

Alter-Native Nations And Narrations in the Work of DeWitt Clinton Duncan (Too-qua-stee), Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) and E. Pauline Johnson

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Article Abstract

In this essay, the ways in which the concept of nationhood is reinforced and negotiated in Native American writing and oral tradition is examined. As among other nations, Indigenous literature, both oral and written, plays a significant role in negotiating Indigenous nationhood, which, in the late nineteenth century, has already been severely shattered by colonialism. This literary oriented essay includes a poem by Cherokee DeWitt Clinton Duncan (Too-qua-stee) called "A Dead Nation" (1899), a short story by Wahpeton Sioux Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) called "A War Maiden" (1906) and a short story by Mohawk E. Pauline Johnson called "My Mother" (1913).

Nations, nationalism and narration in both oral and written forms are closely linked occurrences in all societies. In this essay, the concept of nationhood is analyzed for ways in which it is reinforced and negotiated in Native American stories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The turn of the century is the focus for a number of reasons. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Native American literature in a written form had established itself around several writers. Furthermore, Aboriginal nations in North America were faced

with an accelerating intrusion of colonialism in the forms of economic exploitation of Aboriginal territories, industrialization and assimilation (or even extermination) policies of the states. This radical transition caused a vast range of social, cultural, economic and political problems that still exist in many ways in Aboriginal communities. In Native American literature, this (mal)development created at least two types of texts: those which expressed the distress and concern over the future of the particular people and nation, and those which consciously emphasized the need for a struggle and resistance against colonization.

Most people understand the term “nation” as being a modern Western or European concept – particularly in relation to the concept of a nation-state. There is, however, a clear distinction between nations and states. Cherokee scholar Ward Churchill notes:

[t]here is a rough consensus among analysts of virtually all ideological persuasions that a nation consists of any body of people, independent of its size, who are bound together by a common language and set of cultural beliefs, possessed of a defined or definable land base sufficient to provide an economy, and evidencing the capacity to govern themselves. A state, on the other hand, is a particular form of centralized and authoritarian sociopolitical organization. Many or perhaps most nations are not and have never been organized in accordance with the statist model. Conversely, only a handful of the world’s states are or have ever really been nations in their own right (most came into being and are maintained through the coerced amalgamation of several nations). Hence, although the term *state* has come to be employed as a virtual synonym for *nation* in popular usage – the membership of the United Nations, for example, is composed entirely of states – the two are not interchangeable. (18-19)

Although the concept of a nation in the modern sense is fairly new, Aboriginal peoples in North America (as well as in other parts of the world) were organized in politically autonomous structures with sovereign control over their territories prior to European contact. European colonization and settlement eroded this autonomy and transferred substantial control over land and lives to the governments of the newly established states (Fleras and Elliott 24). Furthermore, Aboriginal peoples of North America were treated as independent nations by the first colonists (Fleras and Elliott 25). According to Churchill:

[t]here can be no question but that the indigenous peoples of North America existed as fully self-sufficient, self-governing, and independent nations prior to commencement of the European invasions. Nor can there be any real doubt as to whether the European powers were aware of this from the outset. Beginning almost the moment Columbus set foot in this hemisphere, Spanish jurists like Franciscus de Vitoria

were set to hammering out theories describing the status of those peoples encountered in the course of Iberian expeditions to the “New World,” the upshot being a conclusion that “the aborigines undoubtedly had dominion both public and private matters, just like Christians.” The diplomats and legal scholars of England, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands shortly followed suit in acknowledging that Native peoples constituted inherent sovereigns. (19)

Aboriginal nations consider their nationhoods – or their existence as a distinct people – as deriving from the beginning of time. The Sto:lo nation in British Columbia, for instance, states that “[s]overeignty including Aboriginal Title and Rights is a gift of the Creator to the people of the First Nations. This sovereignty has never been given up” (Sto:lo 31). The Aboriginal understanding of nationhood or sovereignty as a gift of the Creator is also expressed in the Declaration of the First Nations by the Joint Council of the National Indian Brotherhood, according to which “[t]he Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination. The rights and responsibilities given to us by the Creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation” (cited in Cassidy 323-4). Thus, it is possible to suggest that the “foundational fictions”¹ of Aboriginal peoples are to be found in each nation’s oral tradition and particularly in their stories of creation. Creek-Cherokee scholar Craig S. Womack stresses that “[s]overeignty is inherent as an intellectual idea in Native cultures, a political practice, and a theme of oral traditions; and the concept, as well as the practice, predates European contact” (51).

Native American narrations of nation at the turn of the last century cannot be considered in terms of new, emerging nations as was the case in many other parts of the world, but in terms of the negotiation of the status of Aboriginal peoples known as “nations within.”² The oral traditions and writings of Aboriginal peoples cannot be considered as “nation formation” or an adjustment of European models in the same sense as in Latin America in the nineteenth century. These nations already existed, although gradually, the ideology of imperialism and colonialism eroded the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty. Rather, since the beginning of colonization, the literature (both oral and written) of Aboriginal peoples has had a significant role in defending and maintaining cultural values against intrusion, assimilation and racism. As Craig S. Womack notes:

Native literature, and Native literary criticism, written by Native authors, is part of sovereignty: Indian people exercising the right to present images of themselves and to discuss those images... The ongoing expression of a tribal voice, through imagination, language, and literature, contributes to keeping sovereignty alive in the citizens of a nation and gives sovereignty a meaning that is defined within the tribe rather than by external sources. (14)

Thus, this article considers how Native literature of this period expresses nationhood and how it re-confirms and re-constructs the nationhood that has been shattered by colonialism. In other words, this essay examines the kinds of allegories that chosen texts use to elaborate the nationhood, the core elements of the text, and the ways in which the elements are used to enhance the nationhood.

