

## **Ethnological Conflict and Search for Healing of Non-White's with the Power of Stories in Silko's Ceremony**

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*Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony reflects the Laguna cosmology conscientiously for Native American independency. Stories included in the Ceremony Ceremony inspire women and common citizens to take a position for fighting against all kinds of discriminations that Natives are facing even in their own ancestral land. The study highlights the ceremonies problems in women's cases with racial issues and makes the cultural study to create a socio-cultural harmony. Principal objective of the study is to create a harmonious relationship among Non-whites, Mix-breed and Whites. Silko writes that the good is greater than God and that good is to create the harmonious relation among different races. This article brings out the causes and consequences of ethnological conflicts and carries out the possible approaches to reduce the racial and socio-cultural disharmony.*

[**Keywords** : Ceremonies, Witchery, Mix-breed, Healing, Independency, Darkness, Patriotism, Representation]

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## 1. Text and Context

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* begins with a poem reflecting on Laguna cosmology and incorporates the different issues on land, spirit, women, race, identity, war, witchery, evils and stories of changes. Central figures that Silko focuses in Pueblo cosmology are Thought-woman, Corn mother and the Sun father. Tayo narrates the stories about their experiences and collected memories. Individual stories of Tayo and collected stories of the people are included in the *Ceremony*. Tayo believes a lot in the traditional norms and values regarding the ceremonies and enjoys celebrating them. He accompanies with his friends and community people to invent the new ceremonies, for instance, in the time of drought he celebrates the rain ceremony and it rains. Stories are based upon oral tradition and ceremonies practice especially of the Navajo and Pueblo people.

The stories are about protection of culture and cultural changes as a representative self in recreation of the world voicing for justice to the people as legal documents with the power of healing. Native Americans celebrate the ceremonies frequently for the whole days and nights that are mentioned in *Ceremony*. They prepare different kinds of pictures of their god and goddesses especially related with Christian mythologies and worship them with different purposes to fulfill their dreams and desires. Silko criticizes on continuation of the cultural reservation without changes as says Betonie :

The people nowadays have an idea about the ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as they have always been done, maybe because one slip-up or mistake and the whole ceremony must be stopped and the sand painting destroyed. That much is true. They think that if a singer tampers with any part of ritual, great harm can be done, great power unleashed. He was quiet for a while looking up at the sky through the smoke hole. That much can be true also. But long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began, if only in the aging for the yellow gourd rattle or the shrinking of the skin around the eagle's claw, if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing (*Ceremony*, 126).

Betonie is a spiritual healer who is known as a half-breed medicine man. His relationship with Tayo is contradictory as on the

one hand they serve in the military as friends, work together for human freedom and Native American's independency but on the other hand he insults Tayo to be a mixed breed. Betonie charges Tayo that he is close to the Whites even in the time of Tayo's critical condition in the hospital as he was nearly killed while serving as a patriotic army. "Western doctors and the local medicine man can do nothing to heal him. He is surrounded by bags of medicinal herbs, bones, sticks, and magical ceremonies wishing for health recovery. So they accept all kinds of treatment including allopathic, natural medication, magical activities of Indian communities and psychological counseling as spiritual healer.

Majority of the native people seem rigid in the cases of cultural changes, they celebrate the ceremonies for whole night within their communities and worship their goddess. Whites started cultural politics in the name of ceremonies and they victimize to the natives. They fueled misconceptions among natives to make them lost within the cultural boundaries to fulfill their dreams and desire to rule over them forever. Representation of the Navajo cultural community in Laguna and returning home to the Laguna Pueblo reservation from World War II via a Veteran's Hospital, Tayo finds a way to cure himself of his mental anguish to bring the rain back to his community in the time of draught by rejecting the cultural dominances in the name of ceremonies. Natives started opposing the dominances rejecting the bars created by Whites and planned to take the revenge with them as they captured their land, spirits and cultures that Silko writes in *Ceremony* combining prose and poetry. Collective memories of Harley, Leroy, Emo, Pinkie, Auntie, Josiah, Betonie, Thought-woman, Corn mother, Sun father and Rocky are narrated by Tayo in the stories of Laguna Pueblo people who fought in the World War and collected post-traumatic stress with socio-cultural conflicts. "...victims try to control themselves in self-medicating with alcohol" (Wilson, 84). Conflict among Mix-breed, Whites and Native Americans is never ending that drought the racial relationship. Laguna voices reflect the war memories of Tayo's mother's words casting an opposite wall in the white square. War memories tangle White men darker after death that is the power given to the Natives by stories to heal.

