

Cultural Translation and the Concept of Power in Tony Hillerman's Fiction

In anthropology there is much skepticism and debate on the process of cultural translation. Ethnography is viewed as one of the most popular, thorough and accurate tools (other than field work itself) that anthropologists use in the teaching/learning of different cultures. However, one prominent anthropologist, Talal Asad, states that, "Indeed, it can be argued that translating an alien form of life, another culture, is not always done best through the representational discourse of ethnography, that under certain conditions, a dramatic performance, the execution of a dance, or the playing of a piece of music might be more apt." (Asad 1986:160). Tony Hillerman demonstrates this well by using a unique form of translation. He is the translator of Navajo culture through his fictional murder-mysteries. Although his thrillers are fictional; the setting, the characters, and the underlying cultural concepts are very close to reality. And even though he has had no formal training in anthropological studies, he has created a way to portray an accurate and compelling translation of the culture. Through Hillerman's representations of this Native American culture, thousands of people who would not normally have an interest in learning about this culture (through more strict anthropological methods such as ethnography) will come to a better understanding of Navajo ways of life. However, the question can be asked, what gives Hillerman such authority to be able to do this?

Hillerman's authority comes from a more personal rather than an academic foundation. It stems from an intimate knowledge of the community he is writing about. He is a white Catholic, part of the dominant culture, however, he has assimilated himself into a comfortable spot within the Navajo culture and its people (evidence for this will be discussed later.) His authority comes from his ability to straddle the dichotomy between the dominant culture and subordinate Navajo culture. Hillerman knows and understands aspects of both cultural worlds. He lives in the dominant one but also relates to the subordinate one, and he perceives the impact of differences between them. His position and ability to sustain this dichotomy gives him a unique place of authority and knowledge in that he is especially aware of prevailing power relations between the cultures.

Asad points out that "the process of 'cultural translation' is inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power - professional, national, international and that the interesting question of enquiry is how power enters into the process of cultural translation." (Asad 1986: 163) Power relations are an evident force in the translation of any culture into another. Hillerman's own work is no exception. The imbalance of power between the two cultures is evident in many of his central themes dealing with the cultural sensibilities of the Navajo people. The clash of this traditional Native American culture of the Navajo with concepts of modernism introduced by the outside world demonstrate the imbalance and force of power

Hillerman as Interpreter

Before discussing Hillerman's work, his credentials as a Navajo interpreter must be considered. Hillerman's identity as a white, Catholic writer poses many questions. Is he capable of clearly and fairly depicting the Navajo culture? What are his strengths and weaknesses in doing so? How have critics viewed his writing? And most importantly, how have the Navajos themselves viewed this depiction of their culture and lifestyle?

Hillerman says that he saw the possibilities of what one could do with the Navajo culture. He thought it was a "good way to tell a story with the contrast of cultures and a way to put values in highlights." (Gaugenmaier 1989:59) He also claims that it's very important that his stories seem realistic, with genuine people involved in events that could truly happen. (Hillerman and Bulow 1991:55) He works very hard at presenting Navajo lifestyles, feelings, and fears. Hillerman claims that sometimes when he is "surrounded by the bright lights of Albuquerque and bombarded by his own Anglo-American cultural assumptions, he will go to the reservation, talk to his Navajo friends and get readjusted." (Hillerman and Bulow 1991:82).

Hillerman thought that when he started writing these murder-mysteries that he knew a lot about the Navajo culture. (Gaugenmaier 1989:57) However, he claims his research has never ended. In the Introduction to *The*

Blessing Way, Hillerman says "I wanted to get back to Leaphorn and Navajo Country and do a better job of him and his culture. Now it's almost twenty years later and I'm still trying to get it right." (1970). Among his goals, Hillerman wants to find out how alive traditional behavior actually is in the culture of the reservation Navajo. (Gaugenmaier 1989:57) In order to learn more, he goes to the reservation to interview Navajo friends about customs and traditions. He asks a lot of questions and finds it hard sometimes to get a straight answer because of the Navajo sense of humor. He always makes sure he gets several sources to know his information is truthful. (1989: 57). So, Hillerman appears to be searching out the true life and emotions of the Navajo people. How have other commentators, popular white culture and Navajo culture, come to see his writing? Is he seen as a genuine interpreter or a thief using another culture to make big money as a murder-mystery writer?

Reviews and Awards

Hillerman has received many accomplishments and awards. He has published over sixteen books and his work appears in thirteen languages. He has served as President of Mystery Writers of America and won the Edgar Allan Poe Award from that organization. For *Skinwalkers*, Hillerman also won the Golden Spur Award of Western Writers of America for Best Novel of the Year. Overall, popular white culture has accepted Hillerman as a great murder-mystery writer who has brilliantly depicted many aspects of Navajo culture. This is reflected in the best-selling status of his thrillers. Many people eagerly wait for his next book, to enjoy the entertaining stories while believing that they are getting a glimpse of truthful aspects of the culture's lifestyle.