Methodological Framework and Literary Material

Outside research conducted by indigenous peoples themselves, the “indigenous nationalism” and indigenous peoples’ concept of a nation are neglected topics even within more recent approaches and theories such as cultural and postcolonial studies. Some research has been conducted on ways in which the narrative and visual images of indigenous peoples are incorporated in the political rhetoric of an emerging nationalist ideology. This seems to be the case particularly in Latin America (e.g., Muratorio 1993, Hilbert 1997). Consequently, the ways in which indigenous peoples themselves have incorporated images of “nation-consolidation” in their literature are not widely considered, even the study of “ethnonationalism,” which, according to Stanley J. Tambiah (1996), is a recent phenomenon against the centralizing policies of the nation-state. Other critical approaches of nationalism³ may not discuss nationalism in relevant terms for indigenous peoples. In the academic discourse, the nation formation is most often seen within the scope of states.

Because of the different perspectives of the concept of nation, the conceptual framework of this essay is also slightly different from the framework of the Western narrations of nation (thus the title “alternative narrations of nation”). This does not mean that there are no commonalities between Western and Aboriginal narrations of nation.

The framework of this study applies an “indigenous paradigm,” a perspective and framework of concepts based upon indigenous peoples’ systems of knowledge and cultural practices.⁴ The aim of such a paradigm is to recognize the validity and relevance of indigenous people’s methodologies and theoretical practices. The basic characteristic of indigenous research is its commitment to indigenous peoples’ common aspirations and that it cannot stay aloof from the other operating processes within indigenous peoples’ communities. A conscious attempt to ground research on indigenous perspectives has emerged from the recognition that until recently, indigenous people have been excluded from discourses concerning and analyzing their own cultures (Womack 5).

The corpus of my work includes a poem by Cherokee teacher, attorney, translator and writer DeWitt Clinton Duncan (Too-qua-stee) called “A Dead Nation” (1899), a short story by Wahpeton Sioux writer and spokesman Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) called “A War Maiden” (1906) and a short story by Mohawk writer and actress E. Pauline Johnson called “My Mother” (1913).

Definitions of the Nation

Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community. According to him, the nation is imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the communion” (15). In his view, the nation is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign: as limited “because even the largest of them ... has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations”; as sovereign “because the concept was born in the age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” and finally, as a 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 16).

Although Anderson discusses the concept of the nation within the Western framework, some of his tenets may hold true also in Native American context such as his argument of nation’s imagination. There are also some evident differences, such as Native American nations not being born out of the destruction of some previously existing mode of governance. Sovereignty or nationhood was regarded as a gift from the Creator and something that came into existence alongside the creation of the particular people. On the other hand, it is clear that indigenous peoples not only of North America but everywhere on the globe have constituted and continue to constitute nations even according to the strictest definitions of the term based on the international law of nations⁵ (Churchill, *Struggle for the Land*, 19).

Despite the validity of Anderson’s definition, it is important to ask whether it is meaningful to discuss Native American nations as imagined communities. Arif Dirlik notes:

[i]n academic circles engrossed with postmodernity/postcoloniality as conditions of the present, it is almost a matter of faith these days that nations are “imagined,” traditions are “invented,” subjectivities are slippery (if they exist at all), and cultural identities are myths. Claims to the contrary are labeled “essentialisms” and are dismissed as perpetuations of hegemonic constructions of the world. (73-74)

Dirlik suggests that under circumstances where “Indian” identity is determined by the blood quantum, cultural identity “is not a matter of ‘identity politics’ but a condition of survival, and its implications may be grasped only by references to structures of power” (81). For him, there is a difference between essentialist notions of identity promoted by states in order to create a place in a global structure of political and economic power and “an indigenous identity that may be essential to survival as a social and cultural identity against the deprivations of power” (81). In a similar fashion, it can be argued that under

circumstances where the existence of Aboriginal nations is threatened in many ways, relativistic discussion of “imagined communities” may not be appropriate and the nationhood is not a matter of imagination but a condition of survival as a people, which includes maintaining the language and distinct cultural values and practices.

Yet as a more recent phenomenon, Native American nationalism is increasingly influenced by Western forms of nationalism and shares some elements with it. Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle note that “[t]he idea of peoplehood, of nationality, has gradually been transformed over the past two centuries into a new idea, one derived primarily from the European heritage, and with a singular focus distinct from old Indian culture and traditions” (12). This does not mean, however, that land has lost its primary status in the Native American discourse. Land is still considered the contest in which the other forms have been created (12).

Furthermore, if we define sovereignty, identity and land, as the main foci of nationalistic ideology (Alfred 87), it is clear that both Native and Western nationalism share a common basis. This is also reflected in the literature: it is possible to suggest that some of the Native American writings of the early twentieth century, for instance, use heterosexual love and marriage as an allegory of a nation in the same way as some Latin American “foundational fictions.” The relationship with land can also be considered as a political allegory for nation-consolidation. While in the Western context the nation and land in particular are often symbolized by a female figure, citizenship has typically been represented as masculine (Higonnet 160). In the Aboriginal context, land often is referred to as “Mother Earth” and the citizens of the land as children of Mother Earth. As in the Western tradition, central to Native American nationalistic writing is the creation of the sense of past and antiquity. This is evident especially in the way that creation stories are incorporated into the contemporary writings of present social and political realities of Aboriginal peoples.