## **2. Race, Culture and Gynocentrism in Ceremony**

Tayo, Emo and Rocky are close from school days and they serve jointly in army. Tayo is born of mixed breed blood of white father and

black mother and so Emo insults him. Emo is moody, drinks alcohol and involves himself in the murder cases of Pinkie and Harley. He takes all human beings and their works to be valued equally and so he rejects the color discrimination. He wants to take revenge against all kinds of dominances. He has a different perspective about racism; he claims it as a White European's politics for Native's dominance and remarks :

Long time ago  
in the beginning  
there were no white people in this world  
there was nothing European.  
And this world might have gone on like that  
except for one thing:  
witchery.  
This world was already complete  
even without white people.  
There was everything  
including witchery.  
Then it happened.  
These witch people got together.  
some came from far far away  
across oceans  
across mountains.  
Some had slanty eyes  
others had black skin.  
They all got together for a contest  
the way people have baseball tournaments nowadays  
except this was a contest  
in dark things (*Ceremony*, 132-33).

According to Emo color discriminations are unnecessary debates created by the people who crossed the borders by ships or came over the mountains and captured their lands, destroyed the culture and started ruling over them. In the past there were no eyes and skin debates among people in America but with the passes of time people shifted from different parts of the world seeking for

opportunities. Natives and Non-natives or Blacks and Whites are not subjects to debate as it happens in the global world according to ideas, views and geographical locations. "People gather in different parts of the world across the oceans and mountains and now they are debating for dark things (A Laguna Grail Story, 92)." Skin does not determine darkness and whiteness but it is their concept. Tayo narrates the stories of witches and witchery, "Witches crawl into skins of dead animals, but they can do nothing but play around with objects and bodies. Living animals are terrified of witches. They smell the death. That's why witches can't get close to them (*Ceremony*, 131)." Their ideas, views and works about celebrating the rituals determine how much black or white/superstitious and changed they are by heart. As a ritual "...people keep dogs around their hogans. Dogs howl with fear when witch animals come around (131)." Silko writes, "...white men were darker after death (7)." Silko mean to say that white people have dark heart and Natives have white heart where they try to treat equally to the Natives and Non-natives. In this sense Natives take White Europeans as war mongering people. Tayo narrates about evil activities of the war mongering people who discriminate in the name of nationality, race and identity issues, increase the enmity and inspire their people/army to fight and murder the enemies as an obedient soldier. Silko writes :

The sergeant told them to kill all the Japanese soldiers lined up in front of the cave with their hands on their heads, Tayo could not pull the trigger. The fever made him shiver, and the sweat was stinging his eyes and he couldn't see clearly; in that instant he saw Josiah standing there; the face was dark from the sun, and the eyes were squinting as though he were about to smile at Tayo. So Tayo stood there, stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers (7-8).

Silko portrays the horrific picture of wars among Japanese, Philippines, Spanish, Mexican, European and Native American. Navajo Laguna, Pueblo, Mexican, Spanish and Japanese soldier's humanity is dehumanized and they are killed like animals in the order of sergeants. "The disastrous picture of the women and children in the voice of voiceless reflects the never ending war between Natives and Non-natives (Salyea, 64)." Josia's trip to Black Mountain in the rain continues up to southwest that symbolizes her

never ending journey that has neither the proper beginning nor the end of the stories. The journey looks like foliage from the sky targeting to the earth but entangled in the island and vice versa. Whites take native women as prostitutes and their desire for home comes as a healing power of mixed breed as it is narrated, "...it is easy to remain invisible here, isn't it Tayo? It was until you came. It was all white, all the color of the smoke, the fog. I am sending you home Tayo; tomorrow you'll go on the train (*Ceremony*, 16)." Tayo entangles with sweats for the whole nights. Neither he can reject the traditions nor can he keep in the safe-landing of the Natives to rescue from the dangers of Whites.

