The Concept of the Nation-State in *Ceremony*

Drawing on Benedict Anderson, Mostov proposes the Nation as an imagined sense of community that often arises by a shared identity (2). Subsequently, Nation-state arises from a population with a shared ethnicity and cultural background that desires to attain sovereignty (Mostov, 7). However, there is a contradiction. In order to attain citizenship, Mostov continues, one must "forget differences" of their own identity, to join a shared one (4). A final pertinent aspect of the Nation-State is that it is inherently gendered (Mostov, 8). Drawing on Charlesworth, in times of war, the Nation-State can be viewed as inherently masculine as armies defend their Nation from foreign penetration (Mostov, 8). In the context of *Ceremony,* Emo continuously struggles with forgetting his difference, his indigeneity, to engage with the Nation-State. Indigenous soldiers are able to enjoy the comforts of the Nation's rights. In this sense, the United States as a Nation-State becomes infectious, as it forces Emo, and many fellow soldiers, to shed his own identity to join the U.S and act on its values and needs. Both Tayo and Emo exhibit an internal struggle when acting on the Nation-State: Tayo with his sickness, Emo with isolation and a skewed internal identity. To act on the Nation-State's interest, then, is to become corrupted, infectious. For both Tayo and Emo, the Nation-State's imposition becomes a negative impact on not only their sense of belonging with the State, but within their own community. This paper focuses on the passage beginning on Page 52, "We went into this bar…" through Page 57, "The best. United States Army." Within *Ceremony,* Emo explores the infectious concept of the Nation-State and paradox of citizenship through structural shifts, pronouns, disruptive narrative metaphors and a consistent juxtaposition of tone and mood.

The structural shift from narrative to poem introduces the Nation-State's strength and imposition on Emo's psyche and actions. The story of the thought-woman is the first instance of a poem-like structure within the narrative. Stories which, although are center aligned and arranged in stanzas, continue the narrative, instead of disrupting it. Within the larger context of *Ceremony,* the poem-like structures are the truths the Indigenous community live by. Emo is no exception. For Emo, the structural shift in the poem elicits the truth he lives by: if he's a good American soldier, his citizenship in the U.S remains valid. Emo leverages his veteran and soldier status as a legitimacy of his identity and a person. The poem's content describes Emo's sexual conquest, in which he "used Matucci's name" in order to seduce not one, but two women from the bar (Silko, 54). By the end of the poem, he is successful. Immediately after, though, Tayo supplements another story, in which another of Emo's seductresses finds out he's Indigenous. She passes out in response. This jarring contrast of structure exemplifies the fallacies in Emo's recountment. His instinct to shed his ethnic identity signifies the weight of being Indigenous within a United States context. That is to say, if he were to approach the women as Indigenous, they would not engage with him due to the Nation-States exclusion of Indigenous people. Instead, he longs to transform into an

accepted identity of the Nation-State. Emo believes in the myth of the Nation-State, even if it actively discriminates against his own ethnic identity. The shift in structure is a visual indication not only of Emo's entrenched beliefs, but the Nation-States' imposition on his actions.

The imposition of the Nation-State causes a loss of identity. The Melon smashing scene also communicates identity loss when one becomes a vessel for the Nation-State through the use of pronouns. Before Silko writes the Melon scene, Emo says "We blew them all to hell. We should've dropped bombs on all the rest and blown them off the face of the earth" (56). Initially, the pronoun "we" can be read as Emo and the army. But the military is the physical body of the Nation-State, 'we' becomes the United States and Emo. Therefore, prior to exposing the crime to the audience, Silko uses pronouns to establish who the perpetrators of violence are.

As aforementioned, the 'He' can become the Nation-State, as it enacts violence to reduce his chances of penetration. The agent of the smashing is only referred to as 'he'. With the added context of the 'We' pronoun placed right before this paragraph, 'He' also signifies Emo. The plural 'we' morphs into a singular 'he' when Emo enacts violence onto the enemies of the state, or, the Melon. When soldiers engage in nonsensical violence, they are no longer independent agents; rather, a vessel for the Nation-State's interest. Thus, when smashing the Melon, Emo and the Nation-State become one entity. This is a direct demonstration not only of Emo's loss of identity, but his subversive desire to be seen as a legitimate citizen. During the enactment of violence, he can no longer separate himself from the Nation-State. They are one.