Book reviews yield a lot of positive critiques of Hillerman's work. The *New York Times* calls him, "one of the nation's most convincing and authentic interpreters of Navajo culture. Mr. Hillerman's Navajos are at once a part of their own tribal heritage and also well assimilated into the dominant culture." His portrayal is a "light handed but utterly convincing advocacy of Native American culture and an enchanting description of the spirit of the Southwest." (Gish 1990:12). According to *Time Magazine*, "Hillerman's thrillers are painstakingly, almost anthropological efforts to plunge into the folkways and mind-sets of Native Americans, primarily Navajos." (Melton 1989:4) A *New York Times* article states, "He is writing across a particularly troubled ethnic divide, the one separating Anglos from Indians, and no matter how he demurs, his novels have the cautiousness of anthropology, the decorousness that comes when you don't want to presume too much about an acquaintance." (Klinkenborg 1993:36) Reviewing a *Thief of Time*, another *Times* article says, "Hillerman's picture of modern American Indians is never patronizing, never hokey, never precious. We finish (the book) with the impression of having visited, vividly, though briefly, a place and people unlike any other." (Dorris 1988:6)

Bakerman (1984) looks at the fundamental themes of these thrillers and makes a statement about what she feels is a serious lesson which Hillerman is trying to portray. According to the article, Hillerman is effectively making a statement about ignorance, prejudice, and racism. Bakerman believes that "Hillerman's most effective treatment of prejudice arises from biases Leaphorn and Chee (policeman, heroes) themselves reveal and cope with day by day." (1984:22) She goes on to say that, "having both Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee clearly recognize that they must themselves guard against and behaving in prejudiced fashion deepens their characterizations considerably... Both men look very carefully at Belacani (white) strangers, for both are educating themselves out of the habit of thinking that -and behaving as if- all white men look alike." (1984:22) Evidence for this will be discussed later. Bakerman concludes that Hillerman made his two main characters identifiable to all people, that Leaphorn and Chee are aware of their own prejudices and "must always monitor their own behavior as much as they must guard against racism in others." (1984:25)

Reviewers of Hillerman contends that he effectively portrays the Navajo culture while keeping the story moving. This is one of the key reasons why Hillerman is so successful. The author says that Hillerman's popularity among the Indians is partly due to the fact that he makes political points which are sympathetic to their side. For example, Hillerman works in a statement about the poor health of American Indians:

"He laughed, showing teeth that conflicted with the symphony of neatness. Two were missing, one was broken,

one was black and twisted. Poor people's teeth, Leaphorn thought. Navajo teeth." (19xx:84)

These kinds of descriptions woven into the story are what make Hillerman's murder-mysteries so interesting and popular. Hillerman offers a more personal view than ethnography. According to the article, Hillerman has stated that "The anthropological stuff lets people read escapist fiction and kid themselves they are doing something worthwhile." (Bakerman 1984:25).

"Weaving Mysteries that Tell of Life Among the Navajos" discusses how Hillerman has come to an understanding and developed a relationship with the Navajo people. His thrillers are "about country, people and poverty, second-class citizens in a rich nation, Westerners oppressed by Easterners who make the rules. They are about poor rural people who nevertheless make a successful culture of their own out of determination, tradition, and a supple approach to modern times." (Parfit 1991:94) Hillerman proclaims that he understands this because he lived it as he grew up in a poor, rural family in Oklahoma. He says he grew up identifying with a certain kind of people and that the Navajos were just like the people he grew up with. (Parfit 1991:95). Throughout all this praise of Hillerman, there is some negative criticism. In a book review on *Sacred Clowns*, the author claims that Hillerman "has taken laughter - one of the Navajos strongest traits away from them." (Klinkenborg 1993:36) The author also talks about how Hillerman always makes the white guys guilty and that, "in a murder-mystery, as in life itself, guilt rains down a little more equitably on us all." (1993: 36) The article also claims that Hillerman has a tendency "like so many other visitors" to have "a preferential vision" to see positive aspects such as "the mystical union of Indians and Earth." Klinkenborg goes on to say that "he chooses to portray the spirituality of the Navajos and Hopis and merely hints at the often brutal condition of life on the reservation." (1993: 36).

Navajo Views

Most importantly, how do the Navajo people feel about this portrayal of their culture? Overall, the culture has accepted and appreciated his work. He portrays the culture so well that some people who read his books but have never seen him, including Native Americans, have thought he was a Navajo. (Parfit 1991:92) Hillerman has received thanks and acclaims such as, "your books are us and we win in them." (Ames 1989:60)

In 1990 the Navajo honored Hillerman as "special friend" to the Dinee (the Navajo people) and for authentically portraying the traditional Navajo culture. Lieutenant Ben Shirley of the Navajo tribal police says, "The stories are accurate. It fits right in: the traditional cultures, the values." (Parfit 1991:102) Hillerman's police officers have to deal with circumstances that are particular to their culture, and according to Lt. Shirley this is truthful. For example, Shirley and his officers have to be especially careful around handling a corpse in that it's ghost will haunt any who comes in contact with it. (1991:102)