Cultural dissatisfaction in Silko's *Ceremony* is about ill intentions and wrong practices of the certain cultural communities. There were lots of wrong practices about fight, wars and even murder of the innocents and celebrations by the power to exercise in the society as observed and told by an old man :

...in the old days  
long time ago  
they had this  
Scalp society  
for warriors  
who killed  
or touched  
dead enemies (*Ceremony*, 37).

The old man tells the powerful stories through close observation of terrible punishments and killing of innocent Natives like Auntie and Grandma whose rooms of life and livelihood seem darker all the time. The old man reopens the bundled stories and discloses the historical truths by telling the stories of their ancestors who celebrate the White European people's ceremonies. "Natives are always afraid of the White people's activities collecting some terrors at what will happen at any time (Doren, 35)" as Tayo narrates. Tayo and Emo's misunderstanding is that Tayo frightens from Whites but Emo inspires to take the revenge with them and Whites charge Emo and his friends as black witchery. America for the Indian victims is dry land and dark place where they are neither able to create an identity nor they occupy an open space but what they face in all their lives is disease, depression, death, misbehave and injustices which

inspired them to fight against all kinds of ill treatments of the Whites as says Emo, "They took our land, they took everything! so let's get our hands on white women! (*Ceremony*, 55)."

Paula Gunn Allen takes Laguna Pueblo people shifting as 'stars flew'. Major focus of the novel is on 'power of stories' to heal. Silko fuels the Natives to fight and take revenge against all kinds of injustices. Tayo's quest for identify is healing with the importance of stories. The stories are important for Silko because they have power for healing about people and culture. Supporting in Silko's writing Gregory writes that, "...the world without stories becomes fragmented and people alienated" (Gregory, 42). Silko's *Ceremony* is a poetic novel in prosaic form containing the stories about their power to heal with final truth where Tayo seeks for the growth of stories. Stories refresh the memories of the past and they remind the people about their ritual, art and culture that help to rewrite the cultural history. The fragility of individual is like the stories of spider webs bringing different narratives in *Ceremony*. Growth of Tayo's consciousness is symbolical growth of the stories in present societal growth. Form and content in Silko's writing of the *Ceremony* is unique in poetic-prosaic style. Line breaks, spacing and poetic expressions are meditative incorporating Tayo's individual stories and stories of the common people with general feelings in the stories of Whites and Native characters. The symbol of sunrise is growth power of the stories to heal seeking for the ultimate freedom of Native Americans from the dominance of Whites.

Tayo wants to keep the things between Natives and Non-natives in balance as he is from white father and non-white mother as an output of mix-breed. Tayo's shifting power provides hope in the possibility of creation of good relation between Natives and Non-natives rather than creating an ethnological conflict and the fear of destruction. Native women like Auntie, Thought-woman and Corn mother are always dominated by Whites and they are experiencing the wretched life. They are remembering their past days about how they celebrated the ceremonies for whole night and enjoyed the moments among their friends and relatives and now they are thinking about future. Stories relating with the condition of women, Silko starts writing her novel *Ceremony* with these poetic expressions :

Thought-Woman, the spider,  
named things and

as she named them  
they appeared  
She is sitting in her room  
thinking of a story now  
I'm telling you the story  
she is thinking (*Ceremony*, 1).

Three central figures of the novel in Pueblo cosmology are Thought-woman, Corn mother and Sun father and here Silko opens her novel illustrating the activities of Thought-woman. Silko brings the voices of voiceless women through representatives whose activities are limited within the narrow rooms. They are sitting within a room and thinking about their future with the dreams and desires of their own independency. Women and their values in *Ceremony* symbolically reflect Silko's own energy to understand the feminist values. Female figure in Laguna Pueblo Mythology is marked as the earth that worked hard for 'Female Identity'. Tayo's memory on female identities heals through the conflicts of White and Non-white women having injustice grab of their land by whites. Emo puts forward the concept with Tayo of declaring war because the Whites only use and throw them and they are having nothing to show for it, Emo remarks, "We fought their war for them. . . they took everything!" (55). In *Ceremony*, Natives are angry with Whites and they want to get revenge by raising their hands towards the white women. The revenge motive of Emo groups also does not seem fair because they want to take revenge with women whereas their "gynocentric unfair intention invites the gender conflict (Aggarwal, 46)" that ultimately invites the fight for gender roles. Therefore, *Ceremony* along with the stories of healing is centered on the issues of women and racial discrimination.

