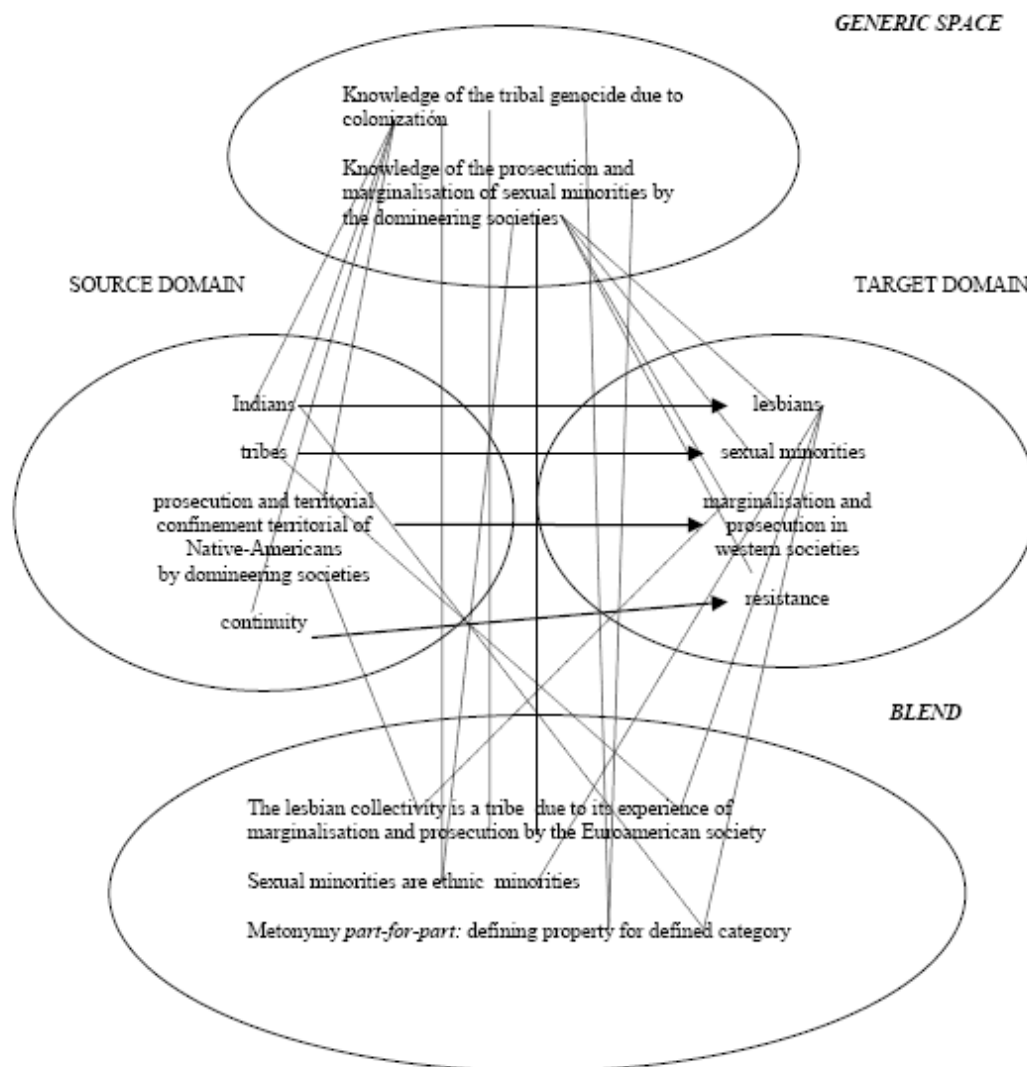


FIGURE 3
Blending in Sample 13
‘Some like Indians Endure’
(Paula Gunn Allen, Laguna-Pueblo, 1988)

The entire blending process (see Figure 3 above) calls for the previous knowledge of two consequences of colonialism: the Indigenous decimation in North America and the prosecution of sexual minorities by European-based societies. Input domain mappings permit the blended schemas **SEXUAL MINORITIES ARE ETHNIC MINORITIES** and **LESBIANS ARE A TRIBE**, which draw on the *pars-pro-pars* metonymy **DEFINING PROPERTY FOR DEFINED CATEGORY**. Through conceptual blending, Native American women writers choose, mix and match values, traits, conventions, practices and discourses as collective and self-descriptors without serving the interests of power and social institutions, which is the core message of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Blends actually make up a counter-colonial pedagogy directed to Natives and non-Natives and complement the

profusion of plain predicative sentences used by female Native authors in interviews and appendices within collective poetic anthologies. Here are some instances:

I am a Coeur d'Alene tribal member living for the first time as an adult on my ancestral land.

(Janet Campbell Hale, Coeur d'Alene, in Harjo & Bird, 1997: 123)

I am a Métis from Saskatchewan presently living in Calgary. My mother's tribe is Plains Cree. I am a poet.