Native American children throughout the reservation schools have Hillerman books as required readings. (Gaugemaier 1989:58) He even has in the past been to high schools to discuss his thrillers. The students apparently love his work as they scrambled for his autograph (Parfit 1991:99). However they have one suggestion - that he include more romance. At the Hopi Junior-Senior High School the English teacher had students write different endings and many students chose to resolve the romance problem. Hillerman wrote to them saying, "Where were you when I needed you? ... I grew up out in the country like you.... It never occurred to me that just regular people like me could write books. But you know better. You can do whatever you want to do." (Parfit 1991:100) Parents have also told Hillerman that his books have "stirred up interests in the old customs." (Gaugenmaier 1989:58)

Tony Hillerman has widely been embraced by his Native American acquaintances. He has many friends who even ask him for advice especially when it comes to cross-cultural issues. For example, a young man named Ronald Horseherder was a Navajo practicing to be a *hataali* (medicine man) and learning about who he was and where he came from. (Parfit 1991:92) He was a Navajo learning about himself, his people, his culture. Horseherder sought out Hillerman for advice because they "seemed to share a common understanding." (1991: 92) Hillerman said he knew and understood where Horse herder was coming from. "I haven't decided," Horse

herder said, "whether to stay with my grandmother (who was teaching him the Navajo ways) or go to college." Hillerman's advice was, "You can have a lot more impact if you go to college and go into politics." (1991:104) A former student of his (who is now a jailer) once said to him, "Your books really made an impact on me. Every weekend I throw drunk Navajos in here, but now I think differently about them." Hillerman replied, "You just justified my career." (Ames 1989:61). Hillerman has situated himself into a comfortable place in Navajo community. There doesn't appear to be many negative criticisms of his work. Those that surface appear to be somewhat "minor" details. One Navajo friend of Hillerman's commented on Leaphorn's skepticism of witchcraft. His friend said, "It doesn't ring true to me as a Navajo... I never knew a Navajo who was skeptical about witchcraft." (Hillerman and Bulow 1991:83) Hillerman admits he makes mistakes. For example, in *Dance Hall of the Dead*, Navajos inform him that the child character should be "more bashful." (Gaugenmaier 1989:57) Hillerman repeatedly reminds readers that he is not an expert on Navajo or other Native American cultures. (Klinkenborg 1993:36) On the rare occasion that he places a name in the wrong geographical spot, he receives hundreds of letters to let him know. Overall, Hillerman is accepted by his multi-cultural readers as a valid interpreter of Navajo culture. The Navajos themselves accept, embrace, and praise his work. It is one which, as mentioned earlier, allows them "to win." Perhaps it is true that he makes mistakes and has a preferential view of Navajo culture and reservation life. Nevertheless, he represents many important, genuine issues of this Native American culture. All readers can learn something from Hillerman's work. As one book review said, "we get a chance to have a vivid impression of a people and place unlike any other." (Dorris 1988:6)

Cultural Translation and the Concept of Power

Now that Hillerman's credentials as a valid interpreter have been established, his translation can be examined. Hillerman has many topics to portray about the Navajo culture. He wants to project a fair and accurate view of this Native American lifestyle so that especially dominant white culture will learn and understand important aspects of the culture.

He touches upon many aspects of reservation life and the endurance of the culture. Though he is presenting everyday life activities and beliefs, the concept of power ultimately is a major force that is recognizable in his translation.

Power is an immeasurable and often imbalanced force in the confrontation of traditional Navajo culture with that of the outside, dominant white culture. White culture inevitably has immense impact on the subordinate culture. The imbalance of power is reflected in many aspects of Navajo life, and through this concept, Navajo tradition is made very clear. The rest of this paper will discuss the evidence of such power relationships in regards to the Navajo culture. Hillerman uses a variety of tools which demonstrate this. His plots, villains, and two main characters, Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn, make the evidence of power struggles clear.

Perhaps the most important and prevalent theme that Hillerman tries to portray is how the *Dinee* (the Navajo people) measure life as compared to the white man. In *Dance Hall of the Dead*, the contrasting values of the two cultures are portrayed. According to what Hillerman's depiction, white man's measure of life is largely based on money, prestige and status, while the *Dinee* have a harder demand, to find and maintain his place in harmony with things. (1973:87) It is the importance of harmony that the Navajo live for and strive for. It is also a concept which illustrates power relations.

In *Sacred Clowns*, Jim Chee is thinking about the importance of *hozho*, the state of harmony which is the goal of Navajo thought. (1993:133) Harmony is an important aspect in this thriller because both Chee and Leaphorn are subjected to it. Chee, who is the more traditional Navajo, tries to keep his life in harmony with the world around him, in a struggle between his deep religious beliefs, his work as a policeman and his practice as a traditional medicine man. He is pulled out of harmony when he falls in love with a Navajo, Janet Pete, who is not sure of her clan lineage. This poses a major problem for Chee because he realizes they may be distantly related and thus in violation of a strict Navajo taboo. He struggles with the question of what to do if they are related. Will he obey the taboo or will he marry her? His *hozho* is momentarily disarranged.