The color and gender discriminations are grave problems for both the Whites and Non-white women as the social disharmony started in their homeland. Concept of the present society is bad to raise their hands towards female bodies to take the revenge. This type of gynocentric violence and ethnological conflict in the stories of Silko bring the moral lesson to not to fight among peoples in the community. This type of politically incorrect war leads the plot of the novel into complexity and people into darkness. In *Ceremony* the women are symbolically compared with rain and earth for the



'power of growth and fertilization'. Women of the Mount Taylor are surrounded by the yellow color and others by whites and non-whites. Tayo puts forward the concept of feminist issue and says :

Corn woman  
 worked hard all day  
 sweating in the sun  
 getting sore hands  
 in the corn field....(*Ceremony*, 13).

The above extracted piece of poem deals with the hard labour of corn women who worked all the day and night for living hood. Poverty and disease of the Non-whites is dangerous issue in White's land. Whites run the industries, work in the offices, earn lots of money and enjoy their lives but the Non-whites work hard sweating in the sun and being wet in the rain. Concept of home and land is culturally associated with identity problem and Norma C. Wilson writes, "Choice of cultural identity; human responsibilities to the earth, to oneself and to others; the ravages or racism; the presence of evil and goodness in humanity; the development of nuclear weapons; physical, mental and spiritual health; war and violence ...(Wilson, 70)." Silko's wish to return back to the homeland is possibly a search for nationality. Attack of whiteness by non-whites is the grab for revenge of colonial witchery of Whites. Nature of language use in Native American culture is one of the most difficult element for non- natives to understand the values of land. Non whites and mixed breed people are dominated by whites and so racial and cultural fight continued for a long among American, European, Mexican, Philippines and Japanese.

Gender and cultural issues for half breed people are greater. Betonie says to Tayo that mixed blood is a bond between him and Tayo. He further explains that a modern medicine man needs to present him differently and uses the artifacts of white American societies. Four American Indian Literary Masters Writers, claim "Betonie makes it clear that the ultimate causes of Tayo's illness, and the real enemy, is 'the witchery'" (Velie, 115). The witchery in Southwest Indian culture is very similar to those of medieval Europe. About the issues and concept on half-breed, Tayo says :

I'm half-breed. I'll be the first to say it. I'll speak for both sides.  
 First time you walked down the street in Gallup or

Albuquerque, you knew. Don't lie. You knew right away. The war was over, the uniform was gone. All of a sudden that man at the store waits on you last, makes you wait until all the white people bought what they wanted. And the white lady at the bus depot, she's real careful now not to touch your hand when she counts out your change (*Ceremony*, 42).

Non-whites are in jealousy of Whites because they are able to buy what they want without any objection and wait. White women do not have any objection in using the public vehicles, storing the things in the side and paying for them but the Natives and Mixed-breed people are not allowed to touch them and wait for a long until the Whites finish their works. They suffer in poverty as they have a low purchase capacity.

### **3. Conclusion**

Silko's *Ceremony* presents Tayo's new threats to the Pueblo to study the early Spanish conquest, and Second World War's dangerous attempts to continue the Laguna, Pueblo culture. Tayo's next seeking of medicine man tries to heal with the traditional Laguna culture. He chants in native language and explains for own sake, but entire world is under the spell of witchery. Love symbol in *Ceremony* gives power to fight against the social evil done in the basis of racial and cultural discriminations. Betonie is also a new kind of healer because he is half-Mexican like Tayo which is mentioned in the medicine man's story. Stories in *Ceremony* jump from traditional myths to the ritual revolts to meet the needs of present society. So, *Ceremony* is a novel about women, culture, identity, land, poverty and sickness. Tayo finally finds peace by participating in a Native American ceremony that allows him to free from horrors of cultural wars in ceremonies. Therefore, Silko's *Ceremony* presents the stories with ideas to solve the ethnological conflict searching for healing of Non-White's with the power of stories to heal.

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