DeWitt Clinton Duncan (Too-qua-stee): “A Dead Nation”

DeWitt Clinton Duncan (Too-qua-stee, 1829-1909) was born at Dahlonega in the eastern Cherokee Nation in Georgia. He served his nation in various capacities: as an attorney, teacher of English, Latin and Greek and translator of the Cherokee laws. He also undertook writing a linguistic analysis of the Cherokee language. In the early 1880s, Duncan started to write for Cherokee newspapers and became well-known particularly for numerous letters under the pen name Too-qua-stee. The predominant subject of these letters is the United States’ attack upon the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation (Littlefield Jr. and Parins 30). His long poem “A Dead Nation,” written in English, is a bitter lament about the contact with Europeans and the destruction that followed. The poem can also be read as an angry, sarcastic comment on how European civilization eventually

reflected what the Europeans thought about the Natives, that they were barbaric savages who destroyed the Cherokee nation.

In the nineteenth century, several legislative measures by the state drastically influenced the Cherokee nation. In 1830, the state of Georgia passed a law to prevent the Cherokee nation from operating under their own constitution. The constitution articulated the Cherokee nation to be a free and independent nation, not a tribe. This law was the final step in a process of intrusion by the state to force the Cherokee to surrender their right to self-government. The next year, another attempt to define the status of the Cherokee and other Native nations was made. Chief Justice John Marshall elaborated the concept "domestic dependent nations" which recognizes the distinct, independent political status of the Native nations concluding that "a weak state, in order to provide for its safety, may place itself under the protection of one more powerful, without stripping itself of the right of government, and ceasing to be a state" (cited in Deloria Jr. and Lytle 17).

In 1830, the federal government passed the Removal Act which forced 17,000 Cherokee on a 1500-mile march to Indian Territory, known as the Trail of Tears. Along the march, 4000 Cherokee died (Awiakta 44). In 1887, the U.S. government passed the General Allotment Act (known also as the Dawes Act) by which traditional Aboriginal forms of collective land ownership were unilaterally abolished in favor of a "more advanced" system of individual ownership. It was a classic example of assimilationist policy and the first piece of legislation explicitly intended to destroy indigenous social organization (Fleras and Elliott 144). Each individual listed on the official roll was allotted a parcel of land, after which the remaining territory was declared surplus and made available to non-Native settlers, allocated to railroads and other corporations or reclaimed to federal parks, forests and military bases. The little land that was left to each Native nation was insufficient to provide economic sustenance and even less to accommodate future population increase (Churchill 26-7). This act also linked blood quantum to entitlement to land and federal services. Cherokee writer Marilou Awiakta contemplates: "Break up the land. Break up the tribal system. Break up the family. The strategy succeeded brilliantly in both geography and politics" (105).

In the backdrop of these measures, the outraged and lamenting tone of Duncan's poem is understandable. The main theme of the poem is to show the treacherous, horrendous acts committed by Europeans against the Cherokee. The representation of the arriving Europeans reaches the limits of repulsion with words such as entrails, pestilence, rot, blast of contagious breath and worms of greed. The first stanza of the poem gives an introduction to the theme: *Alas! poor luckless nation, thou art dead! At last! and death ne'er came 'neath brighter bows! Of flattering hope; upon thine ancient head! hath late-time treason dealt its treacherous blows.* The poem is laden with complex metaphors of both the Cherokee's land and the arriving colonizers: *Brighter bows*, for instance, refer

to the ships with which the Europeans arrived and *thine ancient head* to the Cherokee nation.

The poem consists of twelve stanzas, each having four verses. The second stanza describes “the beginning of time” when the land rose from the sea and the Cherokee were the *first to tread the new-born world; a hand/Divine had given it thee thy restful seat*. The third stanza, which recounts the deathly, violent history of Europe, leads the poem to the fourth stanza where the Europeans brought the same destruction to the Cherokee although *in rouge and ribbons dressed*. The poem continues by describing the white men’s maneuvering and killing the Cherokee, destroying their systems of truth and morality: *Wrenched off the hinges from the joints of truth*. The eighth and ninth stanza have some distinctively ironic undertones when portraying the Europeans as follows:

Thus rotting Pestilence, and Art, and Might,
In moonlight orgies o’er thy children’ bones,
To honor civilization, hands unite
And dance the music of their dying groans.

’Twas civ’lization, (said to be,) at work,
To proselyte thy sons to ways of grace;
With savage means, the rifle, sword and dirk,
To slaughter night, that day might have a place.

Europeans are portrayed as rotting pestilence who, in the nighttime, celebrate their victories over dead bodies. They are supposed to be honouring the civilization, which accompanied them, yet in fact, their behaviour is more barbaric and savage than civilized. If the poem gives a loathsome portrayal of the Europeans, it also sarcastically criticizes those Cherokee who accepted the arrival of the colonizers: *They said, they aped the white man’s heartless ways, And tore the breast that nursed them into life*. Here there is also a reference to the Cherokee relationship with land, which considers the earth the nursing mother and human beings, its children.

The poem’s structure and use of language are very conventional. For instance, the entire poem uses a strict rhyme scheme and form-line stanza to make references to ancient civilizations of Rome and Greece as well as to Socrates and Jesus Christ. Particularly the end of the poem (*Thy room to civilization hadst to give/And so did Socrates and Jesus Christ*) leaves the reader perplexed: is it supposed to be understood as highly sarcastic criticism or as the outcry of a hopeless, beaten nation? Whatever the interpretation, one might suggest that the particular use of language and the verse form could be a conscious literary strategy of resistance: mimicry of the dominant, European poetic style. On the other hand, however, we have to bear in mind that in the nineteenth century, when Native Americans started to write poetry in English, most of it was based on the models to which they had been exposed in their formal education (Wiget 57).