Jim Chee converses with Janet Pete, his Navajo love who has lost touch with tradition. He tries to explain

his understanding of *hozho*. He gives an example of a drought and says that the proper ceremony can restore people to harmony with the drought. "The system is designed to recognize what's beyond human power to change, and then to change the human's attitude to be content with the inevitable." (Hillerman 1993:274) Chee claims that it is the philosophy of *hozho* which has kept his culture alive and enabled the Navajos to endure. Chee sees *hozho* as an adaptation to the inevitableness of change, thus allowing the necessary adjustments to their ceremonial system.

The concept of Navajo harmony comes into a power struggle when outside, dominant cultural forces infiltrate. This is made evident in the problem of the generation gap where the ideas and beliefs of elderly, traditional Navajo are clashed with those of the younger, more modernized youth. In *Sacred Clowns*, Jim Chee realizes that there is a problem between generations in understanding the concept of *hozho*. Since this theological concept is the foundation of the Navajo religion, differences in understanding would cause a rift between generations. For example, Chee sees *hozho* allowing the adjustment of the ceremonial system. Some of the younger shamans had split a long ceremony over two weekends so working people could take part. However Chee's uncle, a very traditional, old Navajo, Hosteen Nakai (along with other traditionalists) believe that "it's poison and the ceremony winds up doing more harm than good." (Hillerman 1993:275) Hosteen Nakai also believes that the Navajo are being "undermined by young shamans who are too lazy to learn the rules the Holy People taught, or too willing to do ceremonies the wrong way and thus adapt them to the world of the *bilagaani*." (Hillerman 1993:249) *Bilagaani* is the Navajo term for the white man, thus illustrating the force of power at work in this cultural translation.

Perhaps an even better example of power struggle concerning the concept of *hozho* is a dilemma that Chee is facing. First of all, Chee is a very traditional Navajo who is deeply concerned about his people. As mentioned before, he is caught between making a decision between the love of his life and the religion that has always given his life a purpose. He is a tribal police officer and also a practicing *hataali*. These two identities create friction for him. Trying to do the job of a policeman enforcing white man's rules and laws while also trying to maintain traditional customs is very difficult. Chee is struggling with this especially since he wants to be a bona fide traditionalist who wants to save his people for the future. For example, in *Sacred Clowns*, Chee is searching for the drunk driver of a hit and run. After a difficult search he finds the responsible individual. He is a grandfather, living only with his young grandson Ernie, a child suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome. Chee finds this man to be a loving, caring person who doesn't have a drinking problem but once made the mistake of driving while intoxicated. The grandfather also knows of his mistake, and although he doesn't turn himself in to proper authorities, he goes about the traditional way of restoring *hozho* and making up for the loss to the victim's family. Chee is now caught between being a cop who values punishment and a Navajo traditionalist who values curing. Chee says to Janet Pete at one point, "The question is *bilagaani* justice or Navajo justice. Or maybe it's Do you try for punishment or do you try for *hozho*?" (Hillerman 1993:273) In the end, although Chee would get a promotion for turning in the grandfather, he chooses to be set with the traditional Navajo way. He even goes so far as to help the elderly man cover up incriminating evidence.

The concept of *hozho*, like all other Navajo philosophies and beliefs, inevitably becomes enmeshed in the power relationship between the *Dinee* and *Bilagaani*. Hillerman addresses this by examining the pull of outside dominant culture on the subordinate society, in the form of alcohol abuse, loss of identity, and the distorting power of the outside world (shown through greed). These forces pull the Navajo people out of balance with their own lifestyle. Hillerman makes it clear throughout his work that alcohol abuse is a big problem affecting the reservation. In *Sacred Clowns* Chee is confronted by a fourteen year old boy:

"And Chee recognized this boy's problem. He had seen this physical evidence before. Seen it too often. They called it fetal alcohol syndrome - the doom the mother imposes on her child when she drinks while pregnant. It was another of the reasons Chee hated alcohol, hated the people who made it, advertised it, and sold it, and poisoned his people with it."

(Hillerman 1993:199). In *Dance Hall of the Dead*, Leaphorn also is confronted with a drunken father. The sad effect of the father's condition is seen through the shame of his son:

"Cecil hesitated. "You been to our place just now. My father. Was he..." Embarrassment overcame the need to know. "Yeah," Leaphorn said. "He'd been drinking some. But I think it'll be alright. I think he'll be asleep by the time you get home." And then he looked away from the pain and shame in Cecil's face." (Hillerman 1973:28)

