

Bicultural Adaptations in Silko's *Ceremony*

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Abstract

Ceremony is one of the important novels of Leslie Marmon Silko Which has been her highly acclaimed masterpiece published in 1977. It aims to achieve such a balance and reorientation into the process of cultural adaptations between the Natives' Culture & Whites. This novel tries to justify the importance of age-old Native American Culture, beliefs & Tradition and in unison creates sense of bicultural adaptations. This novel explores the inner conflict of its male protagonist, Tayo. The novel is set in Post-War (World War II) years in a small town of New Mexico where the hero, Tayo – a young war veteran returns. At the beginning of the novel Tayo is shown as “ill” – hallucinating, despairing, dispossessed and disoriented. He feels guilty for his cousin Rocky's death in the war though he could not do anything to save him. The hero suffers because of the general moral downfall that resulted from it. Tayo does not respond to the treatment given by the Whites. So he returns home where he undergoes Native treatment which helps him cured. Tayo is bicultural & try to understand his personal identity in a multicultural society. He learns values of cultural differences of his own & other peoples and becomes compassionate. Bicultural people learn a life lesson and the importance of respect for other cultures. Tayo, the male protagonist, completely recovers from illness & knows the importance of Native values & beliefs that embodies his being. He also acquires adaptation skill for survivance in mainstream culture.

KEYWORDS : Conflict tradition, acculturation, bicultural, multicultural, Survivance.

Living between two cultures becomes a serious challenge to people who are segregated in a place in society where they do not conform. A culture is sustained through oral history and its heritage. Understanding traditional myths and stories make life valuable. Thus storytellers and authors are powerhouses, for they are able to uncover the histories in which individuals can contract cultural identity histories in which individuals can construct cultural identity that support the creation for selfhood. When individual becomes bicultural they can learn to adapt to and cope with his/her surroundings and to the larger society in which he/she lives. As bicultural authors strive to maintain their own ethnic identity in an effort to keep their traditions and cultural beliefs as a legacy to pass on from one generation to another, they must negotiate new and ever changing values and beliefs and traditions. Theories of acculturation can be helpful to explain bicultural identity. The age-old stories & traditions of Native American culture turn pivotal in accepting the protagonist its biculturalism. This paper helps to understand the effects of the acculturation, an evaluation of Native American culture through the study of literature; and also evaluation of bicultural authors.

Leading theorists such as Berry and Padilla have defined biculturalism as demographic characteristics, the experiences of individuals who may be immigrants, refugees, sojourners, indigenous people, ethnic minorities, those in interethnic relationships, and mixed-ethnic individuals (Berry 2003; Padilla1994). As of yet, there is no single definition of bicultural adaption. Bicultural individuals can be described as

those who seek & continue their self development in both cultures. By doing this they accept the values and beliefs of both cultures. Moreover, biculturalism can be defined as the behaviours exhibited by people that are normative for each group. As a result, the behaviours must be adaptive. However there is no single definition of culture on which all scholars can agree (Segal 1986). When people are born they don't have any knowledge of the culture in which they are born, and do not possess the skills to be able to participate in society. Social rules are learned through the use of language, especially by talking and listening to other members who are members of their first cultural group. Culture is not biologically learned or inherited; no person is born who innately possesses a particular culture. These are people who grow up in the same nation, and can be of another culture or ethnicity. These individuals slowly develop a shared or bicultural world. Leslie Marmon Silko, the author of 'Ceremony' is bicultural in true sense. Many people believe that their culture has the most significance for the personal, experimental, psychological and emotional development. Such attitude can be very harmful, and carried to the extreme. This type of extreme forms of thinking cause prejudice, automatic rejection, and impede the ideas normally assured by social acceptance, such as mutual trust and respect, and a sense of shared values. Each and every culture deserves respect even though the values of each are not common to both the dominant and minority groups.

Much of Leslie Marmon Silko's traditions originates from the Keresan culture. Laguna is a town with a very rich history. The Keres tribe was located in Acoma and Laguna. They inhabited the land and have done so since at least 1075 A.D. The Native Americans came there for farming purposes, and to hunt deer and antelope. This was very beneficial for the Indians as it provided a resource for food and clothing, and economy centred on cultivation of seeds and dry farming. This was a unique way of life for this matrilineal culture. In labour division the men performed the ceremonial dances; the women made baskets, pottery, and built the houses. The Keres did not fight or go to war; they avoided this type of conflict. This is contrary to the position of the character Tayo who goes to war & fights for the United States' government. When the people of this culture traded, it was usually with other plains tribes who were located to the north. They were joined by residents of Zia, Zuni and other neighbouring Pueblos which enabled them to establish a stable settlement. The lake in the landscape became rich resource for the community. (Barnett and James 22).

Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* focuses on a young American Indian who struggles to realign himself with traditional Indian culture and reservation life after having been torn away by WW II. Tayo, the main character in Silko's *Ceremony* is a half Laguna, half- Anglo protagonist, who returns to his New Mexico reservation just after World War II. In *Ceremony*, the struggle of the Native American to free himself from the domination of white values takes place with this Laguna natural environment. Silko is bicultural, and her culture consists of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican and white German ancestry. Silko grew up at the Pueblo of Laguna, located in west central New Mexico. In 1977 she published her first novel, *Ceremony*, which narrates how Tayo must rely on vital storytelling of myths are the Pueblo culture. Furthermore, it explains how white culture has made many attempts to destroy these stories and Indian ceremonies. By recovering these stories, Silko focuses on the preservation of oral tradition. Silko's early life met with turmoil, frustration and disappointment. Consequently, she reveals how

living in Laguna society as a mixed blood is not easy. Her mother as well as her father worked. Then she had to leave other siblings under someone's care. Her father worked at the store which was owned by the family. Being owner of a small business firm put them into trouble, and naturally placed them in a higher social economic social status than other families that lived in the same town. Some people in the town envied them. In fact, their resentment caused her a lot of pain that meant being different from and not fully accepted by either the full-blooded Native Americans or White people. Silko, despite her pain, was finally able to overcome the lack of acceptance and identity with Laguna culture. She didn't pretend to claim her identity with Laguna culture. She didn't pretend to claim her identity only consisted of one culture, she accepted by acquisition awareness of the equivocal status of mixed-bloods in Laguna society, considered herself Laguna, and a mixed red person who openly proclaims "I am of mixed-breed ancestry, but what I know is Laguna," (Velie 106).

As a child Silko became familiar with the cultural folklore from her great grandmother, Aunt Susie, and Grandma Stanger. They all taught her about Pueblo traditions and stories of the Laguna Keres people through a tradition passed on from one generation to the next. Lilly, Silko's great grandmother, and her Aunt Susie stood out as higher figures whose great words of wisdom made traditional myths come alive. It is these women who had a tremendous effect on Silko's upbringing, "passing down an entire culture by word of mouth" (Velie 106). In *Ceremony*, Tayo is severely psychologically traumatized after service in WW II as a result of an unstable childhood, much like Silko's own. This novel is significant because it dramatizes the failure of Native Americans to acculturate to White American culture. Silko portrays the endangered state of the Laguna reservation following World War II. She uses the neglected and afflicted state of the land and the appearance of the Native American to give a sense of the destruction that has taken place in Laguna Pueblo by the neglect of culture. The land has been damaged by runoff from the uranium mines on the nearby Cebolleta land, and a generation of young Pueblo men, Tayo being one of them, has been destroyed by the war. These young men originally enlisted in the army because they sought on escape from their feeling of inferiority. They were lured to participate in the war, and hoped to lead a better life because of the poverty and contamination that Tayo, Rocky, and Emo, three typical young Pueblo, believe they have finally found access to the white world when the army recruiter tells them that, "Anyone can fight for America, even you boys" (Silko 25). Rather than giving the men a life which is something they were hoping for, World War II destroyed them. Rocky is killed fighting the Japanese, Emo becomes an alcoholic, and Tayo returns to his reservation with a severe case of post-traumatic stress disorder that White's medicine has been unable to cure. In his search for healing, Tayo first turns to drinking with Emo and the other Indian veterans. But becoming part of pattern of drinking and violence among Indian veterans only makes Tayo sink further into his sickness, drinking excessively out of control in order to numb his pain (Silko 26).

One way authors can recover for themselves healing and self identity from a traumatic incident is to restore their cultural traditions through as oral traditions, and the myths and stories that are passed down and through one generation to another. Ultimately, oral traditions and myths echo the voices of people who cannot speak for themselves. Moreover, the language used to tell stories can be the battle-ground for

change, healing, and self discovery in helping a repressed culture, adapt, adjust, and coexist with the dominant society. The theme of the story builds the relationship between the individual, Tayo, and his Native American community. Silko re-establishes her connection to her people and her land, just Tayo must do so. One extremely powerful storyteller, Tsitsnaks, Thought Woman, (also called Spider Grandmother, who in many Laguna and Acoma stories figures as the original life force or creatrix) ; represents the life of the people, and life for the people (Porter and Fommer 247-250). Silko's *Ceremony* depicts the wounds of the war and Tayo's isolation." Tayo cannot be healed until he embraces his heritage and reconnects cultural norm" (Paula Aflex 121). In a personal interview, Silko states "When I wrote *Ceremony* I realized that this old story is still very relevant now, even though these old stories take place in the past they having meaning now" (An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko). Thus in Silko's view multicultural literature must accurately represent ethnicity and history.

The closing *Ceremony* leads to Tayo finding a resolution to help him return back to his Native culture, connect with the community and begin self identification. Tayo begins to embrace the land and becomes part of it. All of the cultural demons that were chasing him no longer exist and he makes peace with himself. This refreshes his mind, body and soul and he is able to become whole and free. Through his personal journey and participation in a *Ceremony* Tayo defeats a negative space in himself and is brought back to a new life. We learn important lesson and values such as being accountable for one's actions, accepting the cultural differences of other people, and compassion. This novel, *Ceremony* does not dictate specific moral and ethical beliefs onto the readers. Rather we are challenged to learn a life lesson and the importance of respect to other cultures. Bicultural adaptation means giving respect and equal importance to the traditions, ethics, beliefs of another culture. Works of bicultural authors give us insight of their cultures. Authors' personal experiences give opportunity to learn the strength of a culture or traditions, and its adaptive methods to another culture. In fine, Silko learns to adapt to the dominant culture of the whites as well as her character Tayo recuperates the illness caused by WW II & learn adaptation skill to conform the dominant culture of whites.

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