In the poem, the envisaged future of the Cherokee nation is bleak. It is overloaded with death-derived words, indicating the devastating situation of the Cherokee nation at the turn of the century. One could say even that the profuse portrayal of the devastation and the barbaric character of the colonial settlers is a conscious strategy to make the Cherokee aware of their situation and thus unite them to struggle for a better future although I think this is unlikely. In my view, it is more likely that the desired readership of the poem are the non-Cherokee politicians, intellectuals and the like – perhaps that is why the particular form and style – in order that they realize how their actions are destroying the Cherokee.

If Benedict Anderson sees a nation as a modern concept claiming antiquity, in “Dead Nation,” it is almost the opposite. The concept of the nation for the Cherokee is not modern but it precedes colonialism. Even if it claims antiquity, it certainly does not do it for the sake of a promising, better future. Like many nationalistic writings however, it concentrates on the theme of death. Homi Bhabha discusses the concept of death in nation building, although in different terms from Duncan’s poem. For Bhabha, one has to kill the past in order to build a future (Bhabha 1990). Themes of death and violence can also be found in Latin American “foundational fictions” such as in Sarmiento’s *Facundo* (1845), where violence functions as a founding myth of the nation. By killing the unwelcome constituents of a nation, the ideal circumstances can be achieved. This is not, however, the case in Duncan’s poem. In the nineteenth century, it was actually the United States who desired to get rid of objectionable, problematic segments of the new nation-state. Although violence and death are central themes in “Dead Nation,” they are destructive forces of the Cherokee nation rather than its founding myths.

In *Facundo*, the framework of civilization and barbarism⁶ also resemble that of Duncan’s “Dead Nation.” In both works, barbarism is seen as a threat to the nation; in *Facundo*, it is a threat for the process of building a new nation, in “Dead Nation,” for the existence of an old nation. While in Duncan’s poem the barbarians are the Europeans, in *Facundo* they are the opposite: the “Indians” and *gauchos*. Or perhaps “civilization” in “Dead Nation” is a pejorative term like in Mohawk writer Beth Brant’s story “The Long Story” (in *Mohawk Trail*, 1985). Janice Gould notes how “civilization” or “civilized” is loaded with irony not only in Brant’s story but in many other stories by Native Americans: “Civilization for American Indians has meant near annihilation, or at least psychic, emotional, and cultural violence as many tribes experienced genocidal policies of removal, assimilation, and acculturation through the erosion and evasion of treaty obligations” (36).

Charles A. Eastman: “The War Maiden” (1906)

Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa, 1858-1938) was born in the Sioux nation (Wahpeton Sioux) near Redwood Falls, Minnesota where he was raised by his

grandmother and uncle. At the age of 15, his father brought Ohiyesa to live with him at Flandreau, South Dakota where he was given the Christian name Charles. He received his education at Dartmouth College and Boston University School of Medicine. He had a significant position as a spokesman and a leader of Native people and also achieved considerable recognition for his literary work, which includes autobiographical novels, collections of short stories and a collection of traditional narratives in collaboration with his wife, Elaine Eastman (Allen 312).

Eastman's short story "The War Maiden" is an account of a woman's bravery. In the beginning of his collection of short stories, *Old Indian Days*, Eastman dedicates "these Stories of the Old Indian Life, and especially of the Courageous and Womanly Indian Woman, to my Daughters." In Paula Gunn Allen's view, this is perhaps in commemoration of the women of Wounded Knee where, in 1890, 300 unarmed, hungry Minneconjou and Hunkpapa Sioux were surrounded and murdered by the U.S. Cavalry. Dr. Eastman, serving as the government doctor at Pine Ridge Agency at the time, was one of the first to investigate the scene (41).

The "War Maiden" is an oral account in a written form: the story starts by telling about the old man named Smoky Day, the best-known storyteller and historian of his people, who told the story in question to Eastman. The main character of the story is a young, beautiful and brave woman, Makátah, the daughter of the head chief, Tamákoche, a notable warrior, a hunter and a feast-maker. Tamákoche also had three sons whom he lost in battle. Makátah grows up "listening to the praises of the brave deeds of her brothers" and "[t]hus even as a child she loved the thought of war" ("War Maiden" 43). As she grows into womanhood she becomes so beautiful that people talk about her even in the neighbouring Sioux villages. Although many handsome young warriors ask for her hand, she does not care to marry. She has only two aspirations: "to prove to her father that, though only a maid, she had the heart of a warrior [and] ... to visit the graves of her brothers – that is, the country of the enemy" ("War Maiden," 43).

Among Makátah's many suitors, there are two particular young men: Red Horn, something of a leader among the young men and a vain, persistent and determined suitor, and Little Eagle, an orphan and a poor young man, modest, unknown and unproved as a warrior. One day it is announced that the neighbouring Cut-Head Sioux are organizing an attack upon the Crows. Makátah immediately wants to join the battle, asking first her male cousins if they are intending to go, then her father. Reluctantly, her father lets her go, crying and chanting a war song.