Despite this amalgamation, there is an alienation that arises with it. When Emo and the Nation-State become 'He', it is not an even exchange, but rather an absorption of Emo's identity. 'He' is not acting on Emo's desires, 'He' is action on the Nation-States'. Emo becomes part of the mix, but the violence towards Emo's self still persists, as seen in the violence against the Melon, a passive object. The melon can be equated with Emo's internal sense of self. As Emo, through enacting violence, becomes 'He', he is stripping himself of his identity. Emo, by partaking in violence, is further fragmenting the melon, the metaphor for himself. By allowing the Nation-State to influence his actions and motivations, Emo is further 'forgetting' his difference, and thus creating more turmoil as he violently degrades himself.

Through the melon metaphor, Silko also illustrates a disruption of narrative. The disruption of the narrative inflicts confusion upon the reader, as it disrupts the natural order of the story. The melon metaphor is disruptive, as it breaks the reader's comfort with familiarity of the linear storyline by imposing violence within the story. Similarly, Emo is disrupting the peace by introducing, and encouraging violence, through the use of pronouns and mood. The melon scene's untimely insertion recreates the paradoxical feeling of serving the Nation-State that actively discriminates against oneself.

Amidst all fragmentation, there is the consistency of Emo's mood towards violence that is perpetrated in both the melon scene and the ensuing description of the

U.S Army. Silko maintains the juxtaposition of tone and mood through two passages to emphasize Emo's means for destruction. The scene of destruction is directly contrasted with the 'He''s mood. The melon smashing is done with purpose. The man takes notice that "the symmetry of the oval [melon] pleased him" (57). The contentment for symmetry establishes a positive emotion from smashing a Melon. Much like the order of the story, Emo's actions are a disruption to the peace held when one engages with the Nation-State. Silko then reinforces this argument by maintaining Emo's positive mood towards the descriptions of the U.S army in the following paragraph. The imagery of the army's violence is undoubtedly violent. The mortar shells were praised for blowing "big tanks and trucks to pieces" (Silko, 57); and a "flamethrower that shaped a rifle into a melted lump" (Silko, 57). But in contrast, when describing Emo's perspective on the violence, he can only fixate on his inclusion in the Nation-State and his connection to the United States Army. He was described to be "the best; he was one of them. The Best. United States Army" (Silko, 57). Tonally, it is clear that these actions are morally and ethically wrong because they cause death. But with the Nation-State at the helm of Emo's mind, Emo can only see these things in a positive sense because it allows him to engage with the imagined community of the United States.

By maintaining the tone through both the Melon scene and the descriptions of Emo and the army, Silko frames the argument that Emo, by acting on the Nation-State's desires, is simultaneously inflicting violence upon others and himself. For the United States, the violence is a positive action because it confirms the legitimacy of the State by reducing the chance of infiltration from Japanese soldiers. For Emo, violence is the currency to legitimize his citizenship to the United States. It is this mood that directly contradicts the violence of the Melon smashing. The smashing of the melon, then, becomes another visual representation of the fragmentation of one's identity.

In conclusion, the Nation-State imposes its needs and wants on soldiers such as Emo, causing his own needs to become subservient. Silko presents this through the use of a shift from a narrative to poem-like structure, pronouns, a metaphor disrupting the story's linearity, and the juxtaposition of tone and mood. The structural shift confronts the strength of the Nation-State's ideologies on Emo. The pronoun shift demonstrates the loss of autonomy. The disrupting metaphor illustrates the harm done unto Emo and others. Finally, the consistent tone and mood once again shows the imposition of Nation-State. The Nation-State, as Mostov argues, is an ideal that is only as strong as its imposition on its people. An imposition, as displayed by Emo, disguises itself as unity, but only lends itself to more fragmentation. Through Emo, Silko encourages the reader to critically examine the implications of war, not only on the external, but internal as well.

Works Cited

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