Later on, Leaphorn is having a conversation with a minor character, telling her the father of the boy is dead. She makes it clear that although the boy was ashamed of his father, he still really loved him. She says, "That's like your father being sick (about alcoholism). He can't really help it. You can still love them then and it's not so bad." (Hillerman 1973: 116) Leaphorn can't help but ask the question of why Shorty Bowlegs was hiding from his children in a bottle. Leaphorn and Chee, on a daily basis, see alcohol as a rampant evil on the reservation. As in *Sacred Clowns*, alcohol abuse is evident in other thrillers such as *The Blessing Way*. This is seen in a minor character, a drunk old man, who is easily framed for a murder. It is also seen in the sad story of a drunk-driving hit-and-run case in which an intoxicated driver hit a pedestrian, backed the car up to look at the victim, and drove away leaving the person to bleed to death. One character says, "With whiskey involved you can't tell (what people will do). Mothers kill their children when they are drunk." (Hillerman 1993:154). With declining culture and tradition comes the loss of identity for many people. In *Dance Hall of the Dead*, Hillerman incorporates, along with a Navajo boy, three young white adults who are searching for an identity and place in the world. For the young Navajo boy a struggle with his own personal identity causes him a lot of trouble. George Bowlegs had no adults to teach him the traditional ways because he lived with only his little brother and drunken father. He was a Navajo who wanted to be a Zuni. George is portrayed as a lost child, caught up in a dream world to escape reality and search for a new identity. The other young white adults, who fallen through the cracks of their own culture's power structure, are living in a small commune on the reservation because they feel they do not belong any other place in the world. Hillerman reveals that the loss of identity is reflected in the loss of language which is the result of outside power of white, dominant society. Leaphorn and Chee are led to a suspect because of his language (heard over the radio). His language sounded like, "childhood Navajo." (Hillerman 1993:169) "A lot of middle aged Navajos had a limited vocabulary in their language because in those days the BIA wouldn't let them speak it in school and that was the age period when you grow out of your childhood vocabulary." (1993: 169).

Other Hillerman characters undergo the turmoil of being caught between two different worlds. In Hillerman's view, one cannot comfortably embrace both lifestyles. In *The Blessing Way*, three characters are subjected to such problems, caught up in the power struggles of both cultures, and they abruptly die tragically. Horseman is a character who initially is wanted by the police for an assault. He is a Navajo who has lost the traditional ways, lost his *hozho*. He has had three arrests for drunken, disorderly conduct, assault and battery, and driving while under the influence of narcotics. While Leaphorn discusses Horseman with an anthropologist friend, he says, "just another poor soul who didn't quite know how to be a Navajo and couldn't learn to act like a white. No good for anything." (Hillerman 1970:51)

Another character who gets caught between the two cultures is George, whom was known as "the Big Navajo." The Big Navajo was a "relocation Navajo," "a child of one of those unfortunate families moved off the drought-stricken reservation to urban centers during the 1930's." (Hillerman 1970:184) Being raised in Los Angeles meant he had a weak command of the Navajo language and weak belief in traditions. It is because of this that Leaphorn comes to suspect him as a possible villain. The Big Navajo became desperate and thus resorted to illegal means for survival.

The third character is Jimmie Willie Hall, a college-educated Navajo who is into electronic communication products. His aim in life, however, is to beat the system and buy back his own life. His goal is to make a lot of money. It is this sort of greed which pulls him into an illegal scam with The Big Navajo. It is greed which Hillerman associates with white culture and ultimately causes the downfall of so many Navajos. Because the Big Navajo was not acting like a Navajo but acting more like a white man, Leaphorn was able to figure out the scam. He says, "You put it together. A lot of money and a killing. It's not natural and it's not Navajo." (Hillerman 1970: 200) Greed and coveting material possessions, Leaphorn calls, "the Navajo ultimate of unnatural wickedness." (1970: 182)

In *Dance Hall of the Dead*, Hillerman emphasizes the aspect of greed in the white man's life goals. He portrays this through a minor character, Ted Isaacs. At first Isaacs seems like a good guy, a very hard working graduate student from a poor Tennessee family. Isaacs is working on a Folsom man dig on the reservation and is also involved with a girl living in a commune close by. However, this girl is in trouble with the drug-infested group she lives with so Leaphorn asks Isaacs if he will shelter her. Isaacs replies, "that would blow my

dissertation research, and the degree, and the whole ball game." Instead he chooses to let his love live in danger. In the end of the story, Isaacs is confronted with the dilemma of committing an professional, unethical act in order to save his research. Leaphorn says, "I'm trying to learn more about the white man. You wanted all that (career, money, status) more than you wanted your woman. What else will you give up for it?" (Hillerman 1973:242)

Hillerman uses his main characters, Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn to provide a more personal look into the feelings and emotions of the Navajo people. Every day these characters are subjected to an intense pull from both cultures (mainly because of their profession). They perceive the distortions that are brought on by the forces of power.