(Aice Lee, Métis-Plains Cree, in Harjo & Bird, 1997: 186)

I am an Arapaho, a woman of the Blue Sky People, a nation from long ago.

(Debra Calling Thunder, Arapaho, in Harjo & Bird, 1997: 292)

I am a Cherokee mother and grandmother.

(Wilma Mankiller, Cherokee, in Harjo & Bird, 1997: 397)

I am a drummer, composer, performer, teacher and mother.

(Carolyn Brandy, Cherokee, in Harjo & Bird, 1997: 502)

I am an author and economist and activist.

(Winona LaDuke, Ojibwa, in Brant, 1984: 236)

I am thirty, a lesbian, a writer of short stories and poems.

(Kateri Sardella, Micmac, in Brant, 1984: 237)

In all of these individual autobiographical extracts, community and history are also at stake: these writers define their selfhood incorporating identifications such as tribe membership, gender, sexual orientation, kinship, lifestyle or family roles, which are definitely collective categories. Private and public spaces coalesce. What is more, their similar discourses exhibit an essentialist tone applied even to the expression of activities (e.g. write poetry and stories, compose, perform), so that *doing* is expressed in terms of *being*. Jenkins (1996: 17) remarks that the conjunction of being and becoming is key to any identification, and Sample 8 is a clear reflection of this thought. Identities, he goes on to remind us (1996: 121, 123), are not immutable, and as one of them, ethnicity is also capable of change over time, although routinely its identifications tend to distil some sense of persistence and stability. Further, the formal, discursive similarity of the above examples is an umbrella for their differences in content, since communal ties aggregate rather than integrate (Barth, 1981: 12, 79-81) and identity depends on the interplay of similarity and difference, which should be thought about together (Jenkins, 1996: 22, 137).

Whether by means of open predicative sentences or through more or less unnoticed conceptual blends, Native American women poets realize an identificatory practice of their *Sister Nations*: like any other community it is imaginary (Anderson, 1983: 23-24) but is brought into being the very moment its members acknowledge its existence and feel a sense of shared belonging, which can take many forms. For example, by talking about it, a practice that after all is a *public doing* (Jenkins, 1996: 138), a production and reproduction of shared symbols. Let us not forget that the community is a symbolic rather

than a structural construct (Cohen, 1985: 98) and shared symbols allow its members to believe they see or understand things differently. The nominal descriptor *Sister Nations* is in itself a symbol of the centrality of kin and of women in Native societies and of the lost sovereignty. There is still another possible reading of conceptual integration in the present context: apart from complementing frontal ascription, it may give a glimpse of the fears and desires of *Sister Nations*' members—decisive in the configuration of identity, according to Lemke (2008: 26-28). Fear of invisibility (be it becoming racially diluted as a result of constant miscegenation, of homophobic prosecution, or wiped out by the colonizers' greed—figuratively gobbled up as food in a restaurant) coexists with a strong and urgent longing for transformation in the in-group and the out-group: a need to leave the colonial ideology behind and regain the influencing roles of women and *two-spirited* people within Indigenous communities.

3. Sociological Implications of BT in Identity Construction

Communities are mental constructs (Anderson, 1983; Jenkins, 1996) and cognition has been widely recognized as fundamental to identification and categorisation (Jenkins, 1996; van Dijk, 1998 and 2003; Brubaker, 2004), always ideological and symbolic (Cohen, 1985) and inherently political (Barth, 1969). All these facts and approaches support the idea that conceptual blending must play a critical role in the construction of collective identity, which has been evidenced by former research in CDA emphasizing its importance in the negative categorisation of out-groups. By examining the cognitive underpinnings in the verses of Native North-American women, the point made here, however, has been that blends are also vital in collective self-definition, operating at three macro-semantic levels (ideational, interpersonal and textual), transmitting both propositional and procedural information, and carrying out pedagogical, vindicating, conciliatory and cohesive functions through personal and spatio-temporal projections.

In effect, blending helps to encapsulate tribal philosophy (the discourse of the trickster and the syncretism of creation myths), circulates newly-coined in-group identities (those of contemporary Native women) and raises awareness of oppression harking back to the colonizer's imagery and instructing on colonial injustices present and past. It is a strategy for cultural survival since it selects values and codes with which to build symbolic repertoires and discourses that keep members united. It also unfolds a dual pragmatics of affiliation and resistance that lays bridges for reconciliation with the Euroamerican society by emphasizing common ground and asking for cooperation in the decodification of meanings, but omitting cultural contextualizations. This hinders interpretation and launches Euroamerican readers into a figurative rite of passage that provisionally inverts power relationships, being precisely such subversion one of the reasons why blendings are preferred to more straightforward means like literal expressions, similes and analogies. Others are their non-interventionism as teaching tools, in accordance with tribal idiosyncrasy, and their agglutination of tropes (metaphor, metonymy, irony, and hyperbole) and modes of

cognition (acoustic, visual, verbal), reminiscent of the trickster discourse and of ritual and traditional storytelling.