After all traditional customs and preparations, the warriors set forth for the battle, which turns out to be a long and hard one. The Crows outnumber the Sioux and soon they make a counterattack:

The Sioux retreated, and the slaughter was great. The Cut-Heads fled womanlike, but the people of Tamákoche fought gallantly to the very last. Makátah remained with her father's people. Many cried out to her, "Go back! Go back!" but she paid no attention. She carried no weapon throughout the day – nothing but her coupstaff – but by the presence and her cries of encouragement or praise she urged on the men to deeds of desperate valor. ("War Maiden," 48)

Finally, the Sioux are forced to retreat and Makátah has to follow the others. Her pony is tired and she falls farther and farther behind. Many of her suitors pass her, not attempting to help her but to save their own lives. Red Horn passes her too, not even looking at her. It is Little Eagle who urges her to take his horse. Once he has sent Makátah back to the Sioux camp, he takes her pony and returns to the battlefield. Although the remaining warriors are small in number, under the leadership of Little Eagle, they make a victorious counterattack, which forces the Crows to retreat. The story continues: "It was this famous battle which drove that warlike nation, the Crows, to go away from the Missouri and to make their home up the Yellowstone River and in the Bighorn country. But many of our men fell, and among them the brave Little Eagle" ("War Maiden," 49).

The story ends at the evening of the great battle, when the Sioux have gathered about their campfires. Suddenly, a loud cry of a woman interrupts everybody: Makátah is mourning as widows do: "Publicly, with many tears, she declared herself the widow of the brave Little Eagle, although she had never been his wife! He it was, she said with truth, who had saved her people's honor and her life at the cost of his own. He was a true man!" ("War Maiden," 50). Makátah lives a long life and remains true to her vow: she never marries and throughout her life, she is known as the widow of the brave Little Eagle.

The symbolic union that Makátah establishes with Little Eagle can be considered as an allegory of nation consolidation for a number of reasons. First, she refuses to marry any of her suitors because her interests and ambitions are elsewhere. She wants to fight for her people and prove herself to be a worthwhile citizen of her nation. Makátah's view seems to be that the future of her nation is in brave warriors, not in marriage and family. Moreover, she declares herself as the widow of a dead hero. In this way, she elevates herself above any ordinary and conventional forms of nation consolidation such as marriages or heroic deaths.

In pre-colonial North America, nations waged war against each other, and territories were won and lost. As a result, death is a presence in "The War Maiden." In this particular story, the two Sioux tribes attempt to enlarge their territories at the expense of the neighbouring Crow nation, which is forced to flee to another region. This is different from novels of nation-building, where the central themes are the reconciliation of different groups and recognition of former enemies as allies (Sommer 12). In Makátah's story, the nation already exists and it is predominantly the heroic warriors' expansionist desire that leads them into battle

and eventually to death. In wars, death has a particular role in the construction of a hero.

Many novels and stories in the nationalistic genre figure young characters, their youth being a metaphor for the promise of a nation's future. "The War Maiden" is no exception in this respect. There is also a strong connection to traditional customs and customs related to war in particular are described in detail. This is another method of nation consolidation: creation of antiquity for the future (e.g., Anderson 1983). The story line resembles that of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841). In both stories, the heroine's mother is not present (in *Sab*, Carlota's mother is dead, in "The War Maiden," the mother is not mentioned) and the father plays a central role in both heroine's lives and upbringing. Moreover, both heroines' brothers are dead or die later, thus making the heroines the pride of their respective fathers.

Perhaps the most interesting similarity is the theme of marriage in these two stories. In *Sab*, Carlota marries the "wrong" man. On a personal level, he is wrong because he does not make her happy. In the public domain, as an allegory for the nation building, her English husband is the wrong choice in terms of a prospective future of the nation. Makátah does not get married at all though one can speculate how the situation would be different if Little Eagle did not die in battle. Instead, she forms an ideal, symbolic union with a dead national hero and cherishes this "relationship" all her life. Both stories are based on the genre of romance⁷ although in Makátah's story, romance and love are merely metanarratives. If Carlota is the incarnation of Cuba, we may consider Makátah as the incarnation of the Sioux Nation. Throughout the story, brave Makátah is the inspiring, carrying force, "incentive to feats of desperate daring on the part of the warriors" ("War Maiden," 42) and "to deeds of desperate valor" ("War Maiden," 48) as would a thought of one's nation be. Perhaps we can call her story a form of Sommer's erotic rhetoric that organizes patriotic writing (Sommer 2); a form where the erotic rhetoric is a metanarrative.

In *Sab*, the reader gains the impression that Sab himself would have been the right man for Carlota rather than Enrique Otway. As Sommer notes, Sab's letter at the end of the story shows that he is the only one who could fulfill Carlota's dream (Sommer 115). But unfortunately, Carlota does not realize this until after Sab's death. In "The War Maiden," there are no hints about the "rightness" of Little Eagle as a prospective husband of Makátah's, but like Carlota, Makátah does not think to marry Little Eagle until it is too late – whether she would have married him at all is, of course, an open question. At the end of both stories, the heroes die because, as suggested, they have to die for the future of their nations. Both Carlota and Makátah refuse to marry them and thus, both Sab and Little Eagle have to die in order to satisfy and fulfill the dreams of those whom they love, that is, their nations.

E. Pauline Johnson: "My Mother" (1913)

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake, 1861-1913) was born on the Six Nations Reservation near Brantford, Ontario. Her father was a notable Mohawk chief, bearing a title that dated back to the time of Hiawatha and the 50 Native leaders who created the League of the Iroquois about half a century before Columbus first crossed the Atlantic. Pauline's family name was Tekahionwake ("Double Wampum"). The name Johnson was acquired from the British colonial leader Sir William Johnson who acted as godfather to Pauline's great-grandfather when he was baptized into Christianity. Pauline's father married an Englishwoman and thus could not pass the chieftainship on to his sons. Interestingly, this Mohawk law did not apply to Pauline's great-grandmother who was also a white woman of German descent because she had been formally and properly adopted into the Mohawk nation – she "had taken out her citizenship papers, as it were" (Van Steen 2).