Joe Leaphorn is often caught between ideas and beliefs of both cultures. Throughout each thriller Leaphorn portrays some cynicism about certain aspects of the culture such as tradition, religion, and witchcraft. In *Dance Hall of the Dead* the reader gets a glimpse of his history, childhood, and how he learned the words and legends of the Blessing Way, what the Holy People told Earth Surface People about how to live, and that the only goal was beauty and beauty was only found in harmony. Leaphorn had an intense and traditional teacher, his grandfather, Hosteen Nashibitti. Words Leaphorn lived by:

"When the dung beetle moves," Hosteen Nashibitti told him, "know that something has moved it. And know that its movement affects the flight of the sparrow, and that the raven deflects the eagle from the sky, and that the eagle's stiff wing bends the will of the Wind People, and know that all of this affects you and me, and the flea on the prairie dog and the leaf on the cottonwood." That had always been the point of the lesson. Interdependency of nature. Every cause has its effect. Every action its reaction. A reason for everything. In all things a pattern, and in this pattern, the beauty of harmony. Thus one learned to live with evil, by understanding it, by reading its cause. And thus one learned, gradually and methodically, if one was lucky to always "go in beauty," to always look for the pattern and to find it. (Hillerman 1973: 77)

It was these early lessons which Leaphorn was able to adapt in his profession as a police officer. When trying to figure out these unsolved homicides, Leaphorn's "orderly soul demanded rational harmony." (Hillerman 1973:176) However, when the crimes seemed completely irrational, Leaphorn struggles. Leaphorn does not count on luck but expects order. He looks for the natural sequence of behavior. As a policeman he has a "knack to sort out the chaos of observed facts and find in them this natural order." However when this talent worked out unusually well, it bothered him because of the ingrained Navajo idea that this was far from the human norm, unnatural and unhealthy. But when the facts weren't rational by nature, "acute mental discomfort" forms. (Hillerman 1970:152) And although Leaphorn had an intense, traditional mentor and follows ingrained Navajo ideas, he still struggles with some aspects of these beliefs.

Leaphorn is especially skeptical about witchcraft. In *Skinwalkers* it is clear that he has no tolerance for witchcraft, stories of Skinwalkers, corpse sickness or anything about Navajo wolves. When Leaphorn is confronted by Sandoval, a Hataali, who asks him if he believes in witchcraft, Leaphorn replies, "My Grandfather, I have learned to believe in evil." (Hillerman 1970:71) This sort of skepticism arose in Leaphorn from beliefs that "the tribe had been infected with the notion while it was held captive down at Fort Sumner" and thus had no legitimacy in Navajo culture. (Hillerman 1986:74)

The sickness of Leaphorn's wife, Emma, displays some of his inner conflict. Readers are introduced to Emma's sickness in *Skinwalkers*. Before Emma is actually diagnosed with a brain tumor, Leaphorn fears that she suffers from Alzheimer's. Because of her terrible episodes of fear and forgetfulness, there is nothing in either culture which can cure or relieve the suffering. Leaphorn wants his Navajo wife to see a *bilagaani* doctor yet fears that he will say it's Alzheimer's, a dreadful disease with no known causes or cures. White medicine wouldn't be able to help him either.

In *Sacred Clowns*, after Leaphorn's wife has passed away, he finds it impossible to think of his wife as a malevolent ghost (the Navajo belief of "life" after death). Leaphorn accepts the disapproval of her family by avoiding the traditional observed days of silence and grief. He needs time to be alone with his own sorrow. (Hillerman 1993:234). Leaphorn, although often caught between two worlds, is still deep down a proud traditionalist. While attending a Blessing Way for work reasons, he feels a "sudden fierce pride in the people." (Hillerman 1970:74) Pleasant memories return of a Blessing Way performed for him before his depar-

ture for war. He also finds pride in being a Navajo tracker in *Dance Hall of the Dead* when he is looking for a missing child in the wilderness. (Hillerman 1973:184)

As mentioned earlier, Chee is often caught between cultures also. Chee is very active in political matters. In *Sacred Clowns* there is a secondary-story going on about a toxic waste dump proposal for the reservation. In a letter to the *Navajo Times* Chee calls the proposal as "symbolic of the contempt felt for tribal lands." (Hillerman 1993:4).

Concerning the Navajo Agricultural Industries project (NAI), Chee had mixed feelings. It made him proud that his people were preserving their water use rights. He had seen it as a "rare and seemingly small Navajo victory over white land grabbers." (Hillerman 1993:193) Chee's people had effectively turned the land into useful irrigation property, yet the NAI had also saddened him. Navajo tradition taught him that the spirit of Changing Woman claimed that the earth was a nurturing mother who must be treated with respect. However, the NAI had altered the landscape as the "bulldozers had ripped away plant life, and the insects and mammals that fed upon it, and the birds that fed upon them." (Hillerman 1993:194).