All throughout this article (communal) identity has been regarded as a dynamic process to be negotiated and articulated through language, a result of positioning oneself to others, dialogically relating their own contributions to previous ones (Fairclough, 2003: 160, 205-206). It has also been assumed that if processes of domination usually take place by imposing and internalising images (Grad & Martín Rojo, 2008: 22, in line with the work of van Dijk, Charteris-Black, Goatly, Chilton or Dawkins' meme theory), their reversal may too be implemented via representations. Finally, the whole study invokes the first principle of social constructivism: groups are real if people think they are. As social, discursive and textual practices in Fairclough's sense (1992: 73)⁸, the verses analysed here allow Native American women to behave according to that belief and, in so doing, construct Sister Nation's reality.

- ¹ Following the definition by Bloor and Bloor (2007: 9-10), I consider *Sister Nations* a *discourse community* insofar as it makes explicit its common goals and agrees on its means of interaction to organize knowledge through speech and other semiotic practices. This concept extends the notion of *speech community* formulated by former scholars (Gumperz, 1962: 101 and 1982: 24; Hymes, 1972: 54-55, Silvestertein, 1996: 285 or Duranti, 1997: 122, to cite some) because it is no longer restricted to face-to-face interaction. For all the aforementioned authors, in any case, a discourse/speech community need not be co-extensive with a language community and its boundaries are essentially social rather than linguistic, although internal variations—dialectal or of another sort—may occur (Labov, 1972: 120-121). In this regard, *Sister Nations* is a heterogeneous multilingual (heteroglossic) body whose discourses range from monolingualism (texts written or told only in vernacular languages or in Standard English), to bilingualism (in glosses, translations and parallel versions) and creolization (e.g. *Cree English* and *Métis Patois*). Consequently, paratextual control is a tactic commonly employed to subvert power relationships after having been silenced by the Euroamerican society for over five hundred years.
- ² Far from relying (solely) on racial attributes or *blood quanta* and legal factors, which may vary considerably across tribes, *Sister Nations'* membership criteria revolve around voluntary affiliation, lax genealogical and cultural standards, and a shared colonial experience aggravated by gendered subordination. Its ethnic identity is thus a matter of personal choice that along with the historical and sexual dimensions merges sub-tribal, tribal, supra-tribal/regional and supra-tribal/national features, but must nonetheless be fully endorsed by the community. The group identity resulting from all these variables is necessarily multiple, relational, processual, and highly politicized (Howard, 2000: 386-387).
- ³ The distinction between in-group (in our case *Sister Nations*) and out-group (here the colonizing Euroamerican societies) has been borrowed from van Dijk (1998: 161). In-group discourses highlight the nuances of *difference*, *deviation*, *transgression* and *threat* posed by the out-group (van Dijk, 2003: 56-58).
- ⁴ Let us remember the three interrelated semantic metafunctions of language proposed by Halliday (1978: 128): *ideational* (i.e. the transmission of propositional content), *interpersonal* (the establishment of relationships with the participants in a given communicative event) and *textual* (the organization of the message in terms of coherence, cohesion and format).

- 5 The term *postcolonial* continues fuelling a long-standing scholarly controversy: critics such as Helen Hoy (2001: 5) point to its inaccuracy to describe the current Indigenous situation since colonization still persists, and postulate its substitution by *de-colonial*, exclusively centered on the political and socio-cultural struggle.
- 6 The massacre at Wounded Knee (Pine Ridge reservation, South Dakota, 1890) ended the wars between whites and Plains Indians. Contrarily to what is thought, it was not a battle but a fortuitous incident that caused 146 casualties among the Sioux, who were surrounded by the Seventh Cavalry Regiment on their way to a voluntary exile led by chief Big Foot.
- 7 Scollon and Scollon (1981: 127) point out that Athabascans prefer silence to conversation and writing if they don't know their interlocutors well. Their anti-exhibitionist attitude clashes with that of Euroamericans, in their eyes much too talkative and conceited, always ready to disclose their fruitful biographies.
- 8 As a social practice, Sister Nations' poetry reinforces in-group bonds and ideology, vents injustices and maintains media presence. As a discursive practice, it limits non-Native participation in its rite-of-passage dynamics and controls editorial diffusion. As a textual practice, it reconciles with the mainstream societies by means of dialogue, a decoding cooperation (e.g. in riddle-like blendings) and solidary spaces (e.g. inter-texts and inter-discourses), but also denies cultural information and challenges colonial representations.

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Poetic Samples

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Sample 2

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Sample 3

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Sample 4

Dumont, Marilyn (Cree-Métis) (1996). Still Unsaved Soul. *A Really Good Brown Girl*. London, Ontario: Brick Books, 53.

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Sample 6

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Sample 7

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Sample 8

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Sample 9

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Sample 10

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Sample 11

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Sample 12

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