The fact that Pauline's mother was a white woman did not prevent her from claiming herself to be wholly "Indian." She is told to have said to a reporter in London that "I am a Red Indian and feel very proud of it" in 1894, during her first visit to England (cited in Van Steen 3). One of her friends has also recorded her as saying, "There are those who think they pay me a compliment by saying I am just like a white woman. I am Indian, and my aim, my joy and my pride is to sing the glories of my own people" (cited in Van Steen 3). Moreover, she despised the misconceptions that white people had about her people. Her poems and short stories were published in several magazines and newspapers and she was known by many Canadians as the "Mohawk Princess" who travelled around Canada as an actress and entertainer.

According to the contemporary Mohawk writer Beth Brant, Pauline Johnson was a nationalist who expressed her views in her writings and who was showing the path for the future generations of Native women writers (Brant "Red Road," 83-4). Her short story "My mother" is a story about an Englishwoman called Lydia Bestman who marries a Mohawk chief and who, at the end of the story and after many dramatic events, becomes part of the Mohawk nation. This is particularly interesting because of her respect and understanding towards "Indians." The story is said to be a tribute to her own mother who defied her family and many of her English friends to stand by the side of the Mohawk chief and her husband (Van Steen 3).

The story of "My Mother" starts in Lydia's childhood when her family emigrates from England to the "New World." Her mother has died earlier and her father remarried to a "very cold and chilling type of Englishwoman." Lydia's childhood is very unhappy and loveless; her father beats his children frequently. She finally has a chance to escape when her older sister, Elizabeth, decides to marry a Scottish missionary who lives in Canada and works with "Indians." Elizabeth decides to take Lydia with her to the village of Brantford where Lydia

meets George Mansion, a handsome, smart Mohawk youth and her future husband.

Lydia Bestman's family do not accept her marriage with a "savage" although she explains to her sister that it is *her* who is disrupting the lineage of the Mohawk chieftainship by being only a white girl. This is how Johnson articulates the misunderstandings of the white people regarding the "Indians":

"*Only a white girl!*" repeated the sister, sarcastically. "Do you mean to tell me that you believe these wretched Indians don't want him to marry you? *You*, a *Bestman*, and an English girl? Nonsense, Lydia! You are talking utter nonsense." But the sister's voice weakened, nevertheless.

"But it's true," asserted the girl. "You don't understand the Indian nation as 'Liza did'; it's perfectly true – a son of mine can claim no family title; the honour of it must leave the name of Mansion forever. Oh, his parents have completely shut him out of their lives because I am only a white girl!" and the sweet young voice trembled woefully ("My Mother," 199).

Despite the reluctance of both families, Lydia and young chief George Mansion are married and "lived together for upwards of thirty years, and never had one single quarrel" ("My Mother," 206). They have a good, happy life and are blessed with many children. Even Lydia's father comes to visit them in their big house, which George has built for his wife. The only shadow in their lives is the resentment of George's parents who have not been in contact with their son since his decision to marry a white woman instead of accepting his parents' choice. Yet this is to change when George falls ill with a fever,

that he had contracted among the marshes where much of his business as an employee of the Government took him. Evils had begun to creep into his forest world. The black and subtle evil of the white man's fire-water had commenced to touch with its poisonous finger the lives and lodges of his beloved people. The curse began to spread, until it grew into a menace to the community. It was the same old story: the white man had come with the Bible in one hand, the bottle in the other ("My Mother," 210-1).

George's condition gets worse and finally the doctor summons his parents. Lydia is desperate and thinks that they will not come. They arrive, however, and after many years, a peace is restored not only between George and his parents but also as Lydia is accepted into the Mohawk family. Still very sick, George whispers to his wife: "my mother cannot speak the English, but her cheek to yours means that you are her blood relation" ("My Mother," 213). After his parents' visit, George gains his strength back and soon enough is battling again

against the evil of his nation, the ever-growing menace of the liquor traffic where white men exchanged "a quart of bad whiskey for a cord of first-class firewood, or timber, which could be hauled off the Indian Reserve and sold in the nearby town markets for five or six dollars" ("My Mother," 211). His relentless work for his people brings him many distinctions and recognition by both state and church representatives. Lydia, who glories her husband's achievements, does not however want to accompany him and share his success and honours. To George's frequent requests she replies that she has been homeless for so long that home has become her ambition.

After several serious beatings by white men and Lydia's restless care and nursing, George Mansion finally retires and lets his younger followers continue his work. He realizes that one day, his work may leave his beloved wife, Lydia, alone once more. After his retirement, they have several joyous moments together; many honoured guests visit them, until the day when George finally passes away due to a cold, failing to respond to Lydia's devoted nursing: "he slipped away from her, a sacrifice to his fight against evil on the altar of his nation's good" ("My Mother," 226).

Of the three texts discussed in this paper, the story of "My Mother" resembles most the Latin American "foundational fictions." First, it is not too difficult to find Doris Sommer's concept of "erotics of politics" in Pauline Johnson's story, and second, it is an exemplary account of reconciliation of two races and nations. Like in many Latin American "foundational fictions," the main theme of "My Mother" is to unite antagonistic elements for the future of a nation through love and marriage. According to Sommer, the task of the "erotics of politics" is to "show how a variety of novel national ideals are all ostensibly grounded in 'natural' heterosexual love and in the marriages that provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation" (Sommer 6). Although in "My Mother," there is no question of "novel national ideals," the main theme is to show how through love and marriage, the resentment, prejudice and stereotypes can be reconciled and how the concept of a nation can be broad enough to accept outsiders; that the adoption of outsiders only consolidates and strengthens the nation. In "My Mother," love that crosses races, bloodlines, nations and discrimination becomes an allegory for politics of inclusive nationalism.