The turmoil felt between the cultures in these stories is also demonstrated in the ideas surrounding racism, prejudice, and ignorance. Chee and Leaphorn are subjected to it daily. As Bakerman demonstrates, having the heroes, Leaphorn and Chee, subjecting others to and defending themselves against racism, their characters are deepened. Their interaction with other Native American cultures, not just white, also proves how it is human to fall into racism and exploitation. Bakerman says that, "Their own biases arise directly from the multicultural society in which they live and work." (1984:22). These aspects can be seen in some of the story lines affecting the two main characters. For example, in *Dance Hall of the Dead*, Leaphorn is uncomfortable with Zuni culture, with which he has to directly deal with to solve the mystery. He realizes what these negative feelings stem from the memories of a Zuni college roommate who had treated him as if Navajos were "slow and stupid." (Hillerman 1973:9) He had developed what he called a "silly inferiority complex." (1973: 10) This youthful relationship had created in Leaphorn his own prejudice. While on the search for a killer he scornfully thinks he, "could find tracks where a Zuni couldn't." (1973: 15).

However, Leaphorn has to work closely to Ed Pasquaanti, Chief of the Zuni Police. In order to find the killers, Pasquaanti entrusts Leaphorn with important, secret, information about a Zuni ceremony. While at the ceremony, the Shalako, Leaphorn is touched by its majesty and mystery and for a moment sees, "Shalako, the courier between Gods and men." (Hillerman 1977:220) As Leaphorn sits at the ceremony he reaches a comfortable appreciation for Zuni religion and culture.

Chee demonstrates the exploitation of the Hopi culture in *The Dark Wind*. In order to put the clues together, he needs vital information about the Hopi culture, given to him by Deputy Sheriff Albert "Cowboy" Dashee. Cowboy comes to trust Chee and he carefully provides the necessary information Chee needs. Chee uses this information to sneak into a Hopi village during a private ritual. Even though Chee is serving justice and saving his career, it is a violation of custom and the confidence of Cowboy's friendship. In these ways, Chee and Leaphorn show how they are like people from all cultures - subject to prejudice and racism. They show that they too find a struggle in a multi-cultural world and can subject others to like exploitation. Hillerman wants to demonstrate that no one is free of such prejudice, but everyone can be aware of it and try to overcome it as Chee and Leaphorn do.

Throughout these thrillers, the role of the United States government, the FBI and anthropologists/archaeologists also demonstrate the conflict of power between the white and Navajo cultures. According to Hillerman, the government, FBI and the academics do not clearly or completely understand or appreciate the Navajo culture, nor do they try. In *The Blessing Way*, Bergen McKee is an anthropologist who goes to the reservation to study witchcraft. His character is not particularly accepting or understanding of the culture which he is studying. He appears to be quite ignorant and disbelieving of some cultural aspects such as Navajo wolves. He says, "My Navajo Wolves, being strictly psychotherapeutic, are certified harmless." (Hillerman 1970:20) He believes, as most anthropologists would, that the belief in witches creates a scapegoat from tensions derived from family, jealousies, and sickness. Witchcraft, as it appears to the Navajos, is just not a possible, legitimate, scientific solution to this anthropologist.

As McKee looks for his scapegoat thesis, he also displays ridicule for the Navajo belief system. He is seen making fun of the belief in witches one night while he's at camp with his colleague, Dr. Canfield:

"From the infinite distance came the faint sound of barking. "Take your pick," McKee said. "A coyote, some shepherd's lost dog, or one of my witches turned into a wolf for the evening..." Actually, McKee remembered, the turquoise shape wasn't a Navajo charm. It was a much older Anastasia fertility totem with nothing at all to do with witches. Of course, it didn't really matter." (Hillerman 1970:49)

McKee also is portrayed as an ignorant anthropologist who thinks he knows everything. When thinking about the custom of honking the horn to let households know a visitor has arrived he "guessed it was a universal custom among rural people." (Hillerman 1970: 59) He also appears to underestimate Navajo intelligence. While discussing, with an old Navajo woman, the technology of dynamiting to detect oil, "McKee had not felt this Navajo good enough to undertake an explanation of how seismograph crews record shock waves in searching for petroleum deposits." (1970: 43)

In *Talking God*, "evil lies not within a single character but within the entire field of archaeology." (Neary 1995: 60) Hillerman uses his character, Henry Highhawk (a young, angry, Indian anthropologist), to make his point. Highhawk comments on archaeology and the role of museums:

"Here you see the gods of conquered people displayed like exotic animals in the public zoo. Only the overthrown and captured gods are here. Here you see the sacred things torn from the temples of Inca worshippers, stolen from the holy kivas of the Pueblo People, sacred icons looted from burned tepee villages on the buffalo plains. Above your head, lining the halls and corridors of this very building, are thousands of cases and bins and boxes. In them you find the skeletons of children, mothers, grandfathers. They have been dug out of burials where their mourning relatives placed them." (Hillerman 1989:205)

Hillerman obviously doesn't like most anthropologists and archaeologists very much. In an interview he said that he tries to reflect an accurate sense of what they do and that they don't seem to resent his depiction of their profession. Hillerman's main complaint and his portrayal represent the fact that he sees them as disrupters of *hozho* as they come in, study, and transform the culture bringing along their own Anglo-American assumptions and ideas. (Hillerman and Bulow 1991:77)