Ironically, if in *Facundo* it is a barbaric gaucho who is the hindrance of the nation building, in "My Mother," it is a white woman. But unlike in *Facundo*, where the gaucho is an element to be eliminated (yet who elicits contradictory feelings in the author), in "My Mother," the white woman succeeds in accommodating and harmonizing divisions through love, marriage and family: it is the love and care she shows to her husband that brings his parents back to him. According to the story, it is the episode of the moccasin which brought complete reconciliation between the young couple and George's parents. During the first visit to their new home, George's old mother gives a small moccasin to Lydia, a moccasin which used to belong to George when he was a baby ("My Mother," 219). As Sommer notes: "If nations were to survive and to prosper, they had to

mitigate racial and regional antagonisms and to coordinate the most diverse national sectors... through mutual consent rather than coercion" (Sommer 123).

Besides love and marriage, offspring is an integral part of the national consolidation. The Hegelian notion of the family as a basic unit of a nation is represented in Johnson's story in its truest sense: Lydia, the English wife of the Mohawk chief George Mansion raises good, ideal new citizens for the Mohawk nation. Repeatedly, the story tells how she wants their children to love their nation as much as their father does and be worthy of such an excellent father. The following passage reflects the general spirit of the story:

These children were reared on the strictest lines of both Indian and English principles. They were taught the legends, the traditions, the culture of both races to which they belonged; but above all, their mother instilled into them from the very cradle that they were of their father's people, not of hers. Her marriage had made her an Indian by the laws which govern Canada, as well as by the sympathies and yearnings and affections of her own heart. ... She determined that should she ever be mother to his children, those children should be reared as Indians in spirit and patriotism, and in loyalty to their father's race as well as by heritage of blood....When people spoke of blood and lineage and nationality, these children would say, "we are Indians," with the air with which a young Spanish don might say, "I am a Castilian." She wanted them to grow up nationalists, and they did, every mother's son and daughter of them ("My Mother," 214-5).

Pauline Johnson's short story certainly belongs to the genre of romance both in Sommer's sense and in a more general understanding of the term: her romanticized notions of "Indians" seeps throughout the text. According to Andrew Wiget, Johnson's poems about Native Americans were also highly romanticized (62). If we read her writings in a straightforward manner, we might agree with Wiget, who argues that Pauline Johnson "became most famous not for speaking of Indian rights but for romanticizing the woodland Indian" (63). Yet in my view, we have to read her stories in a similar fashion as Latin American "foundational fictions," as political allegories of nation consolidation in the genre of romance in order to gain a fuller understanding and significance of her writing.

There is perhaps a resemblance between the representation of George Mansion and that of Sab, both being portrayed as noble, if not noble savages. Johnson's story is rich in detailed illustration of the young Mohawk chief's good mannerism, eloquence, courtesy, extraordinary language skills (he commanded eight languages) and his noble bloodlines. As Lydia observes soon after the arrival in Brantford:

She had not expected to see anything like this self-poised, scrupulously-dressed, fine-featured, dark stripling. She thought Indians wore sav-

age-looking clothes, had fierce eyes and stern, set mouths. This boy's eyes were narrow and shrewd, but warm and kindly, his lips were like a Cupid's bow, his hands were narrower, smaller, than her own, but the firmness of those slim fingers, the power of those small palms... ("My Mother," 184).

And later, angry at her ignorant sister and her husband, she defends her fiancé: "George Mansion may have savage blood in his veins, but he has grasped the meaning of the word 'Christianity' far more fully than your husband has" ("My Mother," 200). Yet in my view, the function of romanticized noble savage imagery in these two stories are dissimilar. The representation of Sab as a "new incarnation of an extinct aboriginal 'Cuban'" (Sommer 118) serves a different purpose than Johnson's representation of George Mansion. Throughout the story, she attempts to draw a different, unsterotypical (though romanticized) image of her people. Some might criticize her for falling into just another form of stereotyping, but there is no question of her political agenda.

There can be another comparison drawn between the stories of "My Mother" and *Sab*, and that is the role of violence. If the violence in *Sab* is against the rhetorics of race (Sommer 121), in "My Mother" it is against the antagonisms of race. While George fights it concretely in the public sphere, attempting to resist the white bootleggers trying to destroy his nation, Lydia's fight takes place in the private sphere, at home, and at the level of love and caring, her goal being the re-establishment of the relationship with George's parents and thus, his Mohawk nation.

Conclusion

This essay considers the ways in which Native American writing shaped and constructed notions of the nation at the turn of the last century. The focus was on three samples by writers from different Native American nations: the Cherokee, the Sioux and the Mohawk. This analysis argues that for Native Americans, the concept of a nation is older than the concept understood in the modern Western sense. This is evidenced in various Native American languages, which contain a specific word often signifying both a people and a nation. Native Americans acquired the English (or French) words for nation after colonial contact and the introduction of colonial languages. Thus, Native American nations at the turn of the century were not "emerging, new nations" as was the case in many other places, such as Latin America. They were old nations, whose existence was threatened in a number of ways by the colonial states.

It is also questionable whether it is appropriate to term Native American nations as "imagined," when taking into account the situation of continued colonialism, which Native American nations have known since the beginning of conquest. Benedict Anderson's definition of an imagined community may hold

true in the Native American context, but one must be cautioned against fostering terminology that may be harmful to the current political and cultural struggles of Native American nations towards fuller self-determination.

At the turn of the last century, the Native American nationalist project was not nation formation but rather a nation consolidation and reinforcement against the intrusive forces, which attempted to destroy, if not exterminate, Native American cultures and languages. Therefore, this essay suggests that Native American “nationalist” writing of that period was aimed at expressing the distinctiveness and uniqueness of a particular nation in order to resist the assimilation into the white society. As Craig S. Womack notes: “Nineteenth-century Indian resistance did not merely take the form of plains warriors on horseback; Indian people authored books that often argued for Indian rights and criticized land theft” (3).

Thus, the role of literature is significant in Native American nationalism, just as among other nations, including nation-states. It is perhaps even more significant for Native American nations than for nation-states because of the continuing internal colonialism. There is a clear interdependency of politics and literature not only among Native American nations but other indigenous nations as well. Literature remains a readily available tool with which to tackle and criticize the dominant power structures and indigenous peoples have been quick to utilize the opportunities the medium can provide. As a result, politics becomes intimately linked to literature and it is possible to argue that the inextricability of politics and literature is a common characteristic of any nationalist literature.

The relationship with land is a common allegory for nation consolidation. In Latin American “foundational fictions,” land is often symbolized by femininity and thus, the relationship between the hero and land is seen as a relationship of love or even erotics, such as in *Facundo*. In Duncan’s poem “Dead Nation,” there are metaphors of land, but the relationship is more like one between a nurturing mother and a child. This reflects a common indigenous peoples’ understanding of land as the Mother Earth.

Although the allegory of love appeared in two of the texts analyzed in this essay, it would not be accurate to generalize it as a characteristic of all Native American narrations of nation. Rather, it is typical of the period when romanticization of the heroes and the heroines was common. This is also typical of Latin American literature of the nineteenth century. For example, in both literatures, images of the Noble Savage are found.

Another central element of nation building, the creation of the past and antiquity, can also be found in the three literary samples discussed here. All three stories refer to and are based on actual historical events and moreover, there is, particularly in Charles A. Eastman’s story, a clear continuation of oral traditions. According to Craig S. Womack, oral traditions are always nationalistic because they discuss national concerns although often in a form of an allegory and a metaphor. It is also common to (re)articulate the origin story in a way that it becomes meaningful in the contemporary context (53). Thus, the past is a

crucial element in the current negotiation of nationhood in the Native American nationalist literature.

In conclusion, it is possible to suggest that Native American narrations of nation, not only at the turn of the last century, but also contemporary literature and oral traditions, carry a considerable potential to assist and support the survival of indigenous people. Among Native Americans as well as other indigenous peoples, writers have a special role as cultural pathfinders in maintaining and sustaining their cultures and therefore, working towards decolonization and stronger nations. Because of the current situation where indigenous peoples' rights are still mostly unrecognized, nation building and consolidation are continuing processes in indigenous societies. In this article, the focus was on only one period, but the reader must keep in mind that any period would be appropriate for a similar study. To gain a broader and fuller understanding of the nature of Native American nation building in literature, it is important to analyze literature from various periods, including stories of creation – their “foundational fictions.” Furthermore, it is important that the indigenous people’s concept of “nation” is recognized and understood by the non-indigenous academic discourse.

Notes

1. I use the term “foundational fiction” in Doris Sommer’s sense, according to whom “foundational fictions” refer to the “epoch-making” national novels of the nineteenth century in Latin America which were used in the nation’s secondary schools as “a source of local history and literary pride” (Sommer 4).

2. For more on the concept “nations within,” see Deloria and Lytle 1984 and Fleras and Elliott 1992.

3. Uri Ra’anan discusses the problematics of semantics in the Western discourse regarding the terms “nation” and “nation-state” in his article, “The Nation-State Fallacy” (1990). He defines three views of nationality: the Western, Eastern and Southern views. Although discussing ethnic minorities, one of these views takes into account indigenous peoples who do not consider themselves as merely ethnic minorities. In Churchill’s words, the term “minority” “is employed with reference to demographic subsets of given polities, a classification automatically placing [indigenous peoples] within the parameters of their respective countries’ ‘internal’ affairs. Peoples, on the other hand, are construed as distinct polities on their own, and, as such, are universally guaranteed the unfettered right to self-determination under international law” (40).

4. There are some indigenous scholars who have used the term “paradigm” in relation to their research practices. Maori scholar Kathy Irwin has based her work in “a paradigm that stems from a Maori worldview” (Irwin 28).

5. The two major legal premises are; first, the doctrine known as the “right of inherent sovereignty” which holds that a people constitute a nation, and is, therefore, entitled to exercise the rights of such, simply because it has done so “since time immemorial,” i.e., from the moment of its earliest contact with other nations the people in question have been known to possess a given territory, a means of providing their own subsistence (economy), a common language, a structure of governance and corresponding form of legality, and a means of determining membership/social composition. The second premise holds that treaty making and treaty relations are entered into only by nations. This principle is also enshrined in both U.S. and Canadian constitutions (Churchill, *Struggle for the Land*, 19-20).

6. This was the framework of some other “foundational fictions” of Latin America as well as José Marmol’s *Amalia* (1851).

7. Sommer uses the term “romance” to signify “a cross between our contemporary use of

the word as a love story and a nineteenth-century use that distinguished the genre as more boldly allegorical than the novel" (Sommer 5).

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