Another field of white culture which Hillerman is trying to make a statement about is law enforcement and leadership from Washington D.C. It is another way to show how some facets of popular white culture have little regard for Native American culture and how their power imposes on the Navajo. The American government is often depicted as a disrupting force in the Navajo culture. *Skinwalkers* perhaps demonstrates this point the best. In this story, Yellowhorse is the owner of a health clinic who resorts to illegal means to receive more government funding. He says, "It balances way out in favor of saving the clinic... I know for sure we've saved dozens of lives already, and we'll save dozens more. And better than that, we're stopping birth defects, and catching diabetes cases early, and we'll save dozens more. And glaucoma, I know we've caught a dozen cases of that early enough to save good vision." (Hillerman 1986:273) Yellowhorse feels that his illegal actions are justified. He claims that he is, "getting the government to pay its share. Have you ever read the treaty? The one we signed at Fort Sumner? Promises. One schoolteacher for every thirty children, everything else. The government never kept any promises." (Hillerman 1986:275)

The history of the culture was also subjected to the imbalance of power. In fact, the United States government, through such force literally transformed a facet of Navajo history. In *Sacred Clowns* there is a brief discussion of historical transformation at the hands of the dominant power. This occurred in a historical time the Navajos call *Naahondzibd*, the "fearing time" in which the American army joined with the Mexicans and Utes in a war against the *Dinee*. During this time many of the Navajos were separated and taken to prison, however when they were released from jail they had created their own clan. "Since they came from all over they couldn't name them with the place they came from, so everybody called them the Hunger People." (Hillerman 1993:247)

Continually throughout these thrillers Leaphorn and Chee are confronted by FBI agents who don't understand Navajo culture and treat the Navajo police accordingly. The Navajo police are seen by the FBI as more of a nuisance in their investigations. In *Dance Hall of the Dead* the FBI play a role which proves to be offensive to the Navajo police. As soon as the FBI agents are introduced, they insult the local police by introducing a man as "Agent Baker" but not truthfully telling the Navajos that he is a narcotics agent. While thinking about Agent-in-Charge-O'Malley, Leaphorn asks, "Was he green enough to believe that none of the men in the room would know that Baker was a narc? Or was he arrogant enough not to care if they (the Navajo police) detected the insult?" (Hillerman 1973: 100). Later on in the story the FBI once again show their lack of respect. While at a Zuni Shalako Ceremony, Leaphorn and Agent Baker are both looking for a missing boy. "Baker glanced at Leaphorn - a glance without recognition - and then had looked away. He obviously did not want to be seen talking to a man in the uniform of the Navajo police." (Hillerman 1973:222). As it happens, to be able to discover the murderer of this thriller, one must have some concept of the Zuni and Navajo cultures. The FBI agents basically remain clueless throughout the story because they don't see the connections or even try to understand the cultural implications of the murder. Leaphorn, a Navajo with some knowledge of the Zuni religion, is able to put the puzzle together. In the end, the murderer is also killed, but because of complicated circumstances his body disappears and he is classed as a missing person. Leaphorn knows this, putting together the whole motive and story while the FBI haven't caught any clues at all. Leaphorn figures, "maybe someday he would write a note to O'Malley and let him know who killed Ernesto Cata. But probably not." (Hillerman 1973:242)

As mentioned throughout this paper, there were many times in which Chee and Leaphorn were caught between being a policeman and being a Navajo. The FBI's role also supports this. In the story mentioned above, after a boy is shot Leaphorn chooses tradition over FBI procedure:

"Back in the alley, he stared down at the body of George Bowlegs. Snow had whitened Leaphorn's coat and the boy's too-small denims. Leaphorn squatted and picked up the dead boy, his arms under the legs and shoulders. He guessed he was again violating O'Malley's procedures by moving the body. But he would not allow this boy to lie there alone in the icy darkness." (Hillerman 1973:232)

Hillerman is trying to make an important statement about certain academic and professional structures of white culture. He is trying to prove that there is a lack of respect and understanding for this culture (and other Native American cultures). Even those that claim or believe they have a fair understanding of Navajo lifestyle are often the ones who still have biases and lack adequate comprehension. Those that are outwardly disrespectful, such as the FBI, are depicted as the ignorant ones. Cross-cultural understandings are the major reoccurring theme in Tony Hillerman's thrillers. He portrays the Navajo culture as a very complex one which is difficult to understand. As it is, Chee and Leaphorn struggle with trying to learn and understand themselves and their culture as the frictional power of cultures divides ideas and beliefs. Tony Hillerman's work is a valid exercise in the translation of the Navajo culture. This paper has focused on his representation and how this illustrates the complex force of power at work. However, in these thrillers there is much more to be learned. Hillerman demonstrates such aspects as how ceremonials work, the reasoning behind certain customs, and even how the beautiful landscape of the reservation affect its people. There are many themes at work in this translation, from simple descriptions of cultural concepts to more in depth aspects such as the manifestation of power. Hillerman's lesson is a readable lesson for all people and ages that promotes understanding and an appreciation for the views of cultural relativism. It is the lesson of a multicultural world and the influence of one culture upon another.

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